ISRCTN78795661 https://doi.org/10.1186/ISRCTN78795661

A pilot study of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and brief Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction informed group interventions for anxiety in a university setting

Submission date
29/07/2025

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
15/08/2025

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
15/08/2025

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[ ] Prospectively registered
[X] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[X] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Many university students experience anxiety, which can negatively affect their wellbeing, academic performance, and overall quality of life. This study is exploring two psychological approaches that may help students manage anxiety: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Both approaches are supported by research and aim to help people relate to their thoughts and feelings in more flexible and compassionate ways. The study is a pilot trial designed to test how effective these two brief group-based interventions are for students with symptoms of anxiety. It will also look at how these approaches may help improve mindfulness and psychological flexibility.

Who can participate?
To take part in the study, participants must be university students aged 18 or older who are experiencing mild to moderately severe anxiety, as measured by a standard questionnaire. They must not be receiving psychological therapy elsewhere and must not be enrolled in postgraduate psychology programmes at City, University of London. Students with more severe mental health conditions or those currently in therapy will not be eligible.

What does the study involve?
Participants will be randomly assigned to one of three groups. One group will take part in four weekly ACT sessions, each lasting two hours, focused on accepting difficult thoughts and committing to meaningful actions. Another group will attend four weekly MBSR-informed sessions, also two hours each, which teach mindfulness skills to manage stress and emotions. The third group will be placed on a waitlist and will not receive therapy during the four-week period, but will be offered one of the interventions afterward. All participants will complete questionnaires at the beginning of the study, after the four-week intervention, and again four weeks later. These questionnaires will assess anxiety, depression, mindfulness, psychological

flexibility, and related factors. Sessions will be led by qualified psychologists trained in ACT and MBSR. With consent, sessions may be audio or video recorded to ensure quality and for possible future research, with all identifying information removed.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Participants may benefit by learning psychological and mindfulness skills that could help reduce anxiety and improve wellbeing. They will also receive free group-based psychological support and contribute to research that may improve services for students in the future. Risks are minimal but may include a temporary increase in difficult thoughts or emotions as participants engage more closely with their feelings, some discomfort in discussing personal experiences in a group setting, and minor inconvenience from attending sessions or completing questionnaires. Any serious concerns about safety or wellbeing will be addressed by qualified psychologists, and participants may be referred to additional support services if needed.

Where is the study run from?
The study is being run by the City Counselling Psychology Training and Research Clinic at City, University of London (UK).

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
January 2019 to December 2019

Who is funding the study?
The study is funded by the British Psychological Society's Division of Counselling Psychology (DCoP) Research Grant.

Who is the main contact?
Dr Jessica Jones Nielsen, jones.nielsen.1@city.ac.uk

Contact information

Type(s)
Public, Scientific, Principal investigator

Contact name
Prof Jessica Jones Nielsen

ORCID ID
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6874-1268

Contact details
City St George's, University Of London
Northampton Square
London
United Kingdom
EC1V 0HB
+44 (0)20 7040 8755
jessica.jones-nielsen@citystgeorges.ac.uk

Additional identifiers

Clinical Trials Information System (CTIS)
Nil known

Protocol serial number
Nil known

Study information

Scientific Title
Comparison of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) for student anxiety: A randomized controlled pilot study

Acronym
CAMP study

Study objectives
Participants who engage in a mindfulness-based intervention, informed by Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), will show: (a) significantly reduced levels of anxiety and, (b) significantly increased scores across the five facets of mindfulness following the intervention. These effects will be observed both in comparison to a waitlist-control group and relative to participants' own pre-intervention scores.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
approved 18/10/2018, Psychology Research Ethics Committee of the School of Arts and Social Sciences of City, University of London (Northampton Square, London, EC1V 0HB, United Kingdom; +44 (0)20 7040 8755; psychology.ethics@city.ac.uk), ref: PSYETH (S/F) 17/18 01

Study design
A pilot and feasibility study - a randomised controlled trial with a crossover treatment design comparing the effectiveness of two experimental mindfulness-based intervention groups to a waitlist-control group (WLC)

Primary study design
Interventional

Study type(s)
Other, Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Student anxiety in a University setting

Interventions
Participants were randomly allocated, using randomisation software, to one of three groups: acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) group and waitlist control group. Participants in the intervention groups attended four weekly sessions of either ACT or MBSR sessions, while the waitlist control group received no intervention during the study period. Group facilitators were experienced HCPC registered practitioner

psychologists. Participants were followed up three months after group participation. This study was designed as a three-armed parallel pilot randomized controlled trial (RCT). The first intervention group was informed by Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), the second by Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), while the waitlist control group received no intervention during the study period. Participants were randomized to intervention and control arms in a 1:1 allocation ratio using a Study Randomizer software, and participants randomized into a treatment condition immediately engaged in four weekly two-hour group sessions of MBSR and ACT.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Feasibility outcomes:
1. Recruitment rate measured using percentage of eligible participants who are recruited from all those who contact the research team to learn about the study at regular intervals and at the end of the study period
2. Retention rate regarding intervention participation measured using percentage of participants who completed all group sessions at the end of the study period
3. Retention rate regarding follow-up at 3 months post-intervention measured using percentage of participants who complete 3-month follow-up at the end of the study period
4. Acceptability of the intervention and attendance measured using a qualitative survey when participants completed the intervention

Key secondary outcome(s))
1. Psychological inflexibility is measured using the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire–II (AAQ-II) at baseline and 3 months post-intervention
2. Mindfulness is measured using the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire–Short Form (FFMQ-SF) at baseline and 3 months post-intervention
3. Generalised anxiety symptoms are measured using the Generalised Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7) at baseline and 3 months post-intervention
4. Depressive symptoms are measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) at baseline and 3 months post-intervention

Completion date
21/12/2019

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Enrolled students
2. At least 18 years of age
3. Have a score between 5 -15 on the GAD-7 and <15 on the PHQ-9

Participant type(s)
Learner/student

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group

Adult

Lower age limit
18 years

Upper age limit
80 years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
31

Key exclusion criteria
1. Presenting severe and enduring mental health problems, such as such as psychotic disorders, personality disorders or dependent drug use where they are the primary problem and/or may significantly interfere with treatment
2. Being currently engaged in psychological therapy elsewhere
3. Being a student on a Masters or Doctoral-level courses in the Department of Psychology at City St Georges', University of London – undergraduate students in the Department of Psychology were accepted but not seen by academic members of the counselling psychology team

Date of first enrolment
10/04/2019

Date of final enrolment
08/05/2019

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
City St George's, University of London
Northampton Square
London
United Kingdom
EC1V 0HB

Sponsor information

Organisation
City, University of London

ROR
https://ror.org/04489at23

Funder(s)

Funder type
Research organisation

Funder Name
British Psychological Society

Alternative Name(s)
The British Psychological Society, BPS

Funding Body Type
Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be available upon request from Jessica Jones Nielsen (jessica.jones-nielsen@citystgeorges@city.ac.uk)

IPD sharing plan summary
Available on request

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Protocol file		19/11/2018	06/08/2025	No	No