

***Effect of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on Divorcees' Emotional Adjustment in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria***

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**Abstract**

*The study adopted Quasi-experimental research design to examine the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on emotional adjustment of divorced women in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State. The population of the study comprised all divorced men and women in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State, while a sample size of 60 subjects was selected through purposive sampling technique. A self-constructed questionnaire titled "Effect of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on Divorcees' Emotional Adjustment Questionnaire (ECRTDEAQ)" was used. The control group, made up of divorcees from Adoka was given the instrument to determine emotional stability on healthy relationship while the experimental group in Otukpo was treated with cognitive restructuring technique in form of lessons in 20 sessions. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and Analysis of Covariance. The result indicated that cognitive restructuring technique has significant effect on divorcees' emotional adjustment in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that workshops and seminars should be organized from time to time for the divorcees with low level of adjustment so as to equip them with the right principles, methodologies and skills for handling cases of emotional crisis.*

**Keywords:** cognitive, restructuring, technique, divorcees, emotional, adjustment

## **Introduction**

It is important to note that a breakdown in marriage have negative consequences on the individual's personal life, feelings of self-worth and sense of security. Divorce also affects individuals physically, emotionally and spiritually. It can also lead to emotional instability, irrational decisions and interpersonal tensions in the society. According to Winner and Benneth (2002), divorce is the legal termination of marriage which can be granted on fault or no-fault grounds. Divorce can be defined as dissolution of marriage; it is the process of terminating a marriage. Divorce usually entails the dissolution of the legality of a marriage, thus dissolving the bonds of matrimony between married couple under the rule of law of a country. It is the final outcome of a prolonged process of family disorganization. Therefore, divorce indicates that such marriage has failed and the parties involved are free to depart. Hence, in divorce, the spouses lose all the opportunities to maintain the wedlock in future and the matrimonial family becomes dissolved for life.

When a couple agrees to terminate their marriage, it leads to separation, guilty, anger, resentment; fear and disappointment dominate the divorcees' thinking. Frequently, there is loneliness, confusion, sadness, anger, remorse, sense of failure, rage, guilt, insecurity, low self-esteem and loss of identity (Ugboha, 2019). Melgosa (2007) believes that both men and women experience negative feelings with divorce, which may last several months or even years. When children are involved, the pain is even greater as sensitive parents watch innocent children suffer because their families have been torn apart. No one wins in a divorce. Everybody loses; the couple, their children, their parents, and the community at large. The high rate of divorce has made people to learn and accept divorce as a way of life for many in modern society. In a supportive view, Melgosa and Melgosa (2006) observed that the divorce rate has increased recently because it has been given social approval.

Divorce is one aspect of marital dissolution, among other things, that frustrate the destiny of the children of the divorced couples. These children could constitute a nuisance to the society if not properly brought up in a stable family environment. Divorce is a grave offence against natural law. According to Vanpelt (2002), divorcee is an attempt to break a legal union between spouses that agreed freely to live with each other as husband and wife forever. The author stated that divorce introduces disorder into the family level, the society, and even greatly harm the spouse and the children. The separation of the parents does traumatize the children in the society. Divorce is a painful and emotionally disturbing experience for any human being. In a society that has a prescription for almost all human ill, very little is being done to help the person struggling through the pains of divorce. Though, there are family interaction and support services in the study area, many hurting men and women find themselves aching when divorce shatters their dreams and tears their families apart. It should be noted that divorce is one of the factors that cause emotional problems to individuals in the society. Hence, individual finds it very difficult to adjust adequately to his or her social surroundings. However, divorce arises due to confusion in communication, maintenance of incomparable social values, enforcement of certain moral standards and the existence of situations which are differently perceived by the individual

and maladjusted individuals. Divorce affects the divorcees' emotional stability thereby causing them to have adjustment problems. For these divorcees find it difficult to be productive in their new environments; and they need to adjust their emotions if they are to live happily after the divorce. This is because divorcees' emotional problems caused lack of harmony between them and their environments. Dali (2001) asserted that divorce is one of the most painful of all human experiences.

Divorce also triggers unsettling, uncomfortable and frightening feeling, thoughts and emotions, resulting to grief, loneliness, depression, despair, guilt, anger, frustration, anxiety and devastation and constant transfer of aggression to all and sundry. Divorce introduces anger at the partner's obstinacy and betrayal and even guilt over perceived failures to have made the relationship work. Divorce brings about overwhelming depression at the thought of the seeming impossibility of being able to cope with all the changes that are required. These sorts of emotions are generally natural, grief-related reactions to a very difficult life-altering situation. The end of a relationship causes traumatic, chaotic and contradictory emotional instability.

Smoke (1995) observed five common emotions that people experience during the divorce process. They are often referred to as the five stages of grief. They include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. However, the divorcees should be assisted to overcome self-defeating phenomenon by using cognitive restructuring technique.

The consequences of being a divorcee are enormous, some of which are loneliness, rejection, pains and of course there is no team approach to family challenges. It is not part of African culture for one to live alone as a divorcee. Individuals lack emotional stability as a result of divorce. In this case, they are not well coordinated and so cannot achieve goals and objectives within a given period of time because of lack of emotional stability. This problem affects relationships, especially with the children whose academic performances depend largely on the parent's emotional stability. The divorcees' emotional needs can be remediated through cognitive restructuring technique. This is the premise of this research work.

Cognitive restructuring techniques involve brain-storming and programmed learning where training sessions turn into a more informal training. Nduka-Ozo (2005) sees cognitive restructuring as a rational emotive therapeutic approach where rational thoughts could be reinforced for sustenance while irrational thoughts are restructured to align with appropriate behaviours. Arinze and Ilomuanya (2009) define cognitive restructuring as a strategy of helping people to have insight towards the challenges facing them by improving in their behaviours and assisting them to cope with their enormous challenges. The authors also see it as a useful technique for understanding unhappy feelings and moods. As such, the cognitive restructuring technique is used to reframe the unnecessary negative thinking that the divorcees experience from time to time. It will further help the divorcees to approach situations in a more positive frame of mind. Ker, Ekoja and Ekoja (2006) asserted that cognitive restructuring technique used on group can facilitate deeper

self-understanding and self-acceptance. Ugboha (2012) found out that the technique can help divorcees to alter their maladaptive thought patterns and replacing them with more realistic and constructive thoughts.

Cognitive restructuring technique therefore, becomes a useful technique for understanding what is behind the negative moods of the divorcees, since they may undermine their performance or damage their relationship with other people. The divorcees in Benue state were taught the types and how to use cognitive restructuring technique to challenge their irrational thinking and beliefs through the following process:

Calm yourself; write down the situation that triggered the negative thoughts; identify the moods that you felt in the situation; write down the automatic thoughts you experienced when you felt the mood; identify the evidence that supports these hot thoughts; identify the evidence that contradicts the hot thoughts; identify fair and balanced thoughts about the situation. Finally, observe your mood now, and decide on your next steps.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on emotional stability of divorcees in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State. Specifically, the study intended to:

1. find out the level of divorcees' emotional adjustment before treatment.
2. determine the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on divorcees' emotional adjustment after treatment.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do the mean scores on emotional adjustment of the divorcees in the experimental and control groups differ at the pretest level?
2. To what extent do the mean scores on emotional adjustment of the divorcees in the experimental and control groups differ at the posttest level?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference in the emotional adjustment pretest mean scores of divorcees in the experimental groups and control group.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in the posttest emotional adjustment mean scores of the divorcees in the experimental and control groups after controlling for pretest effects.

### **Methodology**

The study employed the quasi-experimental research design. This is because the researchers were interested in finding the possible cause-effect relationships by exposing one experimental group of divorcees to treatment and one control group not receiving the treatment. The choice of this design provides for comparison of what transpired in the

experimental treatment and control groups. Therefore, the aim of this design is to compare the gain score of the two groups. The design uses non-random assignment to groups. These divorcees were studied based on their locations.

All divorcees, both male and female in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State constituted the population of the study. The target population of this study therefore is the divorcees with low emotional stability specifically in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State. The choice of the sample was informed by the fact that the direct victims of divorce fell into this category. The rationale for the selection of the above population from the same local government is that Otukpo is the centre of Idoma cultural heritage and social activities among the nine local government areas in Idoma land. The sample size of 60 participants was used for the study. An intact group size of 28 divorcees using purposive sampling technique was selected from divorcees at Adoka community which was used as the control group while 32 divorcees from Otukpo town were used as the experimental group. A self-constructed questionnaire titled “Effect of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on Divorcees’ Emotional Adjustment Questionnaire (ECRTDEAQ)” was used. The control group, made up of divorcees from Adoka, was given placebo on healthy relationship while the experimental group in Otukpo was treated with cognitive restructuring technique in the form of lessons in 20 sessions. The data collected were analyzed using inferential statistics. Mean rating and the standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. ANCOVA and t-test were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance at pre-test and post-test. The data collected were subjected to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (2.50pt) for the data analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

### **Presentation of results**

The data collected from 60 respondents were analyzed and presented in tables based on research questions and hypotheses.

**Research question one:** To what extent do the mean scores on emotional adjustment of the divorcees in the experimental and control groups differ at the pretest level?

**Table 1:** Level of the divorcees’ emotional adjustment at pretest

<b>Groups</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mean difference</b>
Experimental group	32	2.74	0.23	0.27
Control group	28	2.47	0.31	
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>			

Table 1 shows that the divorcee in the experimental group had pretest mean score and standard deviation of 2.74 and 0.23 respectively, whereas those assigned to the control group had mean and standard deviation of 2.47 and 0.31 respectively. The mean difference is only 0.27 indicating that both groups did not differ much in their level of emotional adjustment before exposure to the cognitive restructuring technique.

**Research question two:** To what extent do the mean scores on emotional adjustment of the divorcees in the experimental and control groups differ at the posttest level?

**Table 1:** Level of the divorcees' emotional adjustment at posttest

Groups	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Mean difference
Experimental group	32	27.16	1.10	24.68
Control group	28	2.49	0.32	
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>			

Table 2 indicates that the divorcee in the experimental group had posttest mean score and standard deviation of 27.16 and 1.10 respectively, while divorcees in the control group had mean and standard deviation of 2.49 and 0.32 respectively. The mean difference of 24.68 implies that the posttest mean score on emotional adjustment of those in the experimental group is higher than that of those assigned to the control group.

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference in the emotional adjustment pretest mean scores of divorcees in the experimental groups and control group.

**Table 3:** t-test on emotional adjustment pretest mean scores of divorcees in the experimental and control groups

Groups	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	T	p
Experimental group	32	2.74	0.23			
Control group	28	2.47	0.31	58	0.98	.365
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>					

Table 3 shows that the p-value of .365 is higher than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is retained and concludes that the emotional adjustment mean difference between the experimental ( $\bar{x} = 2.74$ , SD = 0.23) and the control ( $\bar{x} = 2.47$ , SD = 0.31) groups is insignificant at pretest ( $t(58) = 0.98$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). This implies that divorcees did not significantly differ in emotional adjustment before exposure to cognitive restructuring therapy.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in the posttest emotional adjustment mean scores of the divorcees in the experimental and control groups after controlling for pretest effects.

**Table 4:** Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) on emotional adjustment mean difference of divorcees in the experimental and control groups

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig	Remark
Corrected Model	2.163	2	1.081	16.826	.000	
Intercept	.017	1	.017	.254	.616	
Pretest	2.039	1	2.039	4.09	.062	
Treatment effect	.269	1	.269	31.01	.000	Sig.
Error	3.748	57	.066			
<b>Total</b>	<b>345.441</b>	<b>60</b>				

Table 4 shows that the posttest mean difference between the experimental and control groups had p-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Thus, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis and concludes that there is significant difference between the experimental and control groups on emotional adjustment after controlling for the effect of pretest score ( $F(1, 57) = 31.01, p < .05$ ). Overall, the intervention accounted for 97.8% variance of emotional adjustment. This signifies that cognitive restructuring technique significantly improved emotional adjustment of divorcees.

### Discussions of findings

The study shows that the emotional adjustment was low before treatment, and high after treatment. The high mean score in post-test shows that cognitive restructuring was effective in improving the emotional adjustment of the divorcees. The finding of this study appears to be in harmony with previous works, which showed significant improvement in behaviour and attitudes when exposed to treatment. Ker, Ekoja and Ekoja (2006) asserted that cognitive restructuring used on a group can facilitate deeper self-understanding and self-acceptance. Ugboha (2019) found out that the technique can help divorcees to alter their maladaptive thought patterns and replace them with more realistic and constructive thoughts. This is why the treatment factor showed improvement over the control group.

The implication is that the technique of cognitive restructuring can be used on groups with emotional problems since it helps to make the counsellees better, happier and more successful, actively performing individuals wherever they may find themselves. It is also imperative that to effect a change in attitudes and behaviour, the process of re-learning in a social setting using cognitive restructuring technique in group counselling is required. The finding of this study is in line with the assertion of Melgosa (2007) who said that both men and women experience negative feelings with divorce, which may last several

months or even years. The similarities in the divorcees' responses may be due to civilization and education.

The study further revealed that there was a significant difference in the emotional adjustment of pre-test and post-test mean scores of divorcees in the control groups. The finding of this study is in agreement with the result of earlier studies of Vanpelt (2016) and Melgosa and Melgosa (2006) who proposed that a partner feels so worthless and experiences low emotional adjustment when his or her marriage is terminated. A failed marriage often portrays the couple as failures. Neither the leaver nor the left can escape the emotional crisis that accompanies divorce. When a marriage ends, there can be massive destructive impact on each partner's emotional stability.

### **Conclusion**

The indices of a person's psychological adjustment include his or her intrapersonal coping experiences. Social adjustment on the other hand refers to the state of coping or relating with others in one's environment. Counselling does the integration of the above. It could be inferred from this study that the cognitive restructuring technique helped in the improvement of thinking and feelings of the divorcees after treatment. It enabled divorcees with low emotional adjustment to practice desirable behaviour. It also reduced divorcees' emotional instability; counselling therefore helped in modifying the divorcees' distorted perception of the world around them.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

1. Marital counsellors should concentrate their counselling efforts on the male and female divorcees in order to equip them with necessary adjustment strategies that would help them in resolving their emotional adjustment problem.
2. Counselling services should be made available to prospective divorcees so as to sustain and improve their level of motivation towards harmonious living with family members and neighbours.
3. Divorcees with low level emotional adjustment should be encouraged to consult the experts to improve their skills in order to meet up with the challenges in the society.
4. Workshops and seminars should be organized from time to time for divorcees with low level of emotional adjustment so as to equip them with the right principles, methodologies and skills for handling cases of emotional crisis.
5. Divorcees with low emotional adjustment should be encouraged to develop their emotional adjustment because the most important ingredients in achievement of motivation is a feeling of self-directed competence.

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