RESEARCH TRENDS IN ACCEPTANCE COMMITMENT AND MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

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ABSTRACT

This study examines trends in the use of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI) in counseling. A descriptive qualitative literature review was conducted to analyze scientific publications. The results show that ACT focuses on increasing psychological flexibility by accepting difficult internal experiences, and that MI fosters motivation for behavioral change. Both approaches have been proven effective, both separately and in combination. ACT and MI have been found beneficial in various contexts, including hypertension, substance abuse, psychiatric disorders, and academic problems. Integrating ACT and MI provides more comprehensive results because it emphasizes self-acceptance and encourages individuals to make positive changes. In conclusion, research trends indicate that combining ACT and MI has great potential for further development as an evidence-based counseling intervention that improves psychological well-being.

Keywords : *Acceptance And Commitment Therapy (ACT), Motivational Interviewing, Psychology, Counseling, And Well-Being.*

INTRODUCTION

Amidst academic pressures, social demands, and the search for identity, individuals often face challenges that are both external and internal. These conditions can affect psychological well-being. At this stage of development, psychological well-being is very important because it is believed to help a person live a balanced life. This means individuals are physically healthy and have good mental health, promoting happiness in everyday life (Kurniasari et al., 2019).

Maintaining psychological well-being, however, demands the capacity to handle pressure, and one approach to achieving this is by cultivating psychological flexibility. Psychological flexibility refers to individual's ability to recognize and give meaning to thoughts and feelings that arise without being overwhelmed or controlled by them (Wijaya, 2020). Conversely, low psychological flexibility makes a person more prone to stress, anxiety, and becoming immersed in negative thoughts and feelings, which can disrupt psychological well-being. This aligns with Kashdan & Rottenberg's (2010) view that psychological flexibility includes recognizing and adapting to situational demands, changing one's mindset when old strategies interfere with personal or social functioning, maintaining balance between life domains, and remaining open and committed to personal values.

Low psychological flexibility leads to decreased well-being and requires serious attention. Various counseling intervention approaches have been developed, ranging from cognitive behavioral therapy (Nazarzadeh et al., 2015) and mindfulness-based interventions to dialectical behavioral therapy (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) (Harris, 2013; Hayes et al., 2006). Of these approaches, ACT is one of the most effective for increasing psychological flexibility. ACT teaches clients to accept disturbing thoughts while remaining committed to their values, enabling individuals to determine what is best for themselves (Lin et al., 2018).

Apart from ACT, another effective approach is Motivational Interviewing (MI). MI focuses on increasing motivation for behavioral change by emphasizing individual values, commitments, and strengths (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). ACT and MI are considered important to integrate, as both emphasize partnership, the significance of clients' experiences, and strengthening commitment to change (Bricker & Tollison, 2011). ACT seeks to foster acceptance of difficult internal experiences, whereas MI enhances motivation to act in accordance with personal values.

Over the last decade, research trends show an increase in the use of both ACT and MI, either separately or together. Several studies confirm that combining ACT and MI can improve intervention outcomes. MI increases clients' readiness to engage in the ACT process, and ACT provides skills for accepting difficult thoughts and feelings that arise during the change process (Dart, 2011; Hall, 2012). Thus, the integration of ACT and MI (ACMI) is considered a valuable and complementary approach in modern counseling practice.

In light of this, it is essential to examine studies concerning recent developments in the integration of ACT and MI. First, psychological flexibility and motivation for change are two key factors in supporting psychological well-being. Second, ACT and MI have been proven effective, and they have the potential to be even more powerful when combined. Third, mapping ACT and MI research trends contributes to the academic development of evidence-based counseling interventions. This study aims to explore research trends regarding Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI), both individually and integratively, to provide direction for future counseling research and practice.

METHOD

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative method along with a literature review technique. This method was chosen to thoroughly examine various scientific sources and previous research results discussing Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI). The goal was to develop a strong conceptual understanding of research trends in this field.

According to Sarwono (2006), a literature study focuses on collecting data from written sources, such as books, journals, scientific articles, and published academic works. This approach differs from field research because it relies on secondary data; therefore, it is often referred to as library research.

For this study, research materials were obtained from reliable sources, including scientific books, national and international journals, academic articles, and previous theses relevant to ACT and MI themes. Sources were limited to publications from 2011 to the present. Through systematic literature analysis, this study aims to provide an overview of development trends in ACT and MI research in terms of study focus, methods, and contribution to psychological intervention development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The search results yielded eight articles that met the specified criteria. Details of each article are presented in the following table, which contains the name of the researcher, year, title, method, and results/conclusions:

NO	Researcher Name and Year	Objective	Research Method	Results/Conclusions
1.	Bricker & Tollison (2011)	*This study aims to present the first systematic comparison between MI and ACT.*	*A systematic comparison*	Despite their conceptual and clinical differences, Motivational Interviewing (MI) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) are complementary interventions. Collaborating between the two can benefit the clinical process and outcomes.
2.	Baradaran, Zare, Alipour & Farzad (2016)	*This study aims to examine how difficulties in regulating emotions and strategies for controlling thoughts can predict the emergence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).*	*A semi-experimental study*	According to research findings, both ACT and MI are effective interventions for patients with essential hypertension
3.	Thurstone, Hull, Timmerman & Emrick (2017)	*This study aims to develop MI/ACT interventions in the form of a standardized manual so that they*	Qualitative.	This research shows that it is possible to apply the Motivational Interviewing and Assertive Community Treatment approach

		can be further tested through controlled trials in the future.		for addressing substance use issues among teenagers.
4.	Ehman & Gross (2019)	*Aims to demonstrate how ACT is combined with MI to help address alcohol abuse in college students.*	Case Study	It outlines the application of Acce ptance and Commitment Therapy and Motivational Interviewing for a 20-year-old female who was directed towards support for alcohol dependency. She mention ed a rise in her awareness of the current moment and showed that she could act in ways that align with her values. At the conclusion of the intervention, she indicated a reduction in her alcohol consumption
5.	Yıldız & Aylaz (2021)	*To determine how a counseling program based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) supported with Motivational Interviewing (MI) affected treatment motivation among individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia (IDSs)*	*A quasi-experimental study, quantitative and qualitative data*	ACT-based counseling supported by MI techniques has proven beneficial in enhancing treatment motivation among individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia. This counseling approach can serve as an effective psychiatric nursing intervention for such individuals.
6.	Yıldız & Aylaz (2021)	*To examine the effect of counseling based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) supported with Motivational Interviewing (MI) on functional recovery in individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia*	*A quasi-experimental study,*	Counseling that utilizes the ACT approach and is enhanced by MI techniques has been shown to significantly aid the functional recovery of people diagnosed with schizophrenia when compared to a control group. The participants in the treatment group attended an eight-session group counseling course at a community mental health facility located in the center of Malatya, Turkey. Moreover, the variations between the pre-test and post-test subscales as well as the overall average scores of individuals with schizophrenia were determined to be statistically significant. As a result, it can be concluded that counseling grounded in ACT, along with MI recovery in individuals with schizophrenia.

				Furthermore, significant differences were observed between the pre-test and post-test subscales and the overall average scores of individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia. Hence, it can be asserted that counseling founded on ACT and supported by MI is beneficial in enhancing functional recovery in those diagnosed with schizophrenia.
7.	Malins, Biswas, Rathbone, Vogt, Pye, Levene, Moghaddam, & Russell (2020)	*To evaluate whether a brief (10–15 minute) motivational interviewing (MI) telephone intervention, delivered after the first CBT group session, can improve adherence and reduce dropout rates among patients with cancer or chronic pain participating in CBT group therapies (ACT, MBCT, PST).*	*Cohort study, quantitative (n = 99 patients with cancer and chronic pain; 47 with MI-call, 52 without MI)*	Brief motivational interviewing (MI) interventions delivered via 10–15 minute phone calls following the first session have been shown to be effective in improving adherence to group CBT among patients with cancer and chronic pain. Participants who received MI calls had a completion rate five times higher than those who did not, and attended, on average, one additional session. These findings suggest that even minimal doses of MI can reduce dropout and enhance engagement in group CBT for individuals with long-term conditions.
8.	Huey, Ramlee & Othman (2025)	*To preliminarily assess and compare the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI) in reducing sleep disturbances and academic procrastination among Malaysian undergraduates*	*quasi-experimental study*	This study offers initial evidence that ACT and MI can simultaneously reduce academic procrastination and sleep problems among undergraduate students, with a greater number of sessions producing better outcomes. The comparable effectiveness of these two therapies suggests flexibility in clinical practice, allowing practitioners to choose interventions based on factors such as student preferences, therapist expertise, and resource availability.

In recent years, there has been limited attention to the integration of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI) because few articles have discussed this integration. Although this approach is not yet significant in terms of quantity, it has a positive influence. This development stems from the need for a more comprehensive counseling approach that combines the strengths of both methods to improve the effectiveness of interventions in various psychological situations. This approach helps individuals accept difficult inner experiences and encourages them to make real changes in their lives.

Studies show that combining ACT and MI positively impacts psychological well-being. For example, Baradaran et al. (2016) found that patients with essential hypertension experienced decreased anxiety, depression, and stress, as well as increased optimism, after receiving the intervention. Similar results were reported by Thurstone et al. (2017), who tested the ACT/MI model with adolescents struggling with substance abuse. They found the model to be feasible and potentially effective in increasing motivation for positive behavior. These results demonstrate that ACT and MI support positive emotional and behavioral changes. Although the results of the research tend to be consistent, the focus of the studies remains scattered across various clinical groups. Some highlight physical disorders, such as hypertension; others emphasize behavioral problems, such as substance and alcohol abuse; some highlight academic procrastination; and some highlight psychiatric conditions, such as schizophrenia. This pattern shows that ACT and MI integration has been used more in the clinical field so far, while its application outside this context is still relatively rare.

The results of the studies in the table also demonstrate that ACT and MI have complementary roles. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) focuses on helping individuals accept unpleasant personal experiences and thoughts while holding onto important values and life goals so they can act in accordance with their life direction (Elita et al., 2017). Meanwhile, motivational interviewing is a collaborative, conversational counseling approach that emphasizes cooperation between counselor and client. It focuses on exploring the client's inner motivation to help them feel more prepared and committed to behavioral change (Setiawati et al., 2025). Combining these two approaches makes counseling more comprehensive. ACT helps individuals accept and come to terms with difficult inner experiences, and MI encourages the desire to move toward positive change. Combining the two makes the counseling process more powerful because it emphasizes acceptance and encourages individuals to take concrete action. Therefore, using ACT and MI together is more beneficial than using them separately.

Although many studies show that ACT and MI are effective, most studies are limited to the counseling process. For instance, Baradaran et al. (2016) studied patients with hypertension; Thurstone et al. (2017) studied substance-abusing adolescents; and Ehman & Gross (2019) examined the reduction of alcohol consumption. Meanwhile, Yildiz and Aylaz (2021) explained that applying ACT together with MI can increase treatment motivation in patients with schizophrenia. These studies indicate that the integration of ACT and MI is rarely applied in counseling despite its potential to help individuals cope with life pressures, social challenges, and serious personal development issues. This indicates an opportunity to develop the integration of ACT and MI in counseling for individuals facing such pressures and challenges, increasing their psychological flexibility and well-being.

Based on previous research, there is an opportunity to apply ACT and MI integration in counseling services for individuals facing life pressures, social challenges, and self-development issues. This approach is expected to increase psychological flexibility and strengthen individuals' ability to cope with various pressures. ACT and MI emphasize self-acceptance and managing difficult emotional experiences. They also provide motivational encouragement to take positive action, thereby supporting and improving overall psychological well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent research trends show that combining Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) with Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a beneficial counseling approach for improving mental health and well-being. ACT focuses on accepting difficult internal experiences and enables individuals to act in accordance with their values. MI fosters motivation for positive change. Together, they allow for a more comprehensive intervention than if applied separately for populations requiring clinical services and those who do not. This study's results underscore the importance of integrating ACT and MI as relevant counseling methods, paving the way for evidence-based interventions to help individuals cope with life stresses, social obstacles, and personal growth issues. Thus, this study plays an important role in counseling practice and in developing more efficient psychological interventions in the future.

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