



# Mental Health & Resilience using i-ACT For Life

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**i-ACT For Life**

RCT on the Effectiveness of  
an Islamic Psychospiritual  
ACT-based Prevention  
Program for At-Risk Young  
Adults during the COVID-19  
Pandemic

Slide 2





### Agenda 1

Introduction  
*Literature Review, Statement of Problem, Research Objectives & Questions*

## Mental health issues during pandemic

A randomised trial to evaluate the effectiveness of an Islamic psychospiritual ACT-based prevention program for at-risk young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic

- The global prevalence of mental health issues in the general population has increased significantly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup>
- Psychological impact of the pandemic is expected to outlast the current viral outbreak<sup>2</sup>, with societies facing economic contraction, limited mental healthcare resources, and dramatically changed lifestyles.<sup>3</sup>
- Globally, the burden of mental disorder falls most heavily on young adults<sup>4</sup>
- The social and economic disruptions of the pandemic stand to exacerbate these stressors of young adulthood, putting an already vulnerable population at higher risk.<sup>5</sup>
- In Malaysia, a majority of those affected are university students<sup>6</sup>, citing financial constraints, remote learning, and future uncertainty as some of the most prominent pandemic-specific stressors.<sup>7</sup>

## Digital mental health interventions

A randomised trial to evaluate the effectiveness of an Islamic psychospiritual ACT-based prevention program for at-risk young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic

- The pandemic has challenged the ways of modern healthcare delivery, and remote methods of delivering evidence-based mental healthcare are more important now than before.<sup>8</sup>
- Digital mental health interventions (DMHI) have already been lauded for its ability to reduce cost, transcend physical limits, and increase flexibility and autonomy of users<sup>9</sup>, making its use arguably vital in managing the mental health impact of the pandemic.
- Novel methods to introduce preventative mental health interventions are needed to reduce the strain on Malaysia's already overburdened mental healthcare system.<sup>10</sup>

## Protective factors of psychological distress

A randomised trial to evaluate the effectiveness of an Islamic psychospiritual ACT-based prevention program for at-risk young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Several protective factors have been identified that can help mitigate the psychological distress associated with COVID-19, and these include psychological flexibility<sup>11</sup>, self-compassion<sup>12</sup>, and resilience<sup>13</sup>.
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) not only targets development of these resources, but also heavily features cognitive behavioural and mindfulness strategies, both of which have been emphasised for use during the pandemic<sup>14,8</sup>
- As a transdiagnostic, acceptance- and mindfulness-based behavioural approach, ACT can be particularly useful in helping individuals foster awareness, accept difficult internal experiences, and pursue personal values, even amidst COVID-19 adversity<sup>15</sup>

## Reliance on Spirituality & Religiosity

A randomised trial to evaluate the effectiveness of an [Islamic psychospiritual ACT-based prevention](#) program for at-risk young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic

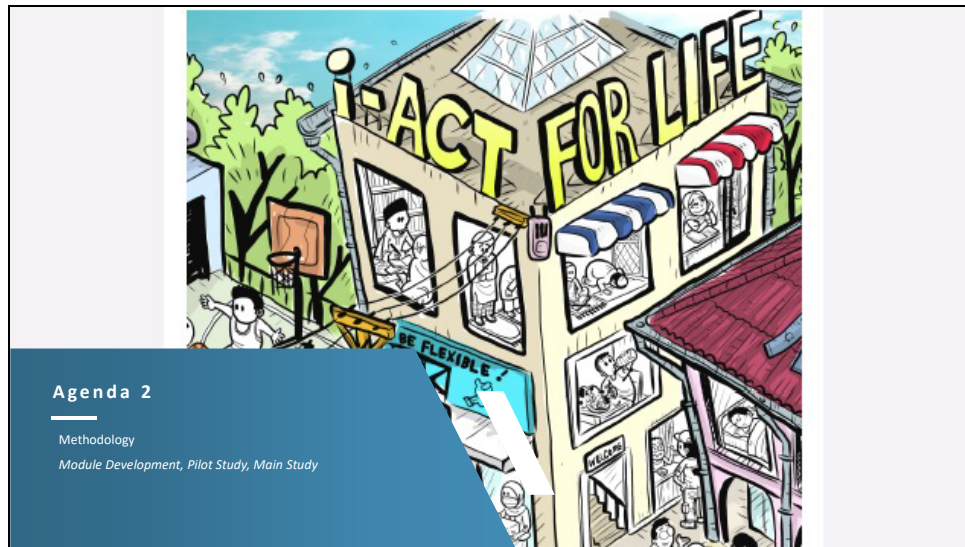
- Major disasters tend to promote increased reliance on spirituality and religiosity<sup>17</sup>
- Positive religious coping during the pandemic have been shown to buffer the psychological impact in religious populations<sup>19,20</sup>
- Integrating religious coping techniques with evidence-based mental health interventions have been emphasized.<sup>19</sup>
- Past research has shown that religio-spiritual integrated psychological treatments have resulted in greater psychological and spiritual improvements compared with no treatment controls and standard non religio-spiritual psychotherapy.<sup>21,22,23</sup>
- Despite conceptual commonalities shared between the principles of ACT and Islam, no existing study has yet to investigate how ACT can be specifically adapted to Muslims populations.<sup>24</sup>

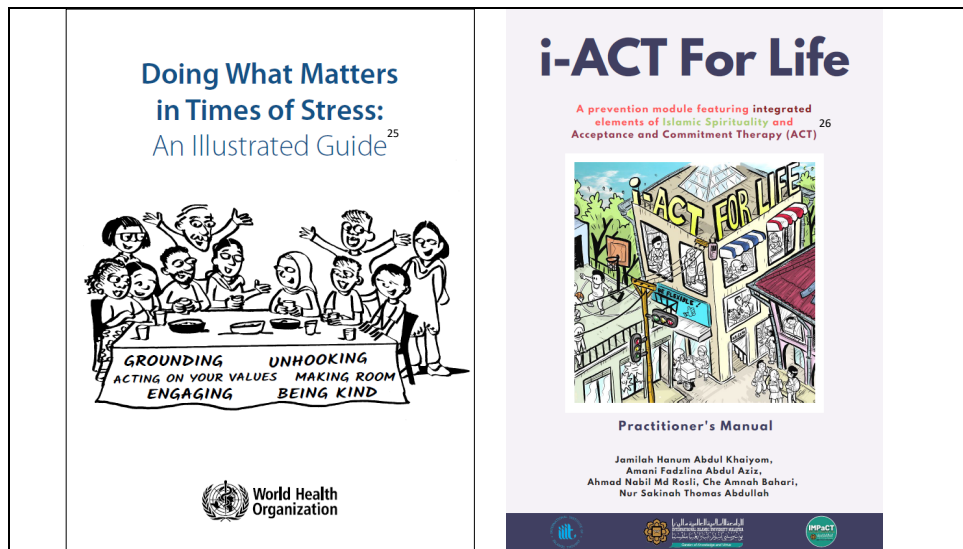
## Research Objectives

A randomised trial to evaluate the effectiveness of an Islamic psychospiritual ACT-based prevention program for at-risk young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic

- To investigate the effectiveness of *i-ACT for Life™*, a web-based Islamic psychospiritual ACT-based prevention program in **reducing psychological distress** and **improving the psychological flexibility, self-compassion, and resilience** of at-risk young adults in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was hypothesised that young adults receiving the program would report significant improvements in all outcomes after receiving the intervention, and would report significant improvements in all outcomes when compared to a waitlist control group.









# i-ACT For Life

A prevention module featuring integrated elements of Islamic Spirituality and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)



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Day 4

## Mindful Wudū'

To most of us, wudū' is considered a routine activity that we perform mindlessly. When this happens, we risk forgetting the number of repetitions, or risk not rinsing a body part properly.

Performing our ablution mindfully would not only help us develop present-moment awareness, but it is also a step towards perfecting our 'ibadah.

For today's exercise, try to perform your wudū' mindfully by following this short guide.

### TAKE DEEP BREATHS

Bring your attention into your body. Notice what you are thinking or feeling.

### MOVE THROUGH EACH STEP SLOWLY

Mindfully declare your intention to perform wudū'. Proceed with the actual steps.

### BE CONSCIOUS OF YOUR BODY

Pay attention to what is moving. Notice your hands as you turned water to your face, the movement of your arms, and the weight of your feet on the ground.

### NOTICE HOW THE WATER FEELS


Take note of the water's temperature and pressure. Notice how it feels as it runs down your skin.

### ACKNOWLEDGE DISTRACTIONS

When distracted, simply acknowledge your thoughts and feelings. Then, bring your attention back to your body's sensation.

### BE FOCUSED AND PRESENT

Be focused, aware, and present in performing your wudū' until you have finished rinsing the final application.



Let's work on **PERFECTING** our **WUDŪ'**!

Tip! Try incorporating your experience from yesterday's body scan into today's activity.

## Development and pilot study of an Islamic psychospiritual Acceptance and Commitment Therapy-based prevention program (i-ACT for Life™) for at-risk young adults in the COVID-19 pandemic

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### Introduction

Young adults in Malaysia show high risks of psychological distress during the pandemic (Wong et al., 2021). Preventive interventions are important and needed to avoid an increase of mental disorders amongst young adults in the upcoming years. Digital mental health interventions are a cost-effective, convenient, and accessible way to address mental health issues among youth without burdening the mental healthcare system (Ebert et al., 2017). **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)** involves **cognitive-behavioural and mindfulness strategies** that are useful for coping with pandemic-related distress (Ho et al., 2020). Integrating ACT with elements of Islamic spirituality is appropriate for Malaysia Muslim majority population, and can help promote short-term and long-term positive religious coping amidst the ongoing pandemic.

### Objectives

- Describe the development of **i-ACT for Life™**, an online modular prevention program for young adults – integrated elements of ACT & Islamic psychospirituality.
- Report acceptability, appropriateness, & feasibility of **i-ACT for Life™** based on a small-scale pilot study.

### Method

**Development of i-ACT for Life™**

- Adapted based on existing World Health Organization module (WHO, 2020) - supplement with additional techniques from established ACT & positive psychology protocols.
- Integrated Islamic psychospirituality based on conceptual similarities - e.g., Quranic verses, hadith, dhikr.
- Developed with guidance of experts from fields of clinical psychology, psychiatry, Islamic studies, & linguistics.
- Consists of 5 weekly modules - each corresponding to a core ACT process (Table 1). Each module comprises 10-15 minute daily exercises designed for delivery through instant messaging platforms.

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Wong et al. (2021). Escalating progression of mental health disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic: evidence from a nationwide survey. *PLoS One*, 16(3), e0248916.  
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### Table 1. Summary of i-ACT for Life™ modules

Module (ACT process)	Summary of content/exercises
Breathing (Present-moment awareness)	Mindful breathing, mindful (20s), mindful walking exercises
Unhooking (Cognitive defusion)	Interactive psychoeducation quizzes; Quran, hadith and video reflection exercises
Acting on Values (Values)	Interactive psychoeducation quizzer; Quran and video reflection exercises; value-setting exercises
Being Kind (Committed action)	Video and hadith reflection exercises; audio-guided self-compassion exercises
Making Room (Acceptance)	Interactive psychoeducation quizzes; video, hadith, and poem reflection; audio-guided exercise

### Pilot study

**Design**

- Quasi-experimental one group design.

**Measures/instruments**

- Acceptability of Intervention Measure (AIM), Intervention Appropriateness Measure (IAM), Feasibility of Intervention Measure (FIM)
- Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales (DASS-21)
- Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II)
- Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)
- Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)
- Open-ended questions - feedback and perceived helplessness of program

**Participants and Procedure**

- 5 undergraduates conveniently sampled for one-week condensed pilot run of prevention program.
- Modules delivered daily through Telegram, web-based instant messaging platform.

### Results

#### Table 2. Implementation outcomes (Maximum score is 5)

	Acceptability M (SD)	Appropriateness M (SD)	Feasibility M (SD)
Grounding	4.48 (0.79)	4.35 (0.72)	4.95 (0.13)
Unhooking	4.75 (0.43)	4.65 (0.55)	4.90 (0.14)
Acting on Values	4.48 (0.65)	4.70 (0.54)	4.90 (0.14)
Being Kind	4.85 (0.22)	4.50 (0.47)	5.00 (0.00)
Making Room	4.68 (0.89)	4.80 (0.45)	4.95 (0.11)
<b>i-ACT for Life™</b>	<b>4.58 (0.35)</b>	<b>4.68 (0.38)</b>	<b>4.88 (0.33)</b>

#### Table 3. Mental health outcomes

	Pre-Intervention M (SD)	Mid-Intervention* M (SD)	Post-Intervention M (SD)
<b>Stress</b>	<b>14.68 (3.33)</b>	<b>11.00 (7.02)</b>	<b>5.20 (3.21)</b>
<b>Anxiety</b>	<b>10.80 (6.42)</b>	<b>6.50 (5.26)</b>	<b>5.20 (7.10)</b>
<b>Depression</b>	<b>7.68 (6.39)</b>	<b>6.50 (1.91)</b>	<b>5.20 (3.35)</b>
Psychological inflexibility	27.50 (12.38)	26.00 (9.41)	19.60 (8.68)
Self-compassion	3.19 (0.70)	3.17 (0.34)	3.61 (0.50)
Resilience	3.43 (0.88)	3.63 (0.44)	3.76 (0.75)

\*Sample size at mid-intervention, n=4

**Qualitative feedback**

- Minor adjustments to module content were suggested to improve usability and engagement.
- Program was helpful in improving coping skills in participants.

### Conclusion

Despite a small sample, the study showed that **i-ACT for Life™** was acceptable, appropriate, and feasible for use, and was successful in achieving program objectives. Results support a full-scale 5-week implementation to test for program effectiveness in preventing distress in young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# i-ACT FOR LIFE™

### Participants

#### Sample size determination:

- Priori power analysis using GPower.
- Using effect sizes reported by Thompson and colleague's (2020) meta-analysis of internet-based ACT treatments
- A sample size of 57 was sufficient for detecting significant between-group effects at .80 power using an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

#### Inclusion criteria:

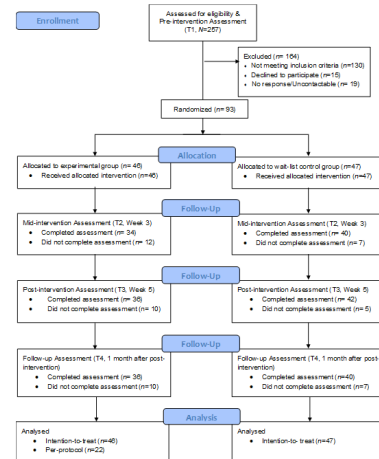
- Young adults who were enrolled in an undergraduate or postgraduate program in a Malaysian higher education institute,
- aged 18-29 years old,
- obtained moderate and above levels of severity for either one of the stress, anxiety, and depression subscales DASS-21 during the screening assessment,
- Muslim,
- owned an electronic gadget with Internet access,
- and can read and understand English

#### Exclusion criteria:

- Self-reported past or present diagnosis of a mental and/or neurological disorder,
- have had previous experience with a modular ACT-based treatment with Islamic elements,
- who were experiencing active suicidality at time of screening,
- were involved in any other form of psychiatric or psychological treatment

Figure 1

CONSORT diagram showing flow of participants throughout study duration.





### Agenda 3

Summary of the Study  
*Limitations, Future Research*

## Summary

A randomised trial to evaluate the effectiveness of an Islamic psychospiritual ACT-based prevention program for at-risk young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Objective:** With rising psychological concerns amidst the pandemic, efforts are needed to preserve the mental health of at-risk populations. The present study examined the effectiveness of *i-ACT for Life™*, an Islamic psychospiritual Acceptance and Commitment Therapy-based prevention program to reduce psychological distress in at-risk young adults in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Method:** Study was preregistered at ClinicalTrials.gov (NCT04870385). Purposive sampling was used to recruit university students studying in Malaysia ( $n=93$ , 78% female) aged 18-29 years old. Participants were randomised to either receive the prevention program ( $n=46$ ) or be waitlisted ( $n=47$ ), and were asked to complete assessments at pre-intervention, mid-intervention, post-intervention, and 1-month follow-up. Outcome assessed were anxiety, stress, depression, self-compassion, psychological flexibility, and resilience. **Results:** Intention-to-treat analyses using Last Observation Carried Forward reported significant between-group effects at post-intervention and follow-up ( $p<.05$ ), and a significant overall effect of time across the four time points ( $p<.001$ ). **Conclusions:** Findings suggest that web-based prevention programs are effective for preserving the mental health of Muslim young adults in Malaysia during the pandemic, and support the integration of Islamic spiritual elements into traditional cognitive-behavioural and mindfulness techniques to improve acceptability of mental health interventions.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Islamic psychospiritual intervention, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Prevention program, Psychological distress



ACT

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