

The Effectiveness of Commitment and Acceptance Therapy to Reduce Separation Anxiety among Divorce Applicants in Jordan

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Abstract

The study is concerned with determining the effectiveness of Commitment and Acceptance Therapy (ACT) to effectively reduce, control and overcome the symptoms related to separation anxiety among those applied for divorce in Jordan. The structure of this study carries an experimental nature. That is, it is an experimental research that has a pretest, a posttest as well as a control group. Moreover, the census included all those who were subjected to separation and divorce; those appeared before the Jordanian courts in Mazar city. In this context, the researcher applied the available sampling method to select the initial study samples. After designing a separation anxiety questionnaire as well as after getting a score for conducting the research, the researcher carried out a random sampling through which two groups, namely, experimental as well as control groups (14 pairs in each group), were formed. ACT protocol was ultimately adopted for the experimental group. Moreover, the researcher applied what is known as the separation anxiety inventory to measure the separation anxiety symptoms. The experimental group was trained sessions of one hour session duration. The results reflected that training, which relied on commitment and acceptance, can have a significant effect. At the same time, members of the control group were not subject to intervention. Therefore, the commitment and acceptance training is significantly affective on Separation anxiety among couples who applied for divorce

Keywords: Commitment and Acceptance Therapy (ACT) • Separation anxiety • Divorce applicants

Introduction

The family is rightly viewed as a source of love and life. Moreover, the concept of marital satisfaction reflects an overall assessment of marriage. At times, such a concept is broadly applied to any romantic relationship of a person. In this context, it may ultimately be a direct reflection of the marriage joy, or in a sense, a merger of pleasure and other unique factors related to the marital relationship.

Marriage is known as an important means of social support concerning the individual identity as an adult. Despite the fact that some of its factors ultimately affect the possibility of its success or failure, such factors have not been studied. Besides, sexual satisfaction ultimately brings about marital satisfaction. This ultimately decreases the possibility of marital instability as well as consequent divorce [1].

Family is a social group where the physical, emotional and intellectual needs are fully satisfied. An individual's marriage satisfaction is no less than the family satisfaction. Moreover, family satisfaction can effectively bring about life satisfaction. That is, it is effective and important for the family growth as well as its improvement [2].

It can rightly be said that family is an important institution where family members experience relations and interactions which are emotionally deeper as well as more intense than they can be experienced in any other place. Every individual views family as a fountain source of love. He or she imagines family as that institution which is full of closeness, intimacy, friendly relationships, love and security. In this regard, family is rightly viewed as a source of love as well as life. On the other hand, divorce is viewed as a real crisis that would shatter all family bonds. It is a fact that the families may widely experience. It is more or less an optional selection in the sense that couples, most often, apply for divorce as per their own choice. Due to the concept that the family is an important group of the Jordanian society, any breakup of this institution is disastrous and divorce is regarded as a real crisis that would break all family ties [3]. Separation Anxiety Disorder

(SAD) is known as a DSM-5 Diagnosis. It is assigned to those who have what is psychologically known as strong fear or intense feeling of anxiety to separating from people to whom they are strongly attached.

Married couples may experience separation anxiety because of divorce, because they are accustomed to a marital life for a long time, but this life began to show disturbances, pressures, and problems that lead them to think about divorce. Nowadays, divorce has become a terrible fact that the families experience worldwide. Truly, this does not indicate that the divorce phenomenon has not been recorded in the past. Rather, it is widely experienced by families of our modern world. It is obviously noticed that the divorce nature has ultimately changed. It has become, more or less, an optional selection. According to the annual statistical report 2019 issued by the Judge Department, the cumulative divorce cases registered in the courts in Jordan in 2019 amounted to 19,241 divorces.

Divorce is divided into two categories:

Obvious divorce: The couples formally divorced from the court, and

Hidden divorces: This type of divorce is not apparent for cultural, value, spiritual, barriers, and rules that are in the way of couples. In this type of divorce, couples live alone, while their other relationships completely cut off or are without enthusiasm. This type of divorce called emotional divorce [4].

Some scholars have identified emotional divorce as the first step in the process of divorce, which means that marital relationship is deteriorating and a sense of strangeness replaces it. When people's traditional view of divorce disappears and the emotional needs of the husband and wife do not meet in the family, it exacerbates the context for emotional divorce [5]. This is how husbands begin to think about formal divorce. However, just thinking about it leads to anxiety about taking this fateful step. The concept of anxiety disorders mainly refer to mental disorders represented by feelings of anxiety as well as fear in addition to being worried about future personal or interpersonal events. At times, such disorders are closely associated with feelings of excessive as well as anxiety levels over being detached or split from a thing, a person or a place [6].

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Separation anxiety disorder, in a sense, can ultimately and significantly interfere with or at times limit or curb an adult's daily life functioning. In this context, performance as well as work attendance can ultimately drop, or at times fail to launch when the adult feels utterly unable to survive away from his/her loved one who has become his/her self-object, or in a sense, secure "home base." Moreover, the anxious and fragmented individual can ultimately become isolated and separated from peers as well as coworkers, afraid to engage in routine social activities especially when such activities require enough time to be spent apart from the loved one. Besides, s/he may experience a difficulty in developing and being in romantic relationships, either represented by their failing to date, or being dependent on an intimate romantic partner or simply being in relationships. In this respect, individual adults who suffer from intense feelings of separation anxiety disorder can ultimately appear depressed, fragmented, and apathetic "the individual ultimately experiences feelings of excessive fear or intense anxiety concerning separation from self-objects" The self-object with whom the anxious person "is strongly connected", is usually a relative, friend, spouse, or intimate partner. Periods of separation ultimately bring about an adult who may utterly feel fragmented and anxious about being detached and separated from his self-objects, have nightmares, fail to go to work, hardly struggle with psycho-physical problems, along with other symptoms. Separation anxiety can be treated with ACT. ACT belongs to the treatments of the 3rd wave. It is regarded as a special form of CBT [7]. This form of therapy has its concepts in the modern theory related to language and cognition [8]. ACT is characterized by its pragmatic as well as philosophical structure. It focuses on the individual psychological behaviour. In a sense, it is ultimately presented in a form of pragmatic contextualization [9].

Acceptance-based therapy relied on the assumption that traumatic feeling is closely linked with the individual's attempt to ultimately control, overcome or avoid his/her negative and painful thoughts as well as emotions. Such treatments are attempts that emphasize on the idea of change of relationship. They mainly focus on the inner experience and avoidance of stress [10]. It is truly argued that, ACT is an important form of psychological therapies that seek to treat individual behavioral problems. As a significant and effective diagnostic treatment, ACT mainly deals with the well-known patho-psychological problems rather than merely focusing on a certain type of problem [11]. Therefore, ACT can effectively treat feelings of depression as well as anxiety [12]. During ACT treatment, people are not expected to hardly and continuously make attempts to change their negative thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Instead, they simply tend to change their existing relationships with such thoughts, feelings, and emotions [13-22].

The concept of acceptance

Psychologically, acceptance occurs in the case that an individual ultimately experiences personal, and usually undesired, emotions without making serious attempts to control or overcome the frequency, form, or in a sense, situational sensitivity related to such experiences [14].

Committed action

It can be stated that committed action mainly takes the form and the role of expanding or broadening the scope of an individual's positive responses to the important others into larger as well as comprehensive activity patterns. In this context, larger patterns will ultimately be built and structured by achievable intermediary objectives that effectively comport with those already existing values. Some studies explored the validity and efficacy of certain web-based or telephone-based forms of ACT and their role in treating smokers. Their result obviously reflected the efficacy and validity of ACT [15,16]. Besides, other studies highlighted certain healthcare settings as they focused on certain populations including veterans who suffer from PTSD [17, 23-29].

Processes does ACT target

ACT has shown some efficacy in treating various disorders related to mental problems, including mental disorder and psychosis, separation anxiety as well as depression, borderline personality disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, along with substance abuse. In this context, the

results of other studies obviously reflected that CBT can ultimately result in as well as improve the feeling of separation anxiety [18-22, 30-35]

Meta-analyses studies on ACT during 2006-2008 have indicated that ACT can affect a wide range of disorders such as anxiety disorders, depression, pain, trichotillomania, and psychotic disorders providing satisfying results in the field of anxiety as well as depression in people studied the impact of this approach on the life quality of females with cancer: all of their studies proved the positive effects of this therapy [23]. Furthermore, according to research on the effects ACT, this approach has been valid and effective in increasing marital satisfaction as well as reducing interpersonal and psychological anxiety, some disorders like psychos, mental and physical diseases, and depression [24-26, 36-39].

Other findings obviously reflected that a mixture of group CBT as well as social skills teaching can effectively and significantly improve the separation anxiety symptoms. Another study in this regard reported that ACT is valid as well as effective in improving feelings of separation anxiety disorder [27, 39-45]. Some studies also indicated that, acceptance as well as commitment therapy contributes to improving marriage, as couples who received training on the basis of acceptance and commitment showed that they had more positive and social feelings.

Research problem

The problem of divorce is one of the most important problems that have become a source of concern for human society, and it is a global problem that even the most affluent societies are not without including the Jordanian community. The most common feelings that occur after a divorce are sadness, fear, resentment, doubt, regret, and guilt. Therefore, at the first stage one especially needs the help and support of friends. However, the decision to divorce is no longer something that many couples fear, without thinking about the consequences of this decision and its consequences for the family.

The statistics of the Ministry of Social Development in Jordan related to marital disputes that lead to divorce between spouses, indicate that the divorce rate in this category amounted to 40.5% in 2014, 45.5% in 2018. And in 2019, it reached 50.2% (Annual report 2019). These percentages reflect a fact in which problems crystallize at an ascending level, and this has psychological and social effects and extensions that have taken a negative nature represented in: anger, aggression, shame, and withdrawal. And feelings of inferiority and separation anxiety from the partner, and separation anxiety disorder in couples can cause real professional and social problems for the person, which may negatively affect the quality of your life in general.

Using ACT to treat separation anxiety is really a new and modern approach whose direct role and effect on enhancing, strengthening and improving marital relations has not ultimately been investigated so far. But given the effect and validity of this unique treatment in treating and reducing social as well as psychological problems, as well as paying attention to the terrible fact that couples who seek divorce also have problems, this treatment is expected to be valid and effective in reducing their separation anxiety. This study generally attempts to answer the question: What is the validity and effect of training on ACT in getting rid of separation anxiety among couples who are about to divorce. Specifically, answer the following questions:

- Are there differences that can be statistically significant at ≥ 0.05 in the scores of the two groups (experimental and control) on the post-measurement of separation anxiety?
- Are there differences, that can be statistically significant, concerning the average scores of the experimental group members on the separating anxiety scale?

This study aims to:

- Recognizing the impact of a counseling program on the basis of ACT in eliminating separation anxiety among divorced couples.

- Recognizing the extent of the continuity of the impact of the counseling program on the basis of ACT in eliminating separation anxiety.

Study limitations

Spatial boundaries: The study was limited to those who are about to divorce in the Sharia Court of the Southern Mazar

Time limits: This study was applied in the period in 2021.

Human boundaries: This study was applied to a sample of those who are about to divorce, whose ages ranged between (25-35).

The objective limits: Determine the results, the method of testing the sample, the psychometric properties (veracity and reliability) of the study tools used, the effectiveness of the extension program, and the research methodology used. The results are also determined by its tools, namely: the scale of separation anxiety that was used and the effectiveness of the collective counselling program provided to those who are about to divorce.

Materials and Methods

This study is characterized by its semi-experimental nature that includes a pretest-posttest as well as control group design. Being a quasi-experimental study, this study is based on the design of the pre and post-tests along with the control group. Besides, the treatment method is mainly based on two levels with regard to the independent variable (ACT and do not enter). Moreover, separation anxiety is used as a dependent variable.

Participants

The population included all spouses, those who frequented the Sharia court in the southern city of Mazar, for divorce, and their number was 40

husbands and wives. The Separation Anxiety Scale was applied to them, 28 of them scored the highest level. The study sample was randomly divided to the experimental and control groups each of group [14]. Data was collected using the following tools.

The statistical population of this study were selected. It was randomly divided to control as well as experimental groups. Furthermore, the experimental group was ultimately treated using the method of ACT during 10 sessions of one hour long in two weeks. It included all 18-26 year-old spouses who suffer from intense feelings of social anxiety. Besides, the sample size included 14 individuals. The data is demographically presented in Table 1.

Research procedure

After identifying the couples who applied for divorce; those suffering from feelings of separation anxiety disorder, and after getting their approval for volunteer participation in the ACT, the researcher set the study's aims, pretest (Separation Anxiety Test) 14 individuals were ultimately selected as members of the experimental group. Besides, 14 individuals were ultimately selected to form the control group. After that, the two groups answered the designed questionnaire on Inventory Acceptance and Action in the pre-test stage. Control group members were only given a number of informative scientific brochures so as to ethically gain something from the study. Moreover, the members of the experimental group were treated using ACT within a period of 90-minute per week. However, the control group members were not subject to any possible intervention. At the end of treatment, the subjects in both groups completed the questionnaires again in the post-test stage and finally the obtained data was analysed by covariance analysis meth. Table 2 obviously presents a summary related to the ACT sessions developed mainly for separation anxiety disorder.

Table 1. Demographic representation of participants.

| Demographic variables | Sub variables | ACT group | Control group | P |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|------|
| Age | 18-20 | 3 | 2 | 28.6 |
| | 21-23 | 5 | 5 | 46.4 |
| | 24-26 | 6 | 7 | 25 |
| Education | Postgraduate | 5 | 4 | 50 |
| | Diploma | 7 | 5 | 28.6 |
| | Under graduate | 2 | 5 | 21.4 |
| Job | Employee | 6 | 6 | 35.7 |
| | Self employed | 4 | 5 | 39.3 |
| | Unemployed | 4 | 3 | 25 |

Table 2. ACT sessions for separation anxiety disorder.

| Treatment sessions | Session-wise treatment summary |
|--|--|
| 1 st Session | Introduction, highlighting the problem, preparation of members, conducting the pretest, preparing a long list of joyful activities then including them in the already designed weekly schedule. |
| 2 nd and 3 rd sessions | Comprehending the reality and content of ACT treatment (mental flexibility, acceptance, awareness, self-visualization, cognitive separation, individual stories, values clarification as well as acting responsibly) in six states. 1) At this stage of treatment the mental awareness of individual concerning subjective and personal experiences (represented by thoughts, feeling) can ultimately be increased. On the other hand, the control action can ultimately be reduced. Besides, the individual acquired that any possible action to control or prevent this undesired psychological experiences is invalid. They may have ultimate reverse effect. Moreover, they might be exacerbated. Such experiences have to be utterly accepted. 2) The psychological awareness is added. This indicates that the individual ultimately recognizes all psychological states, as well as his or her own behavior. 3) The individual is ultimately trained to isolate him or her during the personal experiences. In this way, they can behave independently. 4) Efforts to control and reduce the ultimate focus on Self- Visualization as well as Personal experiences that an individual has kept in mind. 5) Helping the individuals to ultimately recognize and understand their personal value. 6) Making incentives to behave responsibly. Here, the activity is centered on the aims as well as values. |
| 4 th and 5 th sessions | Mindfulness training (emotional as well as cognitive awareness). Here, the ultimate goal is related to training the members about the skills noticed and described, the way skills are not ultimately judged and focused as well as the way they work. Moreover, the use of timeout technique by the spouses during times of quarrel as well as anger led to the consequent dispute. |

| | |
|--|--|
| 6 th and 7 th sessions | Earlier, the focus was made on increasing psychological awareness. After that, it was made on the way an individual responds and the appropriate dealing with their personal and interpersonal experiences and makes purpose as well as style of social life along with practical commitment. Moreover, enumerating the pros as well as cons of couples without any judgment or emotional reaction is practiced. |
| 8 th session | Tolerance of distress, training, review of earlier sessions as well as giving feedbacks of couples. |
| 9 th session | Regulation of emotion training. Here, the point is related to knowing why emotions are significant. Recognition of emotion, reducing vulnerability as well as emotional suffering, levelling up positive emotion, giving practical lessons, having feedback by group as well as therapist are focused upon. |
| 10 th session | Strengthening interpersonal experience (Develop as well as maintain strong family tie etc.), training on interpersonal skills (Describing as well as expressing, assertiveness, negotiation, trust as well as self-esteem), Conclusion along with implementation of the posttest. |

Measures

- The study data were collected by the Separation Anxiety Test which consists of 35 item, the correlation between the items and the total score reached between (0.20 and 0.78), which is statistically significant Alpha 's' Cronbach's coefficient was (0.82)

- The subjects included in the experimental group went under ACT. Table 2 ACT sessions for Separation Anxiety Disorder.

Results

- Are there differences that are statistically significant at ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) in the scores of the (experimental as well as control) groups on the post-measurement of separation anxiety? Here, the arithmetic means as well as standard deviations of the scores of the two groups on the dimensional measurement were extracted. Table 3 of the arithmetic averages and standard deviations of the two groups concerning the dimensional measurement

Table 3. The arithmetic averages and standard deviations of the two groups concerning the dimensional measurement.

| Group | Pre-measurement | | Post measurement | | Standard error |
|--------------|--------------------|--------|--------------------|--------|----------------|
| | Standard deviation | Mean | Standard deviation | Mean | |
| Control | 6.028 | 23.267 | 3.518 | 23.633 | 0.568 |
| Experimental | 5.232 | 24.933 | 3.081 | 66.567 | |

Based on the above results in Table 3, the changes in Separation anxiety score concerning the experiment group during ACT period are higher than that related to the control group $P < 0.0001$. Therefore, ACT is valid and effective. To verify that the differences between the arithmetic means in the dimensional measure of separation anxiety according to the group variable, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANCOVA) was used, and the table 4 shows that results related to the one-way covariance analysis concerning the separation anxiety scale in the post-measurement according to the group variable.

It is observed in Table 4, assuming pretest control, acceptance, and commitment training, that the effects of separation anxiety of couples that seek divorce are noticed at $P \leq 0.01$. Besides, it is observed that this assuming control over pretesting, acceptance as well as commitment training ultimately influences separation anxiety who apply for divorce.

Table 4. Results related to the one-way covariance analysis concerning the separation anxiety scale in the post-measurement according to the group variable.

| Contrast source | Squares sum | Levels of freedom | Mean squares | F value | Statistical significance | eta | Link |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|---------|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| Pre-measurement | 84.043 | 1 | 84.043 | 8.705 | 0.005 | 0.132 | 0.449 |
| Group | 343.089 | 1 | 343.089 | 35.538 | 0 | 0.384 | |
| Error | 550.291 | 57 | 9.654 | | | | |
| Corrected total | 999.4 | 59 | | | | | |

- Are there differences that are statistically significant at $0.05 \geq \alpha$ between the scores of the members of the experimental group, in the post and follow-up measurements on the Separation Anxiety Scale?

- T-Test of paired sample was applied to detect the differences related to the averages among the experimental group members on the separation anxiety scale due to the counselling program according to the dimensional and tracking measures the Table 5. Table 5 reflects that there are no obvious differences at ($\alpha 0.05$) between mean among the experimental group members on the separation anxiety scale due to the collective counselling program according to the dimensional and follow-up measures, where the "t" value did not reach the level of $0.05 \geq \alpha$.

Table 5. (Paired sample T-Test) results concerning the differences between the experimental group members' arithmetic means as per the post and follow-up tests.

| Sig | Value T | SD | Mean | | |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 0.101 | 1.695 | 3.081 | 66.567 | post-test of separation Anxiety | Separation anxiety |
| | | 3.217 | 67.833 | Follow-up test of separation anxiety | |

Discussion

The objective of treatment methods employed in the ACT is not mainly directed to increase the thinking at the effective, realistic, and reasonable levels. It is also not to encourage feelings. Rather, the therapeutic method's aim is to control, reduce and overcome the negative psychological experiences, as well as to increase the level of awareness, especially by making focus on the now without applying any conflict method.

Perhaps the occurrence of divorce, and whatever it is based on understanding and consent between the two parties, is a difficult decision, when the partner so a person cannot get out of the divorce without passing Worried so that he can return to his normal life easily. Therefore, it is concluded that training on the basis of acceptance and commitment was effective in relieving separation anxiety among spouses who are about to divorce, and this is due to the sessions that were trained, including what the couples have become of mental awareness and how to act responsibly as well as how they control this experience that It was originally unwanted, but they accepted it without paying attention to any family interference. The program also helped them to look at their marital problems, which led to their divorce from outside the circle, and thus led to the drawing of specific and clear goals in this period and the coming periods of their lives.

It can be said that the content of the sessions and what they contain are mental flexibility, enhancing personal influence, i.e. developing and maintaining healthy family relationships later on, and interpersonal skills in terms of expression, confidence, negotiation and self-esteem. Mental acceptance, cognitive emotional awareness, and any other action to prevent, reduce or control undesired psychological experiences or problems that have an adverse effect on, or exacerbate the lives of spouses, as well as experiences that must be accepted and practiced (increasing positive emotions).

Considering acceptance and commitment as a process, they will have acceptance of a negative psychological experience that they will experience and how to act with flexibility and more focus on the positive

points they have, which will make them happier in their next social life, and some studies have indicated that training on the basis of ACT is effective in improving divorced couple's marital satisfaction.

This study's results agreed with the results [28] which showed that ACT has an ultimate effect in improving the mental health of the study members by accepting unwanted thoughts and feelings. And the Mohabat-Bahar, et al. study whose results reflected that ACT is valid and effective in eliminating anxiety as well as depression [23]. Such results are also in affinity with a study with Pourfaraj, et al. that reflected that treatment with ACT, significantly reduced separation anxiety scores in the experimental group [29]. The results of this study agreed with which reflected that the experimental group had lower levels of depression, as well as the study which indicated that depression was significantly lower after the ACT intervention [12,13].

Conclusion

Divorce is one of the forms of loss in the life of spouses due to the transformations that follow in their later lives. Counselling and remedial programs provide a safe opportunity to experience loss and express their pain, their hopes, and the meaning-making process. One of the therapeutic models is a model ACT that integrates reflective and cognitive philosophies and behavioural theories. With it, mentors can assess their level of vigilance and presence with clients, while helping mentors communicate and address their awareness of loss. Given that avoiding pain will increase customer injury in times of loss.

ACT can effectively be employed to help individuals respect their personal experiences, express their feelings of pain, and value their new views as they recognize their losses. Besides, through the application of ACT, they can enhance the compatibility between their values as well as future steps toward recovery.

Husbands often face situations that require self-determination, whether in marital life or divorce, which confirms their need for counselling interventions and empirically supported methods for anxiety disorders in general and separation anxiety. This study demonstrated the effectiveness of ACT for separation anxiety, as prospective divorced couples with symptoms of separation anxiety disorder were able to overcome separation anxiety.

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