



## Effect of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy on Psychological Trauma of Students Living in Abusive Home Environment in Imo State, Nigeria

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords: Child abuse, Psychological Trauma, REBT, Students*

*Received : 20, March*

*Revised : 22, April*

*Accepted: 31, May*

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### ABSTRACT

Child abuse has become a turbulent situation in our society – particularly Nigeria which has been masked with discipline in some homes, but bears huge psychological problems on the child. It is with the aim of identifying and solving these psychological problems that this study investigated the effect of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy on the psychological trauma of students living in abusive home environment. The study was carried out on Junior Secondary school Students (JSS2) in Owerri-West Local government of Imo state, Nigeria using a pre-test and Post-test group. The population of the study comprised all junior secondary school students living in abusive home which served as the sample size due to its number being manageable. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-made instrument titled Psychological Trauma Scale (PTS) which was validated by specialists in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha which yielded a .81. The research questions were answered using mean (pre-test and post-test) and hypothesis tested using t-test at .05 level of significance. The result of the study proved REBT to be effective in reducing the psychological trauma of students living in abusive home environment. The gender difference in the effectiveness of the therapy was not significant. Based on the findings, recommendations were made which include: Parents and caregivers should be enlightened on the dangers of their abusive relationship with their children.

## INTRODUCTION

The home environment is crucial to the development of the child. This is because the home houses the family which forms the bedrock of the society and the first socializing agent of an individual. It is within the home that the child forms their first attachment or bond with members of the family, therefore its influence is certain. Eze as cited in Ede *et al.*, (2019) conceptualized the family as a social system with biologically related individuals who are inclined to the development of psychological and sociological wellbeing of the family members and sustenance of family structure through inter and intra relationship existing among its members. In same view, Olaitan as cited in Ede *et al.*, (2019) opined that the family produces the first and perhaps the most insistent and subtle influence on the mental health and personality development of the individual.

In the present society, some home environments are far from ideal in terms of being conducive, affectionate and accommodating which is highly needed if the developmental process of the child is expected to be harmonized. Uwazuruike, *et al.*, (2019) asserted that it is the people in the family environment and around the children that begin to guide their actions and behavior, hence where there is cordial relationship among members, parental affection, mutual interest and understanding; children are likely to imbibe acceptable and desirable behavior and experience a positive well-being. This positive well-being is however compromised in an abusive home environment. An ideal family environment is one where there is proper reward to strengthen the desired behavior, a keen interest in and love for the child, provision of opportunities to express their views freely, while not compelling the child to act strictly according to parental desires and expectations.

In scrutiny of security challenges bombarding the nation, issues of abuse sustained within the confines of the home have begun to gain wide prominence which is far from complementary. UNICEF as cited by Appiah & Abubakari (2013) revealed that for many, home is where they face a regime of terror and violence at the hands of somebody close to them – somebody they should be able to trust. It is an undesirable fact that some children receive harsh treatment meted on them by parents or older siblings in their various homes which may or may not be performed in the pretense of discipline. Though there lies a substantial gap between discipline and abuse, in some homes, the gap seems to be too close and most times indistinguishable in the context of parenting which occurs mostly in African countries such as Nigeria - where child development is seen as a prime responsibility of the parents and which demands strict measures in order to conform the child to the high expectations of the society with no ado about how it affects the child both physically and psychologically.

The child in the context of this research is designated to individuals between the ages of 0-18 as recognized in the child right documents. This age bracket therefore covers the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education hence, the secondary school students formed the interest of this research.

It is necessary for the sake of this research to make brief assertions as to what entails abusive home environment, though no explanation would be able to do justice enough as to what an abusive home environment wholly comprises.

However, to be specific, abuse involves any violation of a humans' right and refers to use of one's inherent position to harm another or deprive of another what is rightfully theirs. Taking the child into perspective, abusive home environment is an atmosphere that harbors unfair treatment towards a child which involves a violation of their right as asserted by the human right law on the rights of the child. According to Peter & Anake (2015) child abuse has become an endless and cruel cycle that hurts the image of Nigeria and the self-respect of those involved. They further characterized the act as infliction of serious physical injury and emotional torture on a child or adolescent, which is intentional or unintentional and could endanger the physical, emotional, social and educational wellbeing of the child. In the words of Adejobi *et al.*, (2013), child abuse is any act of omission or commission, physical or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child by their parents, guardians, caregivers or other adults that may endanger the child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development.

Sometimes the child could be abused verbally through name calling and other thought-provoking words. Name calling has proved to be a norm in the African context of child training as most parents find it difficult not to make wrong utterances to their children out of anger. Some go as far as comparing their child to other children in order to instill a sense of shame on the child which invariably affects the child's self-concept and esteem. Howard as cited in Uwazuruike *et al.*, (2019) included, Brow-beating, belittling the child's aspiration with sarcasm, integrating mocking responses and defaming character, berating feelings, demanding answers with frequent interruptions as forms of verbal abuse. Economical abuse is the act of making profit from exploitation of a child. This involves sending children to hawk in the streets or make money for the family while still under the age of being taken care of by parents. In African homes particularly rural areas girls are exploited by being sent out as domestic aids or through early marriages in order to lighten the burden of child-care and also make profits through demands of bride price and other customary requirement that accompany marriage in Africa. Economic abuse also stem from a parent or guardian with-holding financial aid from a child as punishment or as a way of escaping their responsibility.

Sexual abuse is an abuse which involves making sexual remarks towards a child, making sexual advances, exposing children to sexual contents and touching the child in an inappropriate way. Children who are victims of sexual abuse sometimes experience it early in life with little or no knowledge of what was done to them which on later understanding has after-effect damage on them psychologically. Reports of child molestation by people close to the child have been of the increase and therefore require drastic measure to curb its occurrence and save the society from further mayhem.

The researcher however cannot exhaust all dimensions of abuse common in home environment but have chosen to address these few dimension which is perceived as being prevalent in African homes particularly Nigeria. These dimensions of abusive have long-term physical as well as psychological impact on the child. Also children who are witness to abuse between adults such as their parents are indirectly abused. This is because no child would be cognitively and

psychological sound in an environment where their parents or guardians batter and abuse each other. Whether directly or indirectly, children from abusive homes are likely to respond in certain ways; this could be behavioral, mentally, or socially as a result of home problems. This response to undesirable event in the home is termed psychological trauma.

Psychological trauma is inevitable in abusive home environment. It arises from the child's feeling of helpless due to their inability challenge their abuser; they therefore resign to emotional distress which manifest through depression, anxiety, addiction and aggression amongst others. Trauma according to Adam as cited in Ikechukwu-Ilomuanya (2021) is an emotional response to an extremely negative event like death, divorce, accident, rape and natural disaster. Janet French psychodynamic school identified psychological trauma as one or more events that due to their characteristics, can alter subject's psychic system, threatening to fragment mental cohesion. The hallmark of this dangerous psychological problem is its potential to lead to suicide. Ikechukwu-Ilomuanaya (2021) opined that when left untreated, psychological trauma has many effects on adolescents such as drug abuse, sexual problems, and inability to maintain healthy close relationship, hostility, grief, anger and social withdrawal. Therefore the researcher is propelled to investigate relevant psychological approach such as REBT and its effect on psychological trauma of students from abusive home.

Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy is a psychological technique aimed at restructuring an individual's negative perception of themselves and their circumstance. According to Komalasari *et al.*, as cited in Syah, (2020) the rational emotive behavioral therapy approach is a cognitive-behavioral approach that focuses on individual and group behavior that emphasizes that problematic behavior is caused by irrational thinking so that the handling is individual and group thinking. Ellis as cited in Ikechukwu-Ilomunanaya (2021) asserted that clients treated with REBT are encouraged to actively dispute their irrational beliefs and to assimilate more efficient, adaptive rational beliefs with a positive impact on their emotional, cognitive and behavioral response.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Some researchers have investigated the effects of REBT on students with psychological problems such as Syah (2020) who studied the effectiveness of REBT in reducing anxiety among victims of bullying. The study utilized a total of 28 students from class VII Muhammadiyah Boearing School Al Mujahidi Gunnungkidul who were victims of bullying in classes and schools. The result showed that the counseling programme with the rational emotive behavior therapy approach was effective in reducing anxiety in bullying victims. Also Ikechukwu-Ilomuanya (2021) studied the effect of rational emotive behavior therapy on Psychological trauma among secondary school adolescents living with divorced parents in Enugu Metropolis using a Quasi-experimental design. The result of the study showed that REBT was effective in reducing psychological trauma of secondary school adolescents. Lubuis & Novia (2019) investigated the effect of individual counseling through Emotive Behavior Therapy approach on Bullied student's resilience in Amir Hamzah Medan private middle school and

discovered the therapy significantly effective. In same line, Duru (2021) study examined the efficacy of Rational Emotive Behavior therapy and social skill training in enhancing the self-concept of orthopaedically impaired in-school adolescents in Imo state using a sample of 64 adolescents out of a population of 158. The result of the study revealed that the level of self-concept of those in the treatment groups (REBT and SST) were higher than the control group at post-test. Also there was no gender difference in the treatment outcome. However, with the aim of bridging the existing gap, this research investigates the effect of REBT on students living in abusive homes.

The home is the foundation of the students and its environment highly influence their wellbeing both physically and psychologically. When the home becomes non-conducive for the student, there is bound to be an adverse effect on their wellbeing which can manifest in the physical dimension as well as the psychological dimension. Taking the psychological dimension into consideration, psychological trauma among students is a clear indication of a compromised psychological health which can arise from living in abusive home. The implication of psychological trauma among students such as its susceptibility to suicide necessitated the researcher to investigate approaches which would yield positive effect in reducing its occurrence among learners. This study therefore aimed to ascertain the effect of REBT on psychological trauma of secondary school students living in abusive home environment. Specifically, the objectives are to find out:

1. The mean scores of students living in abusive home before and after implementing REBT
2. The mean scores of male and female students after implementing REBT

The following research question guided the study:

1. What are the mean scores of students living in abusive home before and after implementing REBT?
2. What are the mean scores of male and female students after implementing REBT?

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

Ho<sub>1</sub>: there is no significant difference in mean scores of students living in abusive home before and after implementing REBT

Ho<sub>2</sub>: there is no significant difference in mean scores of male and female students after implementing REBT

## **METHODOLOGY**

The researcher employed a quasi-experimental one group pre-test and post-test design. The population of the study consisted of JSS2 students living in abusive home environment in all twelve (12) secondary schools in Owerri-west Local Government Area of Imo state, Nigeria. Though getting the total number of secondary school students living in abusive home environment proved a challenge, the school teachers and guidance counselors assisted the researcher to identify the participants in their respective schools. The psychology profile of the students was used as the criterion for selection for participation in the study. Due to the small number, the entire population was used as the sample of the study.

The instrument for data collection was a researcher-made instrument titled “psychological Trauma Scale (PTS)”. The instrument consisted of 20 items with four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was validated by specialists in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation and its reliability further tested using Cronbach alpha analysis to test for internal consistency which yielded 0.81. Oral and written permission was sought from the schools as well as the participants which was granted before the study was carried out.

A pre-test was administered at the beginning of the research in order to measure the participants’ level of psychological trauma. The participants were then exposed to REBT treatment for a period of six weeks after which a post-test was administered to the same group to determine the effect of the treatment on the participants. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at .05 level of significance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Shows the Mean and Standard Deviation on the Level of Students’ Psychological Trauma Before and After Implementing REBT

| Variables | N  | Mean  | SD    | Mean Difference | Remark    |
|-----------|----|-------|-------|-----------------|-----------|
| Pre-test  | 79 | 68.31 | 11.81 | 38.31           | Effective |
| Post-test | 79 | 30.00 | 4.02  |                 |           |

Result in table 1 show that the mean level of secondary school students on psychological trauma before the implementation of REBT was 68.31 with a standard deviation of 11.81 while after implementation of REBT, the mean level of psychological trauma reduced to 30.00 with a standard deviation of 4.02. This implies that the REBT was effective in reducing the level of psychological trauma of students living in abusive home environment with a mean difference of 38.31.

Table 2. Shows the Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Students’ Level of Psychological Trauma After Implementing REBT

| Gender | N  | Mean  | SD   | Mean Difference |
|--------|----|-------|------|-----------------|
| Male   | 38 | 29.89 | 3.11 | .22             |
| Female | 41 | 30.11 | 4.93 |                 |

Table 2 shows that the mean score of male students on psychological trauma after implementing REBT at post-test is 29.89 with a standard deviation of 3.11 while female students is 30.11 and a standard deviation of 4.93. Their mean difference is .22 which is in favor of the male students whose mean are lower compared to the female.

Table 3. Summary of T-Test on the Difference in Mean Scores Of Students Before and After Implementation of REBT

| Variables | N  | Mean  | SD    | Df | t <sub>cal</sub> | t <sub>tab</sub> | Pval | Decision               |
|-----------|----|-------|-------|----|------------------|------------------|------|------------------------|
| Pre-Test  | 79 | 68.31 | 11.81 | 77 | 27.29            | 1.96             | .00  | Reject Ho <sub>1</sub> |
| Post-Test | 79 | 30.00 | 4.02  |    |                  |                  |      |                        |

Result in table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 27.29 is greater than the tabulated, and a p-val of .00 less than .05 shows that the mean difference between the post-test and pre-test is significant. Therefore the null hypothesis which states that there is a no significant mean difference in mean scores of students living in abuse home before and after implementing REBT is rejected.

Table 4 Summary of T-Test on the Difference in Mean Scores of Male and Female Students After Implementing REBT

| Variables | N  | Mean  | SD   | Df | t <sub>cal</sub> | t <sub>tab</sub> | pval | Decision               |
|-----------|----|-------|------|----|------------------|------------------|------|------------------------|
| Male      | 38 | 29.89 | 3.11 | 77 | 0.24             | 1.96             | .10  | Accept Ho <sub>2</sub> |
| Female    | 41 | 30.11 | 4.93 |    |                  |                  |      |                        |

Table 4 shows the significance of the difference in mean score of students based on gender after implementing REBT. The t<sub>cal</sub> of .24 which is less than the t<sub>tab</sub> 1.96 and a p-val .10 greater than .05 shows that the difference is not significant. This therefore accepts the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in mean scores of male and female students after implementation of REBT. The study investigated the influence of REBT in managing the psychological trauma of students in abusive home environment and discovered REBT effective in reducing the psychological trauma of students in abusive home environment. This is evident in the difference in mean of students with psychological trauma at the pre-test and post-test. The reduction in mean value in the post test showed that the therapy (REBT) was effective. On further testing the hypothesis, the difference in mean value at the pretest and posttest level was significant. The finding of the study is in agreement with other studies such as Lubis & Novia (2019) that investigated the influence of REBT on bullied students' resilience and found it effective. In line with this, Ikechukwu-Ilomuanya (2021) study agrees with the finding as her study on the effect of REBT on psychological trauma among secondary adolescents living with divorced parents in Enugu Metropolis found it significantly effective.

This research equally investigated the gender difference in the effectiveness of the therapy and a significant difference in the mean score of male and female with the males having higher mean scores than the females. This is also in line which the study of Duru (2021) who discovered no gender difference in the effectiveness of REBT on self-concept of orthopedically impaired in-school adolescents.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy has been investigated and found effective in reducing psychological trauma of students living in abusive home. This attempt is however imperative in order to safeguard the health and wellbeing of students suffering from psychological dilemmas. The essence is to prevent the likelihood of suicide which is the ultimate end to most students suffering from anxiety, depression and other psychological problems. The effectiveness of REBT proves that one's beliefs and self-concept goes a long-way to influence one's psychological health. It therefore shows that an individual has

the control to their wellbeing through having rational and positive concept towards themselves and their environment.

1. Parents and caregivers should be enlightened on the dangers they might pose to their children through abusive relationship
2. REBT should be encouraged in school and psychologists employed to help students who are victims of abuse
3. Government should properly fund the operation of REBT in schools  
Students who are victims of home abuse should speak up to their counselors for immediate assistance

### **FURTHER STUDY**

This study still has limitations so that further research is still needed on the topic "Effect of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy on Psychological Trauma of Students Living in Abusive Home Environment in Imo State, Nigeria".

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