



Development and Evaluation of a Virtual Postpartum Psychosocial Support Program Based Upon Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)



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INTRODUCTION

Postpartum depression and anxiety are common experiences that result in reduced quality of life and impairments in functioning.

Despite the need for psychological treatments tailored to the postpartum time period, availability and accessibility of specialized postpartum treatments remain limited, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Delivering postpartum psychosocial support in a virtual group format may address barriers to care and increase participation among new mothers. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a novel, innovative approach for treating postpartum depression and anxiety symptoms.

OBJECTIVES

- Address need to increase access and improve psychological support provision during postpartum period
- Pilot treatment protocol in virtual format
- Evaluate acceptability and feasibility

AIMS

1. To develop a structured treatment manual for an innovative program, based upon principles of ACT
2. To assess feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary effectiveness of the program and the virtual delivery format through a pilot study of postpartum women.



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PARTICIPANTS

- Adult women (18+ years old) living in PA
- Within one year postpartum (live birth)
 - No suicidal ideation, psychosis, or substance use disorder
 - Compensated total of \$50 in Amazon gift cards for participation in program
 - 14 interested; 6 enrolled; 5 completed study

Sociodemographics

Age: $M = 32.4$ years (range: 22-39)
 $N = 4$ Non-Hispanic White; $N = 1$ Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander
 $N = 2$ with infants admitted to NICU
 $N = 4$ first time mothers
 $N = 3$ fertility treatment
 $N = 2$ with history of pregnancy loss

SESSION CONTENT

Postpartum Psychosocial Support Program Based upon principles of ACT (Hayes et al., 2012) and ACT during perinatal period (Bonacquisti et al., 2017)

VALUES – Exploring values and goals in the context of motherhood and discussing how to align behaviors and values

PRESENT MOMENT AWARENESS AND MINDFULNESS – Teaching mindfulness skills to focus on and enjoy present moment

EMOTIONS – Identifying and discussing various emotions that come along with motherhood

EMOTION REGULATION – Learning ways to notice and experience emotions instead of suppressing or pushing away

ACCEPTANCE – Exploring different ways of responding to thoughts and emotions

INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS – Improving communication skills to ask for help and advocate for getting needs met

CONCLUSIONS

Program was acceptable and feasible
One mother did not complete due to return to work and scheduling constraints

Virtual format was strongly preferred

Results suggest potential for effectiveness in reducing symptoms
On the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (Bond et al., 2011) and the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (Cox et al., 1987), scores decreased from pre to post in 4/5 participants

Pilot study supports future research with larger sample size

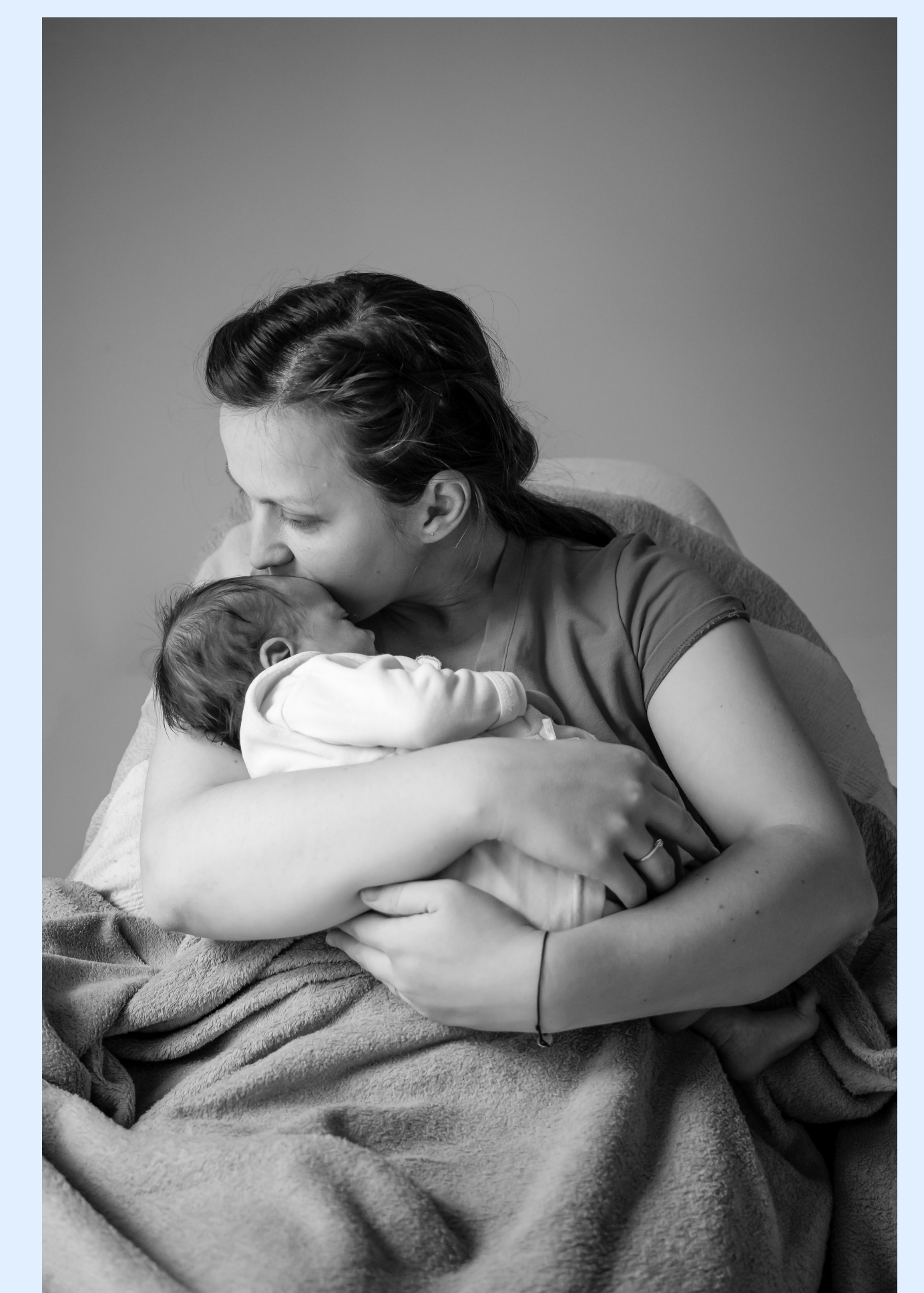


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PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

“Enjoyed seeing and interacting with other mothers. Time and format were great. I enjoyed the openness of conversations.”

“Thank you for taking the time each week. It was helpful to feel heard and not all alone in motherhood.”

“I absolutely loved having it on a virtual platform and likely would not have attended if in person due to pandemic and childcare.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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