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## **Efficacy of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy on the Emotional Expression and Sexual Function in Infertile Women's**

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### **Extended Abstract**

#### **Aim**

Infertility is one of the most challenging experiences a person can face. It is defined as the inability to conceive after one year of regular, unprotected sexual intercourse (Nayar et al., 2020). Studies indicate that between 50 to 85 million people worldwide suffer from infertility, with one in every six couples of reproductive age affected by this issue (Ozturk, Aba, & Sik, 2021). Approximately one-third of infertility cases are due to female factors, one-third to male factors, and the remaining one-third to unknown or combined factors.

Despite the equal involvement of men and women in the causes of infertility, social prejudices often lead to infertility being viewed primarily as a women's issue. Consequently, women typically face more significant family and social challenges than men (Shin et al., 2021). Infertility can have numerous psychological consequences, causing couples to encounter various social, emotional, and cognitive problems (Li et al., 2021). The stress and psychological impact of infertility can intensify over time, leading to increased infertility-related stress (Swift, Reis, & Swanson, 2021). Beyond stress, infertility can also result in depression (Lawson et al., 2014), as ongoing stress and the chronicity of symptoms can lead to feelings of helplessness and eventually depressive symptoms. Depression, in turn, can reduce emotional expression.

Moreover, infertility affects women's sexual performance (Maarofizadeh et al., 2018). Given these factors, the present study aims to investigate the efficacy of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) on emotional expression and sexual function in infertile women.

#### **Methodology**

This was a quasi-experimental study with a pretest-posttest control group design and a two-month follow-up period. The statistical population comprised infertile women who visited the infertility clinic at Mother and Child Hospital and the Samar Infertility Clinic in Shiraz during the winter of 2021. A total of 36 infertile women were selected through voluntary sampling and randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. The experimental group received ten sessions of acceptance and commitment therapy over a period of two and a half months. The questionnaires used in this study were the Emotional Expression Questionnaire (EEQ) (King & Emmons, 1990) and the Sexual Function Questionnaire (Keraskian, Mojembari & Kaiballah, 2014). The collected data were analyzed using mixed ANOVA via SPSS 23 software.

**Findings**

The results showed that acceptance and commitment therapy has a significant effect on emotional expression ( $P < 0.001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.61$ ;  $F = 53.44$ ) and sexual function ( $P < 0.001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.58$ ;  $F = 46.95$ ) in infertile women. This intervention led to a significant increase in the average scores of emotional expression and sexual function in infertile women. These results remained stable in the follow-up phase.

**Conclusion**

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that acceptance and commitment therapy can be an effective method to enhance emotional expression and sexual function in infertile women by fostering psychological resilience and mental acceptance. Through this therapy, infertile women learned to accept the provided concepts and metaphors, adhere to the constructive goals of their lives, and purposefully live with their infertility issues instead of engaging in daily struggles and emotional confrontations.

By forming new values and improving coping and problem-solving skills through acceptance and commitment therapy, infertile women were able to follow a psychologically and emotionally productive path and strengthen their emotional expression. Additionally, they learned to focus on discovering personal and marital values rather than solely trying to maintain pleasant feelings and avoid unpleasant ones. This process helped them understand their deepest desires and the importance of their marital relationship, leading to more favorable sexual performance.

**Keywords:** Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Emotional Expression, Infertile Women, Sexual Function.

**Ethical Considerations**

To ensure ethical compliance in the research, informed consent was obtained from the infertile women participating in the intervention program. They were fully informed about all stages of the intervention. Women in the control group were assured that they would receive the intervention after the completion of the research process. Additionally, all participants in both the experimental and control groups were assured that their information would remain confidential and that they would not need to be identified by name.

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**Conflict of Interest**

The authors have reported no conflicts of interest in this study.

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