

Effects of the ACT Raising Safe Kids Program - online version - on parental practices and child behavior

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ABSTRACT

Theme: Evidence-based practice models

Subtheme: Maltreatment, violence and bullying

Violence against children is a worldwide problem and to face this huge challenge, evidence-based interventions represent a good strategy. Parenting programs target to prevent child maltreatment offer knowledge and support for parents to understand child development, positive discipline, and effective communication. The ACT-Raising Safe Kids of the American Psychological Association constitutes an evidence-based parenting program to enhance positive parenting practices and prevent maltreatment against children. This program is provided in-group presential or online mediated by a trained facilitator. The present study aimed to examine the effects of the ACT-Raising Safe Kids -online version - to strengthen mothers' parenting practices, and to reduce children's behavior problems. The sample consisted of 38 mothers of 2-to-6-year-old children. The data collection included nine weekly sessions of the program. The remote version was performed via the Google Meet platform, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first session (pre-intervention), the mothers answered the following questionnaires:

Sociodemographic characteristics; *ACT Scale*, which assess parenting (positive discipline, communication, and emotional and behavioral regulation); and *Parenting and family adjustment scales* (PAFAS), that evaluate parenting (parental inconsistency, coercive parenting, positive encouragement, and parent-child relationship); *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (SDQ), that assess the child behaviors (total of difficulties). The mothers answered individually via Google Forms the questionnaires with the support of the researcher. Subsequently, the mothers participated in eight intervention sessions of the ACT program. The post-intervention assessment was performed at the last session of the intervention applying the ACT, PAFAS, and SDQ scales. The within-group comparison analysis was performed (Wilcoxon-test, $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$). The results showed that, in comparison to the pre-intervention, there was a statistically significant increase in emotional and behavioral regulation (ACT Scale: pre-intervention, mean = 22.82 \pm 4.15; post-intervention, mean = 26.47 \pm 3.75; $p \leq 0.0001$), parents-children relationship (PAFAS: pre-intervention, mean = 10.79 \pm 1.94; post-intervention, mean = 11.42 \pm 1.28; $p=0.02$) and a statistical marginal increase in mothers' communication (ACT scale: pre-intervention, mean = 13.26 \pm 1.58; post-intervention, mean = 13.76 \pm 1.46; $p=0.06$) in post-intervention. Additionally, there was a decrease in coercive practices (PAFAS: pre-intervention, mean = 3.74 \pm 1.70; post-intervention, mean = 2.32 \pm 1.49; $p \leq 0.0001$) and parental inconsistency (PAFAS: pre-intervention, mean = 2.84 \pm 1.28; post-intervention, mean = 2.26 \pm 1.36; $p=0.02$), in the post-intervention. Regarding the children's behavior, there was a decrease in total behavior problems score (pre-intervention, mean = 11.84 \pm 5.44; post-intervention, mean = 10.96 \pm 4.97; $p=0.004$). In conclusion, the ACT Program - online version - improved maternal parenting practices and children's behavior, according to the mothers' perceptions. The ACT program revealed an evidence-based online version that is relevant for violence prevention in public policies on a large scale.