



# The effectiveness of group therapy based on acceptance and commitment on reducing stress and depression symptoms of mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder

Fatemeh. Pourmehdi Ganji<sup>1</sup>  
*Soleyman. Yahyazadeh Jeloudar*<sup>2\*</sup>  
Mohammad Javad. Ranjbar<sup>3</sup>

1. M.A. in General Psychology, Pardisan Institute of Higher Education, Fereydunkenar, Iran
2. \*Corresponding author: Assistant Professor, Department of Women's Education and Employment Center, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran
3. PhD in Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran

Email: s.yahyazadeh@umz.ac.ir Received: 09.12.2022 Acceptance: 04.09.2023

*Journal of Applied Family Therapy*  
eISSN: 2717-2430  
<http://Aftj.ir>  
Vol. 4, No. 3, Pp: 247-260  
Summer 2023 Special Issue

Original research article

## How to Cite This Article:

Pourmehdi Ganji, F., Yahyazadeh Jeloudar, S., & Ranjbar, M. J. (2023). The effectiveness of group therapy based on acceptance and commitment on reducing stress and depression symptoms of mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder. *aftj*, 4(2): 247-260.



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## Abstract

**Aim:** This research was conducted with the main purpose of determining the effectiveness of group therapy based on acceptance and commitment on reducing stress and depression symptoms of mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder. **Method:** The statistical population of the current research includes all mothers of children suffering from separation anxiety disorder in 2021 who referred to private medical clinics in Babol city. For sampling, a non-probability sampling method based on the purpose was used and according to the type of research, 20 mothers who had anxious children were selected (10 in the experimental group and 10 in the control group). And they participated in 8 2-hour sessions for two months starting from the 24th of April and ending on the 11th of June. The tools used are: Beck's 21-question depression questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.78; Perceived stress scale by Cohen (1983) with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86 was used. In order to analyze the data, after collecting the data, it was recorded in the computer under the SPSS24 program and descriptive statistics, which included the frequency distribution and percentage, were used, and in the inferential statistics section, in order to find the effectiveness of the research components from Analysis of covariance test was used. **Results:** The results indicate that group therapy training based on acceptance and commitment to mothers of children suffering from separation anxiety disorder reduces depression and the effect size is (0.887); Perceived stress becomes the effect size (0.723). **Conclusion:** Group therapy based on acceptance and commitment can reduce depression and stress of mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder.

**Keywords:** acceptance and commitment therapy, stress, depression, separation anxiety, mothers.

## Introduction

Separation anxiety disorder is the most common childhood anxiety disorder that appears on average at the age of seven (Schneider et al., 2013). Some anxieties are normal and acceptable in childhood, anxiety makes it difficult to recognize the levels. Separation anxiety is considered to be the norm for babies and toddlers, but it can be diagnosed as a disorder when it continues into the post-childhood period (Douila et al., 2015). The National Institute of Health (2014) considers separation anxiety disorder to be an experience of extreme fear, overwhelming and extreme, which does not match the developmental level of the child and occurs when the child is separated from the caregiver. It is estimated that this disorder has a prevalence of 1 to 5 percent in the ages of 5 to 11 years. These challenges include excessive worry, sleep problems, distress in social and academic fields, and bring many physical symptoms; If these problems are not treated, they can lead to psychological problems in adulthood.

One of the therapies that have been receiving the attention of therapists in helping psychological problems in recent years is the therapy based on acceptance and commitment. Based on theoretical concepts, therapy based on acceptance and commitment is a psychological intervention based on modern behavioral psychology, which includes the theory of communication framework. Flexibility, acceptance of reality instead of fighting it, contact with the present, awareness and raising physical and mental health help mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder in life (Sastri & Agir, 2015). The fundamental processes of acceptance and commitment therapy include acceptance, mindfulness, living in the present, cognitive dissonance, values, and committed action, all of which lead to psychological flexibility (Hayes and Lillis, 2014). It is needed by mothers of children suffering from separation anxiety disorder due to the mentioned problems and mental conditions.

According to the mentioned materials, it is very important to choose the method of teaching the desired and optimal styles of parents and to find effective methods as soon as possible in creating social adaptation and success of children; Therefore, this research aims to investigate the effect of group therapy based on acceptance and commitment to mothers on reducing stress and depression symptoms of mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder. Also, stress and depression in mothers can cause problems in the family. Therefore, this research aims to investigate whether group therapy based on acceptance and commitment is effective in reducing stress and depression symptoms of mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder.

## Method

The statistical population of the current research includes all mothers of children suffering from separation anxiety disorder in 2021 who referred to private medical clinics in Babol city. For sampling, a non-probability sampling method based on the purpose was used and according to the type of research, 20 mothers who had anxious children were selected (10 in the experimental group and 10 in the control group). And they participated in 8 2-hour sessions for two months starting from the 24th of April and ending on the 11th of June. The tools used are: Beck's 21-question depression questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.78;

Perceived stress scale by Cohen (1983) with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86 was used. In order to analyze the data, after collecting the data, it was recorded in the computer under the SPSS24 program and descriptive statistics, which included the frequency distribution and percentage, were used, and in the inferential statistics section, in order to find the effectiveness of the research components from Analysis of covariance test was used.

### **Results**

The results indicate that group therapy training based on acceptance and commitment to mothers of children suffering from separation anxiety disorder reduces depression and the effect size is (0.887); Perceived stress becomes the effect size (0.723).

### **Conclusion**

This research was conducted with the main purpose of determining the effectiveness of group therapy based on acceptance and commitment on reducing stress and depression symptoms of mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder. The results of the examination of the questions related to this hypothesis and the implementation of the relevant covariance test indicate that group therapy based on acceptance and commitment to the mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder reduces their depression.

One of the limitations of the current study is that this study was conducted on mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder who referred to a clinic in Babol in 2021. Therefore, its findings cannot be generalized to other strata and other cities. In case of generalization, caution should be taken. Due to the lack of coordination among the mothers of the experimental group, it was not possible for all mothers to participate in the meetings. Therefore, each meeting was held twice a week. One of the limitations of this study was that due to the limited time of the study and its implementation in a clinical center, it was not possible to follow up the results in the long term. In addition, the time interval between the pre-test and post-test stages, as well as the absence of a follow-up stage to evaluate the effect of group therapy training based on acceptance and commitment on mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder, were limitations of the study. It is suggested to conduct a research to compare the effect of group therapy based on acceptance and commitment on stress and depression in other mothers using different measurement tools (for example, interview, observation and questionnaire). Also, comparing the effect of different methods of third wave psychotherapy and group therapy based on acceptance and commitment on mothers' stress and depression can help in further improving the results of this study. In addition, qualitative research methods can further clarify the effectiveness of this intervention method.

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