

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT) TECHNIQUES IN COUNSELING TO REDUCE AGGRESSION BEHAVIOR: LITERATURE REVIEW**

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### **Abstract**

This article reports the results of a systematic review of articles published between 2020 and 2025 that specifically examine the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) techniques in counseling to reduce aggressive behavior. The databases used are Semantic Scholar, PubMed, and DOAJ. Articles selected from various databases use the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) approach. The results of the analysis of five selected articles revealed that ACT is effective in reducing aggressive behavior in both school and college students. When compared to Beck cognitive therapy and CBT, ACT is more effective in reducing aggressive behavior. In ACT therapy sessions, clients' feelings of anger, hostility and all types of verbal and physical aggression are accepted and the feelings associated with them are expressed and adjusted in feedback with group members. If the client's negative feelings are softened during the ACT therapy session, and if they recognize their personal values and turn them into desired behavioral goals, then mental peace will be achieved, thereby reducing aggressive behavior. The results of this study support the use of ACT as an effective approach to help students reduce their aggressive behavior in a more adaptive manner.

**Keywords:** Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Aggression, Intervention, Aggression Therapy

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini melaporkan hasil kajian sistematis mengenai artikel yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2020 sampai dengan tahun 2025 yang secara khusus mengkaji mengenai efektivitas teknik Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) dalam konseling untuk mereduksi perilaku agresi. Pangkalan data yang digunakan yaitu Semantic Scholar, PubMed, dan DOAJ. Artikel yang dipilih dari berbagai pangkalan data menggunakan pendekatan Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA). Hasil analisis mengenai lima artikel terpilih mengungkapkan bahwa ACT efektif untuk mereduksi perilaku agresi baik pada siswa maupun pada mahasiswa. Apabila dibandingkan dengan Beck cognitive therapy dan CBT, ACT lebih efektif untuk mereduksi perilaku agresi. Dalam sesi terapi ACT, perasaan klien mengenai kemarahan, permusuhan dan semua jenis agresi verbal dan fisik diterima serta perasaan yang terkait dengannya diungkapkan dan disesuaikan dalam umpan balik dengan anggota kelompok. Jika perasaan negatif klien ini dilunakkan selama sesi terapi ACT, dan jika mereka mengenali nilai-nilai pribadi mereka dan mengubahnya menjadi tujuan perilaku yang diinginkan, maka kedamaian mental akan tercapai sehingga mengurangi perilaku agresi. Hasil penelitian ini mendukung penggunaan ACT sebagai pendekatan yang efektif

*untuk membantu siswa maupun mahasiswa mereduksi perilaku agresinya secara lebih adaptif.*

**Kata kunci:** *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Agresi, Intervensi, Terapi Agresi*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the behaviors that is relatively common in children and adolescents is aggression behavior. Aggression is a type of emotion and reaction in which a person unconsciously manifests stress, deficiencies and failures in the form of aggression, rape, malicious and aggressive behaviors (Saliminezhad, Rezaei, & Azmudeh, 2022). In addition, aggression can also be defined as cognitively impaired behavior in the evaluation and problem-solving process (Feizi Lafmajani, Farzad, Delavar, & Khodabakhshi Kolaee, 2023). Aggression is one of the most complex emotions in response to situational stimuli and causes physiological changes such as increased blood pressure, heart rate, and adrenaline levels and causes a variety of physical and mental problems that in turn can affect clinical functioning (Garivani, Taheri, & Alizadeh, 2021).

Aggressive behavior in adolescents is a significant problem faced by society today because it has very negative consequences for perpetrators and victims both in the short and long term. Victims of bullying have more mental health problems during adulthood than those who have never been bullied, are at risk of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem and adolescents who become aggressors are more likely to have problems with substance use, show symptoms of depression, and deal with criminality (Ananta, Rahmawati, Selia, Puriani, & Novirson, 2025; Castillo-Eito et al., 2020).

One type of aggression that appears in schools is hostile aggression, which includes two types of aggression (open aggression and relational aggression) (Feizi Lafmajani et al., 2023). Open aggression (physical and verbal) includes hostile behavior, such as hitting, pushing, kicking, and threatening. Relational aggression is a form of aggression used by an aggressive person with the aim of disrupting the victim's friendship and interpersonal relationships, spreading rumors or slander and forcing the person to cut off communication with the person resulting in isolation for the victim.

Based on the results of the study (Saputra, Hanifah, & Widagdo, 2017), male students tend to commit aggression in the form of physical and verbal aggression, while female students tend to commit aggressive behavior in the form of anger and hatred. However, there were no significant differences in aggression behavior between males and females (Saputra et al., 2017). In other studies (Aridhona & Setia, 2022) It found that as many as 61.1% of students were included in the medium category, which means that students have committed verbal aggression behavior towards others, and as many as 19.4% of students who are included in the high category, which means that students often engage in verbal aggression behavior towards others. This is in line with other research (Saputra & Handaka, 2018) which found that 5% of students were in the category of very high aggression behavior, 26% were in the high category, 40% were in the medium category, 21% were in the low category, and 8% were in the very low category.

Internal factors that affect adolescent aggressiveness, namely frustration, thinking and intelligence disorders, and emotional/emotional disorders while external factors include family or peer factors, school factors and environmental factors (Sekar, 2021). Other research suggests that self-esteem and pleasure-seeking are also factors that cause the emergence of aggressive behavior in adolescents (Febriana & Situmorang, 2019).

Based on the data obtained, it illustrates that aggressive behavior is no longer just a phenomenon, but has become a real problem that needs to be addressed immediately so that more and more students do not behave aggressively. This needs to be addressed immediately so that it does not interfere with teaching and learning activities at school and does not become a bad habit for students. Therefore, efforts to handle the problem of aggressive behavior of students need to be the attention of school counselors so that students can understand behavior that is in accordance with ethical principles and moral values in society. One of the ways counselors can overcome student aggression behavior is by providing services and conducting counseling (Br. Ginting, Hasanah, & Irwan, 2021).

*Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* (ACT) is a combination of exercises acceptance and attention associated with commitment and behavior change (Roshan & Jafari, 2016). In this approach, individuals learn to accept their thoughts without judgment rather than challenging them. The goal is for individuals to learn to identify their life values, plan, and practice with those values. ACT targets the core of the problem and its overall goal is to improve psychological flexibility as well as the ability to relate to current events as much as possible and change behaviors that align with personal values.

ACT does not view aggression as a mistake or something that should be removed immediately. However, the ACT views the urge to commit aggression as something natural from human experience. Aggression is seen as a response to uncomfortable thoughts, emotions, or experiences. In addition, aggression is a form of psychological inflexibility created by cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance (Garivani et al., 2021). Problems will arise when individuals react impulsively or inflexibly to the urge to commit aggression that is not in line with personal values. ACT seeks to help individuals not to be controlled by such urges but to choose more meaningful actions. In a literature review (Byrne & Cullen, 2024) found that ACT was shown to be effective in reducing anger and aggression among children, adolescents, and adults.

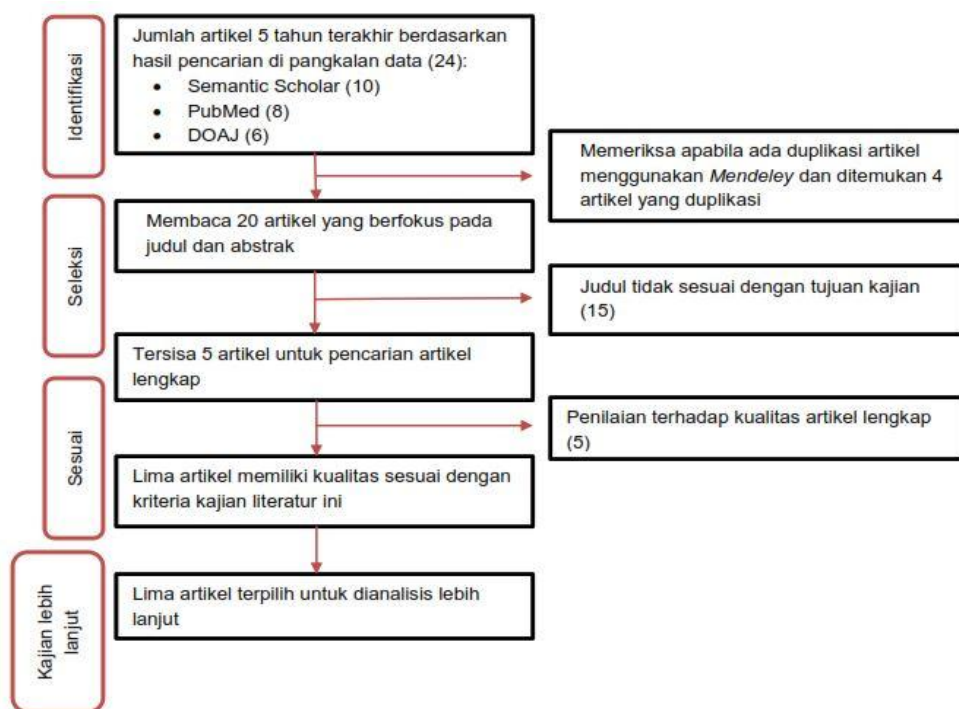
Based on the above presentation, this study will focus on analyzing the literature on the effectiveness of ACT in reducing aggression behavior in students and students. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for counseling and psychology practitioners in implementing ACT as the right approach to help students and students reduce their aggression behavior.

## **METHOD**

This study uses the systematic literature review method. Selection of articles to be studied using the PRISMA guide (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-*

*Analyses*). The stages in PRISMA consist of four steps. First, define topics and criteria. Second, determine the source of information. Third, choose relevant literature. Fourth, Collect articles. The last stage is to analyze the article. *Systematic literature review* in this study was carried out through the collection of articles published in 2020 to May 2025. Article searches were conducted through Semantic Scholar, PubMed, and DOAJ databases. Article search using Semantic Scholar because of Semantic Scholar's advantages in filtering content that focuses on leading journals as well as articles that have gone through the process *peer-review*. PubMed is used as one of the databases because the articles to be collected are related to the field of biomedicine or psychology. DOAJ is also used as a database because journals indexed in the DOAJ must meet certain criteria and have gone through a process *peer-review*. In addition, these three databases are used because of their ease of accessing and obtaining complete articles. To search for related articles, keywords are used using English combined using *boolean operator* i.e. "*acceptance and commitment therapy AND aggression*". The AND operator is used to find more extensive information about the topic being collected. The use of keywords in English is due to obtaining articles that may be researched by international researchers or have been disseminated through international publications. The researcher used three main criteria in the selection of articles. First, the article was published within the last 5 years (2020-2025). It is hoped that in that time span the articles found will still be relevant. Second, the participants in the study are students and students. Third, quantitative studies that produce aggression measurement data. In addition, three criteria are used to eliminate the articles to be selected. First, participants are clinical patients (all types of disorders). Second, research in the form of *systematic review* or *meta-analysis*. Third, the intervention is carried out online.

**Figure 1.** Article search stages (PRISMA)



The analysis of the article is carried out in three stages. The first stage is to read the full article and understand the content of the article as a whole. The second stage is to extract the reading results and summarize them in the form of a table. Table 1 presents information about the identity of the research, the purpose of the research, the research sample, the method of data collection and the main findings of the research results. In the third stage, the researcher analyzed the results of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 20 articles that have been checked for duplication, as many as 15 articles do not meet the criteria based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria that have been set. Furthermore, there are 5 articles that are checked for article quality and in accordance with the purpose of this literature review. In the end, the 5 articles were studied in this study. The results of a review of 5 studies show that ACT is efficient in reducing aggression behavior. The ACT intervention given to students has a significant influence on reducing aggressive behavior (Garivani et al., 2021; Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 2024; Razavi, 2023). Likewise, ACT interventions carried out on students also have a significant influence on reducing aggressive behavior (Feizi Lafmajani et al., 2023; Masoumian et al., 2021).

When compared to group therapy using *Beck cognitive therapy* In reducing aggressive behavior, group therapy using ACT is more effective in reducing such behaviors (Feizi Lafmajani et al., 2023). But it is another thing when compared to *reality therapy*. Group therapy using ACT and using *reality therapy* has equal effectiveness in reducing aggressive behavior (Razavi, 2023). Meanwhile, to overcome anger as a form of aggression behavior, group therapy using ACT is much more effective when compared to group therapy using CBT (Masoumian et al., 2021). One of the contexts in which the client was given ACT intervention in the literature was aggression in immigrant children. Aggressive behavior in immigrant children is one of the issues of social damage caused by the immigration process (Garivani et al., 2021). Immigration causes emotional changes due to the difference in space and time from the country of origin, causing an increase in aggressive behavior.

There is variation in ACT intervention sessions to reduce aggression behavior. The sessions given in this intervention are made in 7, 8 and 10 sessions (Feizi Lafmajani et al., 2023; Garivani et al., 2021; Masoumian et al., 2021; Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 2024; Razavi, 2023). The majority of studies made this ACT intervention into 8 sessions (Garivani et al., 2021; Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 2024; Razavi, 2023). However, based on the results of the study, the number of these intervention sessions did not affect the effectiveness of ACT in reducing aggression behavior. ACT is a behavioral therapy that focuses on accepting beliefs and challenges against them, cognitive errors, awareness, or meaningless descriptions of thoughts and feelings, value-based living, personal spirituality, and a more flexible way to achieve a more valuable and fulfilling life by improving cognitive flexibility rather than focusing solely on cognitive

reconstruction (Garivani et al., 2021). In addition, ACT also produces psychological resilience (Garivani et al., 2021). Psychological resilience enhances the client's ability to relate to their current experiences and act in a way that is consistent with the values chosen.

The ACT has six core processes that are used to help individuals lower aggressiveness. The first is acceptance where the individual is trained to accept his or her internal experiences such as anger and frustration without changing them directly. The second is cognitive diffusion where individuals learn to see the mind to carry out aggressive behavior instead of as an absolute truth. Third, it is full presence which aims to make the individual aware and present in the moment and observe the aggressive impulse to open the orders that must be followed. Fourth, the self is a context in which individuals are helped to realize that they are not the content of their thoughts so that they can create a space between themselves and aggressive impulses. Fifth, personal values that aim to help individuals identify important values in their lives that are in contrast to aggressive behavior. Sixth, value-based actions where individuals take tangible actions that are consistent with their personal values.

In general, all the principles and processes in the ACT lead to a reduction in efforts to avoid external thoughts and situations such as aggression and increase commitment and achievement of goals consistent with the chosen values (Garivani et al., 2021; Masoumian et al., 2021). ACT helps clients directly contact their stressful events, especially in group sessions. It also helps replace unwanted thoughts and emotions with positive experiences instead of controlling or fighting them. In ACT therapy sessions, the client's feelings regarding anger, hostility and all types of verbal and physical aggression are accepted and feelings related to them are expressed and adjusted in feedback with other group members (Feizi Lafmajani et al., 2023; Masoumian et al., 2021). If these clients' negative feelings are softened during ACT therapy sessions, and if they recognize their personal values and turn them into desired behavioral goals, then mental peace will be achieved thereby reducing aggressive behavior (Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 2024). Instead of suppressing or removing aggressive behavior, ACT seeks to instill psychological flexibility so that individuals can respond to aggressive urges with awareness, acceptance, and meaningful action.



**Table 1.** Article summary

RESEARCH IDENTITY	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	RESEARCH SAMPLE	RESEARCH METHODS	KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS
<b>GARIVANI G, TAHERI E, ALIZADEH Z. (2021). EFFECTIVENESS OF ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY ON THE ANGER RUMINATION, HOSTILE ATTRIBUTION AND AGGRESSION IN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN. SOC DETERMINANTS HEALTH, 7(1):1-9</b>	Investigating the effectiveness of the ACT against anger reflection, hostility attribution bias, and aggression of immigrant children	24 immigrant children aged 12 to 18 in Mashhad, Iran	Applied experiments and quasi-experiments with <i>pre-test</i> and <i>post-test</i> designs with control groups. Instruments used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Anger rumination scale</i></li> <li>• <i>Aggression Questionnaire</i></li> <li>• <i>Hostile attribution questionnaire</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The experimental group got 8 sessions</li> <li>• ACT is done in a group form</li> <li>• ACT reduced the variables of anger, rumination, hostility attribution bias, and aggression in immigrant children in the experimental group compared to the control group (<math>p &lt; 0.05</math>).</li> <li>• ACT is effective against anger reflection, hostile attribution bias, and aggression of immigrant children</li> </ul>
<b>FEIZI LAFMAJANI, M. R., FARZAD, V., DELAVAR, A., &amp; KHODABAKHSHI KOLAEI, A.</b>	Comparing the effectiveness of two methods, namely ACT	45 students referred to the Mental Health	Quasi-experimentation with <i>pre-test</i> and <i>post-test</i> design as well as follow-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The experimental group (ACT and Beck cognitive</li> </ul>

**(2023). COMPARISON OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TWO METHODS OF TREATMENT BASED ON ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT AND BECK COGNITIVE THERAPY ON AGGRESSION AND IRRESPONSIBILITY OF STUDENTS. JAYPS, 4(1): 61-71**

and *Beck cognitive therapy* on aggressiveness and Islamic Azad University Student Irresponsibility ‘ Islamshahr Branch Counseling and Services Center of Islamic Azad University‘ Islamshahr Branch dari April 2014 to September 2017 up with the control group and the selection of subjects in the experimental and control groups. To measure irresponsibility and aggression, a subscale of high form *questionnaire Minnesota Multifaceted Personality Questionnaire* reconstructed

*therapy*) was trained in 10 90-minute sessions and no intervention was performed for the control group

- Group therapy
- Both treatments at the *post-test* and *follow-up* stages were able to significantly lower the score of aggressiveness and irresponsibility towards the experimental group
- ACT is more effective against the "aggression" variable compared to *Beck cognitive therapy*
- *Beck cognitive therapy* is more effective than ACT



<p><b>F. RAZAVI. (2023). COMPARING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT-BASED THERAPY AND REALITY THERAPY IN AGGRESSION, PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY, AND CAREER DECISION-MAKING SELF EFFICACY AMONG ADOLESCENTS. AVICENNA JOURNAL OF NEURO PSYCHO PHYSIOLOGY, 10(3): 96-102</b></p>	<p>Comparing the effectiveness of ACT and <i>reality therapy</i> in terms of aggression, psychological flexibility, and self-efficacy in career decision-making in secondary school girls in Yazd, Iran</p>	<p>15 selected cases of second-grade high school students in two Yazd districts for the 2022-2023 school year</p>	<p>Quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. Instruments used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire</i></li> <li>• <i>The Hayes Psychological Flexibility Questionnaire</i></li> <li>• <i>The Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSSES)</i></li> </ul>	<p>against the variable "irresponsible"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subjects in the experimental group received ACT and <i>group reality therapy</i> [in the form of training and skills] for two months (8 sessions each, one 60-minute session per week)</li> <li>• Significant effect of these two treatment methods compared to the control group in the aggression variable</li> <li>• In the psychological flexibility variable, there was no significant difference between the mean control group and the two treatment</li> </ul>
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				<p>approaches in this variable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACT and <i>reality therapy</i> are effective in aggression and self-efficacy in career decision-making with a significance level of less than 1%</li> </ul>
<p>MASOUMIAN, S., ASHOURI, A., GHOMIAN, S., KESHTKAR, M., SIAHKAMARY, E., &amp; VAHED, N. (2021). EFFICACY OF ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY COMPARED TO COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY ON ANGER AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF MALE STUDENTS. <i>IRANIAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY</i>, 16(1), 21.</p>	<p>Determining the effectiveness of the ACT compared to CBT on anger and interpersonal relationships among male students</p>	<p>30 students from several universities in Tehran province</p>	<p>Using experimental methods. Instruments used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Fundamental Interpersonal Relation Orientation- Behavior (FIRO-B)</i></li> <li>• <i>Aggression Questionnaire (AGQ)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACT and CBT were each conducted in 7 sessions over 7 weeks (90 minutes per meeting) in groups</li> <li>• At the end of treatment, there was a significant decrease in anger levels among the participants and a significant increase in all subscales of interpersonal relationships</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger changes in the ACT group were higher, so it was concluded that the ACT group had more changes than the CBT group</li> <li>• There was no significant difference between the 2 ACT and CBT groups in terms of the FIRO-B subscale</li> </ul>
<p><b>MOHAMMADI, A., &amp; MOHAMMADI, A. (2024). THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AGGRESSION AND ADDICTION TO MOBILE PHONES IN ADOLESCENTS. JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE, 23(144), 293-312.</b></p>	<p>Investigating the effectiveness of the ACT against domestic violence, aggression, and cell phone addiction in junior high school students</p>	<p>30 high school students in Sanandaj for the 2023-2024 school year</p>	<p>Quasi-experimental in a series of <i>pre-test-post-test</i> designs with control groups. Instruments used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Adolescent Violence Questionnaire</i></li> <li>• <i>Aggression Questionnaire</i></li> <li>• <i>Mobile Phone Addiction Questionnaire</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ACT is administered in 8 sessions</li> <li>• ACT is effective in reducing violence, aggression, and cell phone addiction in adolescents (<math>P &lt; 0.05</math>)</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION

Aggression is one of the behaviors that is relatively common in children and adolescents and has long-term and short-term impacts for both victims and perpetrators. Aggression is one of the most complex emotions in response to situational stimuli and causes physiological changes such as increased blood pressure, heart rate, and adrenaline levels and causes a variety of physical and mental problems that in turn can affect an individual's clinical functioning. Intervention *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* (ACT) is one of the therapies to reduce aggressive behavior. From the results *literature review* that researchers did show that *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* effective in reducing aggressive behavior in students and students. All of the principles and processes in the ACT lead to reduced efforts to avoid external thoughts and situations such as aggression and increase commitment and achievement of goals consistent with the chosen values. Based on the results of the study, it is hoped that counseling and psychology practitioners can apply counseling with the ACT technique as an alternative in providing counseling services to reduce aggressive behavior in both students and students.

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