

## ***Effects of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on Emotional Adjustment of Selected Single Mothers in Jos Metropolis***

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated the effects of cognitive restructuring technique on emotional adjustment of selected single mothers in Jos metropolis. The study adopted pretest-posttest, control group experimental design. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The population of this study comprises all single mothers in Jos Metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 40 single mothers in Jos Metropolis with low emotional adjustment as indicated by their scores from the instrument tagged "Single Mothers' Emotional Adjustment Inventory" (SMEAI). The instrument was validated by experts from Research, Measurement and Evaluation, and Guidance and Counselling Units, University of Jos for content validity. The instrument yielded a reliability index of 0.72. The participants were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Participants in the treatment group were exposed to twelve weeks of cognitive restructuring technique. The collected data were then analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. The findings revealed that cognitive restructuring technique is effective in increasing single mothers' emotional adjustment. It was recommended, among others, that cognitive restructuring technique should be used when an individual experiences a negative mood, or when one feels fear, apprehension, or anxiety about a person or event.*

**Keywords:** cognitive, restructuring, emotional, adjustment, single, mothers,

### **Introduction**

The role of single parent is a challenging one especially when the family is headed by a woman. Problems of single motherhood are linked with the upbringing of children, their future and settling down in life. Till the time children get married and/or get jobs, they are dependent on the single parent. After that, the problems are considerably reduced. The present study looks at the emotional adjustment of the single mothers when cognitive restructuring technique is used on them. Therefore, the statement of the problem of this study is the low self-concepts of single mothers who need the experts' improvement skills in order to meet up with the challenges in the society. They are affected psychologically

and this effect, by extension, affects the children, neighbours and their productivity. The consequences of being a single mother are enormous; some of which are loneliness, rejection, pains and lack of team approach to family challenges. It is not-African for one to live alone as a single mother.

In Nigeria, single mothers often face different challenges with sustenance and child support often not imposed, following a fractured relationship or extended family not supporting after the death of a partner. Single motherhood introduces the single mother and her children into economic hardship. According to National Women's Law Centre, Poverty and Income among Women and Families (2000-2013), single American mothers live in poverty five times more often than married parents. In addition to single mothers' traditional protective and nurturing role, they may have to play the role of family provider as well. Single mothers also experience poor housing. All of these factors contribute to a heightened likelihood for them experiencing poverty. Single motherhood also brings about poor physical and mental health, loneliness, stigmatization and difficulty in social interaction (Ugboha, Oche & Isreal, 2017). In general, single mothers have a harder time making ends meet. As a result of the financial strain experienced by many of them, they tend to be more anxious, depressed and overwhelmed with parenting issue.

Self-concept is the cognitive or thinking aspect of self. Researchers define self-concept as all the ideas, thoughts, and information people have about themselves. From the above views, self-concept can be described as how single mothers see themselves, and how they feel about themselves. Although, many people tend to have a somewhat consistent view of themselves, single mothers with low self-concept often assess themselves negatively, and engage in negative self-remarks about themselves. Vanpelt (2002) suggests that one's self concept changes from moment to moment as a function of the social environment. These changes in turn influence one's emotional state, behaviour and information processing. It has been discovered by social psychologists, such as Melgosa and Melgosa (2006), that what happens to anyone in life, whether success or failure has a great deal to do with that person's self-concept. Those with low self-concept doubt their abilities to perform or achieve, express fear in task performance and often attribute their success to external factors such as luck or fate (Ekoja & Ekoja, 2006). Such individuals have the inclination to depend on others and external factors for their success, as such, they can easily engage in marital disharmony. Single mothers' low self-concept and withdrawn behaviour can lead to deeper depression and then to suicide if not modified (Ajayi, 2005).

Being a single mother means that there is no one there to share the good and bad experiences of life. As a result, frustration, anger, anxiety, loneliness, depression and guilt start to creep in. These are single mothers' emotional feelings. Some of these experiences might interfere with the individual's normal functioning. Emotion is the mood of being conscious in which the feeling element is predominant. It is a particular type of feeling that a single mother has to a particular stimulus, a feeling in which certain stimulus provokes in someone. This is why Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith and Ben (1990) stated that emotions can activate and direct behaviours and may also accompany motivated

behaviour. This implies that emotions are triggered from the outside of a person. They are usually aroused by external events, and the emotional reactions arising thereof are directed towards these events, and can be elicited by a wide variety of stimuli.

Nwachukwu (1995) believed that emotion is used to designate motives, moods or frames of mind, agitations and feelings. Emotion is a general descriptive term applied to observed behaviour, the accompanying physiological changes, and subjective feelings which are associated with a state of high arousal. An emotional experience is understood to be a reaction that accompanies the satisfaction or frustration of a need.

Therefore, the single mothers need to adjust. Egbule (2005) referred to adjustment as a process of the individual's efforts to satisfy her needs in the society. Single motherhood comes with a unique set of emotional challenges that can, at times, feel overwhelming and are best understood by women who share them. This ranges from self-doubt and anxiety over money to the stress of making decisions alone. Adjustment, according to Chauhan (1990), is an organism's reaction to the demands of the social environment. Adjustment disorder occurs when a single mother is not able to deal adequately and meaningfully with psychical, social, cognitive, emotional and psychological demands.

Weiten and Llayd (2003) defined adjustment as the psychological process through which people manage or cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life. It is a single mother's attempt to develop coping strategies and withstand any forms of adversities in the world. Encyclopedia Britannica (2015) perceived adjustment to be the behavioural process by which human and other animals maintain equilibrium among their various needs or between their needs and the obstacles of their environments. Whenever single mothers' needs are unmet, the needs become adjustment problem (Alabi, 2004).

Adjustment is both psychological and psychosocial state of being which an individual finds difficult to separate from the other. It involves both positive and negative dimensions. Positive adjustment is widely sought for to enable individuals live meaningfully, whereas negative adjustment is a counter-productive state of being that requires psychical or psychological treatment (Mangal, 2002). Life is a continuous series of change and challenges. Everyone faces such situations for survival or growth. Individuals may use different ways or strategies to cope with these needs. The strategy used by an individual to manage this, is what is called adjustment or coping strategies. Sometimes, the efforts of an individual may be successful and satisfying and then it is a case of good adjustment. But if an individual meets frustration in her efforts continuously, the personality adjustment may not be proper and then it might be a case of maladjustment.

Emotional adjustment may be defined as the individual's struggle to get along or survive in her social and physical environment (Best, 2007). This is an adjustment made by single mothers to become more productive in their environment. It consists of two kinds of processes: fitting oneself into given circumstances and changing the circumstance to fit one's needs. Emotional adjustment (also referred to as personal adjustment or

psychological adjustment) is the maintenance of emotional equilibrium in the face of internal and external stressors. This is facilitated by cognitive process of acceptance and adaptation. An example would be maintaining emotional control and coping behaviour in the face of an identity crisis. This capacity is an important aspect of mental health and where it is compromised, or not developed, psychopathology and mental disorder can result.

Group counselling adopting cognitive restructuring technique of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) is a counselling theory based on the fact that man is capable of thinking and behaving in both rational and irrational ways (Ellis in Ugboha, 2012). Ellis (2004) explained that rational emotive behaviour therapy is action and results oriented psychotherapy, which teaches individuals how to identify their own self-defeating thought, beliefs and actions and replace them with more effective and life enhancing ones.

Unhelpful thinking in the form of dysfunctional beliefs and/or cognitive distortions is just like any other automatically occurring bad habit; with practice and efforts, single mothers can become more aware of what is happening in their minds and change how they are thinking for the better. Cognitive restructuring, also known as cognitive reframing, is a technique drawn from cognitive therapy that can help single mothers identify, challenge and alter stress inducing thought patterns and beliefs. The end goals of cognitive restructuring is to enable single mothers to replace stress inducing thought habits with more accurate and less rigid (and therefore less stress-inducing) thinking habits.

Cognitive restructuring was first developed as a part of cognitive behavioural therapy for depression (in Dr. Beck's version) and as a part of REBT (in Dr. Ellis' version). It is a very powerful therapy which has been adapted to help single mothers cope with all manner of stressful events and conditions. It is a useful tool in dealing with what lies behind the stressful and unhappy feelings and moods of people. Cognitive restructuring, according to Carpenter (2007), is a better way to cope with negative emotions. Cognitive therapists' questions are designed to make clients examine the connection between their own interpretation of events and their subsequent feelings. Once they discover that their destructive thoughts are not based on fact, the therapist can help them to correct their assumptions and develop realistic interpretations of event.

Cognitive restructuring is a core technique in Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), a well-studied and effective approach to treating common mental health issues like anxiety and depression. And while it is often used to treat clinical disorders like anxiety and depression, cognitive restructuring can be just as useful to anyone who struggles with overly negative thinking patterns and self-talk. It also has been used successfully to treat a wide variety of conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), addictions, anxiety, social phobias, relationship issues, and stress. For example, a 2007 study found that cognitive restructuring helped participants who experienced severe grief, while a 2003 study discovered that it reduced the symptoms and effects of PTSD. It is also helpful for

overcoming fear of failure and fear of success, and for beating self-sabotage (Gladding, 2009; Huppert, 2009).

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to determine the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on emotional adjustment of selected single mothers in Jos metropolis.

### **Research question**

The following research question guided the study:

1. What is the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on single mother's emotional adjustment in Jos metropolis?

### **Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis was formulated and tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance:

**Ho1:** There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on single mothers' emotional adjustment in Jos metropolis?

### **Methodology**

The research design that was adopted for this study was pretest-posttest, control group experimental design. This design is interpretable because it has a pretest. The researchers therefore used interpretable non-equivalent group design because it is suitable for this study as it takes cognizance of the inherent pretesting and biased sampling. The population of the study constituted all single mothers in Jos metropolis with emotional adjustment problem. The choice of the sample was informed by the fact that the direct victims of single motherhood fell into this category.

The sample consisted of forty identified single mothers with adjustment needs who were purposively sampled and were used for this study. Denga (1986) maintained that better results are achieved in smaller group as there will be effective concentration and understanding of the treatment procedures by the participants. The study had two groups of treatment and control. The subjects were given a pretest. At the end of the pretest, the treatment commenced for the experimental group only. The treatment group received twelve weeks treatment based on cognitive restructuring programme, while the control group did not receive any treatment. After the treatment, all groups were given a posttest. This made it possible for the researchers to investigate the effects of the training programme on the single mothers' emotional adjustment in Jos metropolis.

The instrument of this study was a 36 item "single mothers' emotional adjustment inventory" (SMEAI) which was developed by the researchers. It had a four-point scale meant to determine single mothers' emotional adjustment needs. The items were designed to measure psychological constructs such as frustration, anger, anxiety, loneliness, depression, guilt and so on. The coding system was four-point likert type scales that have 4 to 1 in order of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

in the positive and the reverse in the negative. The instrument was trial tested on 20 single mothers in Makurdi town, Benue State. The internal consistency, reliability estimate of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method of reliability. The reliability coefficient value yielded 0.72 which was considered reliable.

A pretest was administered at the beginning of the programme in order to measure the participants' level of emotional adjustment. Twenty (20) participants who were in the treatment group were thereafter exposed to cognitive restructuring technique treatment for a period of twelve weeks with one session per week, after which a post-test was administered to them to determine the effect of the treatment on the participants. Mean scores, were used to answer the research question while t-test was used to test the hypothesis.

### Presentation of results

**Research question one:** What is the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on single mothers' emotional adjustment in Jos metropolis?

**Table 1:** Effect of cognitive restructuring technique on single mothers' emotional adjustment

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
Pretest	20	31.5	2.81
Posttest	20	63.7	0.52

Results in table 1 show that the treatment group of single mothers obtained 31.5 mean score in pretest and 63.7 in posttest. The mean score in post-test is greater than that of the pretest. The high mean score in posttest represents better emotional stability. This is an indication that the respondents, responded well to cognitive restructuring technique treatment.

**Ho1:** There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on single mothers' emotional adjustment in Jos metropolis.

**Table 2:** Paired sample t-test statistics on the effect of cognitive restructuring technique for the pretest and posttest mean scores on single mothers' emotional adjustment

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Std Err</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>t-cal</b>	<b>Sig (p)</b>
Pretest	20	31.5	2.81	2.051			
Posttest	20	63.7	0.52	1.470	19	8.158	0.000

p<0.05 at df 19

Table 2 shows significant difference in the pretest and posttest scores of the treatment group (t-calculated=8.158, p=0.000). The null hypothesis is rejected since p-value is less than 0.05 alpha level.

### **Discussion of the findings**

In tables 1 and 2, the emotional adjustment score of the participants were low before treatment and high after treatment. The high mean scores in post-test show that cognitive restructuring technique was effective in improving the emotional adjustment of the single mothers. To ascertain whether the effect was statistically significant, the null hypothesis one was tested. The results indicated that there is significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on emotional adjustment of single mothers.

From the findings, cognitive restructuring technique can significantly increase single mothers' low emotional adjustment. The implication of this result is that when appropriate and desirable behaviours are demonstrated, the single mothers will inculcate such behaviours into their lives. The findings of this study are in agreement with the works of Vanpelt (2002), and Melgosa and Melgosa (2006) who believed that partner feels so worthless and experiences low emotional adjustment when his or her marriage or relationship is terminated. A failed marriage often portrays the couple as failures. No victim of divorce, death, adornment or unintended pregnancy can escape the emotional crisis that accompanies each.

The findings of this study appear to be in harmony with the work of Ellis (2004) who explains that Rational emotive behaviour theory which in a counselling theory is based on the fact that man is capable of thinking and behaving in both rational and irrational ways. Therefore, when exposed to the therapy, there will be significant improvement in behaviour and attitudes. Ugboha (2012) also found out that cognitive restructuring technique can help divorcees to alter their maladaptive behaviour thought patterns and replacing them with more realistic and constructive thoughts. This was why the treatment factor showed significant difference over the control group.

The implications are that technique of cognitive restructuring helped the participants to change their wrong perception of single motherhood and improve their emotional stability. This means that cognitive restructuring technique can be used on groups with emotional problems since it is hoped to make them better, happier and more successful, actively performing individuals wherever they may find themselves. It is also imperative to effect a change in attitudes and behaviour; the process of re-learning in a social setting using cognitive restructuring techniques in a group counselling is required.

### **Conclusion**

These researchers maintain that bad moods are unpleasant as they can reduce the quality of one's performance and can also undermine one's relationship with others. Moods are the fundamental feelings that single mothers have. It has been proven empirically from this study and others that cognitive restructuring is useful for understanding what lies behind negative moods, which may undermine performance. Negative thinking can cause severe health problems and, in extreme cases, death; while cognitive restructuring has been shown to have a positive effect on reducing negative thinking. It further helps the single mothers to approach situations in a more positive frame of mind.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Cognitive restructuring technique should be used when an individual experiences a negative mood, or when one feels fear, apprehension, or anxiety about a person or event.
2. The single mother should learn to satisfy or attempt to satisfy her physical, social and personality needs.
3. Counselling service should be made available to prospective single mothers by the government so as to sustain and improve their level of motivation towards harmonious living with their family members and neighbours.
4. Workshops and seminars should be organized from time to time for single mothers with emotional adjustment needs so as to equip them with the right principles, methodologies and skills for handling cases of emotional crisis. These will further encourage them to develop high self-concept because the most important ingredient in achievement motivation is a feeling of self-directed competence.

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