

Effect of Rational Emotive Therapy in Curbing Psychological Effects of Imprisonment Among Inmates in Port Harcourt Correctional Centre

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Abstract: *The study explored the effect of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effects of imprisonment among inmates. The study was guided by two specific objectives, research questions and corresponding hypotheses. Quasi-experimental design was adopted in the study. The study population was made up of over 1200 inmates serving various terms of imprisonment in Port Harcourt Correctional home. A sample of Sixty (60) inmates (34 males and 26 females) with a mean age of 26 years were randomly sampled and placed into the experimental and control groups of 30 each. RET was used as the treatment for experimental group. The “Psychological Effect of Imprisonment Scale” (PEIS) was used as instrument for data collection. The instrument was treated to have sufficient content and face validity. The internal consistency of the instrument was established by using the Cronbach alpha which yielded an index of 0.76. Data were analyzed using the mean, standard deviation and t-test. Result indicated among others that RET was a very effective counselling technique in curbing the psychological effects of imprisonment. Therefore, it was recommended that rational emotive therapy should be adopted as an effective strategy for curbing the psychological effects of imprisonment among inmates. Conclusions were made based on the research findings.*

Keywords: Efficacy, rational emotive therapy, curbing, psychological effects, inmates

INTRODUCTION

The history of imprisonment was based on punishing those who wronged society, by inflicting suffering on the body - similar to the pound of flesh depicted within Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice. In contrast to this concept, today’s imprisonment is no longer simply intended as an acute form of corporal punishment, but a method by which to work on a prisoner’s mind as

well as his body, through three distinct areas - which include: punishment, deterrence and rehabilitation. These unique areas, when interlinked into a single process are intended to allow society to remove criminals from a position where they may continue their criminal behaviour, place them into an institution that satisfies the masses who desire some form of retribution, persuade would-be criminals that such activities are not beneficial, and in time, sculpt them into productive and law abiding citizens through positive psychological conditioning who may later be re-integrated into society.

In theory, such a concept fairs well but unfortunately in reality, a large range of negative psychological experiences encountered within correctional homes do not lead to this other well thought out plan. The correctional facility has some responsibility which may include but not limited to safe keeping of all inmates, maintaining and improving of welfare of all confined within and the performance of these objectives with the maximum of efficiency and economy.

Safekeeping generally comprises of keeping inmates locked away, counted and controlled, while allowing for isolated moments of welfare activities to satisfy needs through recreation, education and counselling. Unfortunately, the welfare and psychological freedom of the individual inmate does not depend on how much education, recreation, and counselling he receives but rather, on how he manages to live and relate with the other inmates who constitute his crucial and only meaningful world (Santos, 2020). It is what the prisoner experiences in this world; how they attain satisfaction, and how they avoid its detrimental effects through the adjustment process known as prisonization that ultimately decides how, if they will cope in life. It has also been recognized, through simulations of prison environments, that lockups and isolation have the tendency of dehumanizing prisoners by making them feel anonymous, and breeding ill feelings because of their rejection and condemnation by society as a whole. Likewise, it should be remembered that offenders have been drawn from a society in which possessions are closely linked with concepts of personal worth by numerous cultural definitions. However, in correctional homes, inmates find themselves reduced to a level of living near bare subsistence. Whatever physical discomforts this deprivation may entail, it has deeper psychological significance as to the prisoner's conception of his personal adequacy - particularly when surrounded by other inmates, whom twenty percent are estimated as mentally deficient five percent as psychotic (Weekes, 2020).

The entire correctional homes structure is based on solitude. Firstly, the convict is isolated from the external world and everything that motivated his/her offences. Secondly, they are to a large degree isolated from one another. During the 18th century, this concept was taken to extremes, whereby prisoners were even forced to wear facemasks that did not allow vision or communication during exercise periods. This concept was based on the promotion for total submission, and in older correctional homes dually acted as a form of buffering with which to control the outbreak of diseases (Donaldson, 2021). Early attempts at submission and rehabilitation were far from perfect. The use of solitary confinement was originally designed to allow prisoners to rediscover their own conscience and better voice through spiritual conversion. Unfortunately, it was later discovered that no form of torture could have been worse than solitary confinement because it ended up causing within many prisoners adverse psychological effects such as: delusions, dissatisfaction with life, claustrophobia, depression, feelings of panic, and on many instances madness (Flanagan, 2019). As part of rehabilitation

efforts, there are many efforts used in helping the psychological health of the inmates and one of such is the use of RET in counselling them.

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) is an action-oriented form of cognitive-behavior therapy developed by Dr. Albert Ellis. It operates on the premise that emotional distress is caused by irrational beliefs and thought patterns, rather than the situations themselves. The goal is to identify, dispute, and replace these beliefs with healthier, rational perspectives. According to Corey (2017), Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), developed by Albert Ellis, is widely used in correctional settings because it targets the irrational beliefs that often underlie criminal behavior and prison maladjustment. REBT helps inmates identify and dispute beliefs like “I must get what I want when I want it” or “I’m a worthless person because of my crime” and replace them with rational, adaptive thoughts. Sukhodolsky and Ruchkin (2004) also stated that prison inmates face unique psychological challenges including anger, depression, low self-esteem, and criminal thinking patterns that increase the risk of recidivism. To them, REBT offers a structured, cognitive approach that is particularly suited for correctional settings. REBT operates on the premise that it is not events themselves, but the irrational beliefs about those events that cause emotional distress and maladaptive behavior (Ellis, 1994). From this premise, it is essential to critically examine the psychological effects imprisonment has on inmates, with a view to assisting them cope with life in prison, if we are to reduce recidivism among released inmates. This study attempted to provide such critical examination. Factors predisposing prison inmates to adverse psychological effects will be explored. The study will establish the efficacy of rational emotive therapy in curbing the psychological effects of imprisonment among inmates.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Correctional Homes

Correctional homes are often the scenes of brutality, violence and stress. Prisoners are faced with incidence of violence and are always concerned for their safety. A long-term prisoner named Jack Abbott had stated “everyone is afraid. It is not an emotional or psychological fear. It is a practical matter. If you don’t threaten someone at the very least, someone will threaten you. Many times you have to “prey” on someone, or you will be “preyed” on yourself (Tosh, 2021). Correctional homes aim to cure criminals of crime; however, their record has not been encouraging, instead, prisons do more harm than good. The pains of jail confinement affect all prisoners in different ways. To begin with the prisoners need to withstand the entry shock by adapting quickly to prison life. Prisoners are exposed to a new culture, which is very different from their own culture. Then they need to maintain outside links. For example, keeping in contact with family and friends becomes frustrating. While being in prison the prisoner must determine his/her ways of passing the time since the hours appear endless (Bridges, 2020). For some prisoners, the major source of stress would include the loss of contact with family and friends outside the prison.

There is also the fear of deterioration. There is lack of personal choice within the correctional homes environment, which may affect prisoners. After many years of being told what to do they may well lose the ability to think for themselves and make their own decisions and choices freely (Cragg, 2022). The age of an inmate also appears to determine the psychological effects

of imprisonment. In 2018, Richard McCorkle discovered what Toch and Adams had reported in 2021 that is that, younger inmates aged twenty-five or below, are initially more resistant to the prison structure which makes them more likely to be the targets of victimization in comparison to older inmates who assume passive avoidance roles in prison hence, increasing psychological effects of imprisonment. However, it has been suggested that after the initial shock of imprisonment, younger inmates tend to demonstrate increasing levels of conformity over time (Bartol & Bartol, 2021). The pains of confinement are limited to certain psychological deprivations. This includes the loss of liberty where prisoners experience a limitation of movement. There is also the pain of moral rejection implied in confinement. Confinement implies that the prisoner is not trusted or respected therefore; he/she should not be able to move freely amongst other citizens (Johnson, 2022).

Prisoners must obey rules and there are restrictions placed on what goods they may have with them and when. Sexual deprivation places pressure on prisoners towards homosexual satisfaction of one's sexual needs. It also involves a cry for the compassion of a woman. Also loss of autonomy suggests that prisoners are under the control of officials. Prisoners must obey rules and are treated like children. Combined these psychological deprivations lead to a destruction of the human personality (Heilpem, 2020). Isolation is the term used when inmates are separated from the general prison population. There are three situations which may call for an inmate to be put in isolation. These include disciplinary segregation, administrative segregation, and protective custody. As one may predict, whether an inmate becomes severely psychologically affected by solitary confinement is dependent on how much time is spent in isolation (Bartol & Bartol, 2021). For instance, an inmate who is placed in isolation for a few days will not be as psychologically affected by the experience in comparison to an inmate who is isolated for a longer period time.

As was demonstrated with the experiment conducted by Sycamnias (2019) at the Stanford University, a number of case studies on the effects of prison life have also indicated that imprisonment can be brutal, demeaning, and generally psychologically a devastating experience for many individuals. Psychological symptoms described in these studies which are believed to be directly caused by imprisonment include psychosis, severe depression, inhibiting anxiety, and complete social withdrawal. Another major stressor which the prisoner is faced with in prison is the fear of contagious and incurable diseases, such as, aids (Bartol & Bartol, 2021). Overall, the results from studies indicate that individuals react differently to confinement while some find experience of prison extremely stressful, at the other extreme, those who are dependent, passive, and generally incompetent may find that the prison structure offers them a positive experience (Bartol & Bartol, 2021). In another research, it was concluded that "correctional homes do not produce permanent harm to the psychological well-being of inmates" (Bartol & Bartol, 2021). However, it was later found that there are certain prison conditions where this may not be the case, such as, where inmates are subjected to crowding and isolation.

Concept of Rational Emotive Therapy

Rational emotive behaviour therapy is a counselling theory based on the fact the man is capable of thinking and behaving in both rational and irrational ways. Ellis (2015) argues that when

man thinks rationally, he increases the probability of leading a more effective and happy life than when he thinks irrationally. Ellis (2018) explains that rational emotive 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, life enhancing ones. Shertzer and Stone (1980) quoted in Ellis (2018) stressed the importance of human values when an individual has emotional reactions. These reactions he explains have some consequences due to the belief system that arises about the cause of the reactions.

To Ellis, the task of the counsellor is to work with individuals who are unhappy and troubled and to show them that their difficulties may result largely from distorted perceptions and illogical thinking and that there is a relatively simple, through-work-requiring method of reordering their perceptions and recognizing their thinking so as to remove the basic cause of their difficulties. In the **A-B-C** theory of personality, A is the existence of a fact while B is the behaviour or attitude of an individual. C is the emotional consequence or reaction of the individual; the reaction can be either appropriate or inappropriate. A (the activating event) does not cause C (the emotional consequence). Instead, B, which is the person's belief about A, causes C, the emotional reaction.

Statement of Problem

Through the researcher's observation, it is seen that violent crimes like armed robbery and kidnapping continues to rise in Nigeria, despite the stiff penalty. The reason is in the nation's or leaders' collective failure to cater for the psychological needs of citizens. It is often difficult to integrate ex-convicts. They are discriminated against in employment, politics, and so on. Some of the ex-convicts spend most of their youthful age in prison. It should be expected that they would like to be gainfully engaged to enable them pick up the pieces of their lives. If the society fails to show interest in their rehabilitation bid, they get frustrated and take up arms again. To ensure relative peace in the society, ways have to be sought to rehabilitate and integrate ex-convicts. Rehabilitation of ex-convicts should start from prison. Based on these issues, the researchers therefore used rational emotive therapy as a treatment technique on prisoners to observe its efficacy in curbing psychological effects of imprisonment among inmates.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study was to establish the efficacy of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effects of imprisonment among inmates. The specific objectives were; to explore the difference in the post-test mean scores of the inmates who were treated with rational emotive therapy and the control group and to ascertain the difference in the mean scores of the inmates treated with rational emotive therapy and the control group after four weeks follow-up.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of rational emotive therapy effective in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates as compared between the experimental and the control group?
2. What is the retention effect of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates as compared between posttest and follow up test?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study and were tested at the .05 level of Significance:

1. There is no significant effect in the effect of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates as compared between the experimental and the control group.
2. There is no significant retention effect of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates as compared between posttest and follow-up test.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted that quasi-experimental pretest post-test control group design. The population of study were made up of over 1200 inmates of Port Harcourt Correctional Center. A sample of 60 inmates were drawn using purposive and systematic sampling techniques. These sample included 34 males and 26 females with an average age of 26 years and placed into experimental and control groups-of 30 each. The pre-test scores were used as the basis for equivalence since only sixty inmates who manifested adverse psychological symptoms were used for the study out of a total of one hundred and fifteen initially pre-tested. The instrument used was a structured questionnaire titled "Psychological Effect of Imprisonment Scale" (PEIS developed by the researchers and used to raise scores for pre-test and post-test. Test-retest method was used to establish the reliability of the research instrument. The internal consistency of the instrument was established by using the Cronbach alpha, which yielded an index of 0.76. Experts in Measurement and Evaluation from university of Port Harcourt ascertained the face and content validity. The treatment programme consisted of five phases of 1 hour each, spread over four weeks with one session per week.

Phase 1: To ascertain the equivalence of the experimental and control groups, the instrument was administered on both groups (pre-testing).

Phase 2: Subjects in the experimental group were asked to share their most shameful experiences and describe their most upsetting feelings.

Phase 3: Subjects in the experimental group were assisted to realize that the negative experiences they have were as a result of their irrational thought. They were encouraged to engage in activities that will act as counter propaganda agents. They were encouraged to learn trade since they are potential employers of labour after serving their full terms. Video clips of ex-convicts who are now in gainful employment were shown to them.

Phase 4: There was an intensive interactive session between the experimental subjects and the researchers to replace irrational thoughts with positive statements about oneself such as "if Nelson Mandela could make it, I can make it".

Phase 5: Re-administration of the questionnaire, completion and collection (post-testing). After the treatment procedure, data were analyzed using the mean, standard deviation and t-test.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the effect of rational emotive therapy effective in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates as compared between the experimental and the control group?

Hypothesis One: There is no significant effect in the effect of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates as compared between the experimental and the control group.

Table 1: t-test on the post-test mean scores of the treatment techniques and the control Group

Groups	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	Sig	Alpha	Result
Experimental	30	38.62	8.41	58	0.03	0.05	Significant
Control	30	43.04	9.82				

From table 1 above, mean and standard deviation for inmates in the experimental group was 38.62 and 8.41 while that of those in the control were 43.04 and 9.82 respectively. In answering the resrecah question through these mean values, it is seen that RET has a significant positive effect in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates when compared between those that were treated and those that were not. Also, the calculated sig-value shows 0.03. Hence, since sig values ($P=0.03 < 0.05$) is less than 0.05 alpha at 58 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected meaning that there is a significant positive effect of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates.

Research Question Two: What is the retention effect of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates as compared between posttest and follow up test?

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the retention effect of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates as compared between posttest and follow-up test.

Table 2: Paired sample t-test of posttest and follow-up scores of the treatment techniques on psychological effect of imprisonment

Groups	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	Sig	Alpha	Result
Posttest	30	38.62	8.41	28	0.52	0.05	Insignificant

Follow-up	30	37.74	4.03
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From table 2 above, mean and standard deviation for posttest remained 38.62 and 8.41 while that of follow-up is 37.74 and 4.03 respectively. In answering the research question through these mean values, it is seen that RET has a positive retention effect in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates when compared between those that were treated and those that were not. Again, the calculated sig-value shows 0.52 was realized. Hence, the sig values ($P=0.52>0.05$) is greater than 0.05 alpha at 28 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis is retained meaning that there is no significant difference between the posttest and follow-up retention test scores effect of rational emotive therapy in curbing psychological effect of imprisonment among inmates.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From finding one, it is revealed that there is significant positive effect of Rational Emotive Therapy in curbing psychological effects of imprisonment among inmates. This finding means that inmates who received REBT showed a measurable reduction in the negative psychological effects of imprisonment compared to those who did not receive the therapy. "Psychological effects of imprisonment" usually include anxiety, depression, hostility, low self-esteem, and poor coping skills caused by loss of freedom, stigma, overcrowding, and uncertainty about the future. The positive effect is consistent with REBT theory. REBT targets irrational beliefs that worsen prison stress. By disputing these beliefs and replacing them with rational alternatives like frustration tolerance and unconditional self-acceptance, inmates learn to manage emotions without aggression or withdrawal. Other studies support this finding as it was seen that REBT group programs in correctional settings have reduced anger, depression, and hostility while improving behavioral control (Sukhodolsky & Ruchkin, 2004). So the significant effect found here suggests REBT works as a brief, structured intervention to help inmates reframe their prison experience and cope better psychologically.

From resercah finding two which reveals that there is no significant difference between posttest and follow-up retention test scores, the finding means that the gains inmates made immediately after REBT were maintained weeks or months later during the follow-up test. In other words, the therapeutic effect was retained over time. This is important for some reasons. First, the durability of change as it shows REBT did more than give temporary relief. Inmates internalized the ABCDE model and continued disputing irrational beliefs on their own. RET is psycho-educational, so once inmates learn the skill, they can keep using it without a therapist present. Again, in terms of practical value for prisons, prisons have limited counseling resources and high inmate turnover. A therapy whose effects last after sessions end is cost-effective. It reduces relapse into depression, aggression, or hopelessness even when inmates return to stressful prison conditions. The finding of the study is not surprising by the resrecaher

because over time, REBT has proven through various studies like that of Walters (2003) that REBT effects are retained and that inmates are more likely to maintain rational thinking and self-control after release, which can lower recidivism risk.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy on curbing the psychological effects of imprisonment among inmates. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that REBT is an effective intervention for reducing the anxiety, depression, hostility, and maladaptive coping associated with incarceration. Inmates who received REBT showed significant improvement in psychological adjustment compared to those who did not receive the therapy. Furthermore, the study concluded that the positive effects of REBT were durable. There was no significant difference between posttest scores and follow-up retention scores, indicating that inmates maintained the rational beliefs and coping skills learned during therapy over time. This suggests that REBT does more than provide temporary relief; it equips inmates with a practical, self-applicable framework for managing prison stress.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Correctional facilities should integrate REBT into the standard psychological services offered to inmates. Group REBT sessions should be organized regularly, especially for new inmates during the adjustment period, and for inmates with histories of aggression or depression.
2. Because the therapeutic gains from REBT were retained over time, prison administrators should adopt REBT as a core component of pre-release and rehabilitation programs. The fact that inmates maintained their rational beliefs and coping skills after therapy shows that REBT provides lasting skills, not just short-term relief. Therefore, REBT should be included in “through-care” programs that prepare inmates for reintegration. Follow-up booster sessions can be minimal, allowing counselors to focus resources on more inmates.

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