

## **Effect of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on Social and Emotional Adjustment of Divorcees**

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**Abstract:** *The study investigated the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on social and emotional adjustment of divorcees. The need for the study came as a result of the increasing rate of divorces among couples to which the researchers sought to find solutions. Pre-test-post-test randomized control trial experimental design was adopted by the researchers for the study. 34 divorcees who were drawn through proportionate stratified random sampling technique constituted the sample for the study. The divorcees were randomly assigned to experimental (19) and (15) groups. Social Adjustment Assessment Scale of Divorcees (SAASD) and Emotional Adjustment Scale of Divorcees (EAASD) were used for data collection. SAASD and EAASD were properly validated by experts in the test development and the internal consistency reliability indices of the items estimated as 0.88 and 0.89 respectively using Cronbach Alpha method. Before the commencement of the testing and treatment package, the researchers assured the participants of confidentiality of interactions and personal information as they work together in self-disclosure. Thereafter, pre-treatment assessment (pre-test) was conducted using the SAASD and EAASD in order to collect baseline data (Time 1). After that, the experimental group was exposed to 90 minutes of the CRT program twice a week for a period of 6 weeks. The treatment took place between September and November 2019. Post-test (Time 2) assessment was conducted 1 week after the last*

*treatment session. Besides, a follow-up assessment was conducted after two months of treatment (Time 3). Data collected were analyzed using repeated measures analysis of variance. The findings of the study revealed that the effect of cognitive restructuring technique on the social and emotional adjustment of divorcees was significant at post-test and follow-up measures. One of the contributions of the findings is that if divorcees are not properly counseled, maladjustment socially and emotionally will continue to increase. Based on the findings, the contribution among others is that Federal Government or relevant education authorities should provide enough family counsellors in the various institutions who will assist in the counselling of the divorcees in the dangers of social and emotional maladjustment using CRT.*

**Keywords:** Cognitive, Restructuring, Technique, Social, Emotional, Adjustment of Divorcees.

## **Introduction**

Marital peace requires that the couples are able to make the necessary transitions towards a sustainable relationship. Stability in family is used as a definition of success. George (2012) posits that the family's success is often measured in terms of its members' happiness and satisfaction. This implies that, where there is happiness and contentment expressed by family members, such a family could be said to be stable. In spite of the significance of marriage, every society is faced with situations in which marriage fails and the couples cannot tolerate living together. The effect of this is usually divorce. The phenomenon of divorce is receiving increasing attention as a stress inducing factor or rather a life crisis that affects over seven million couples and six million children worldwide annually (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 2014; Norton & Glick, 2015). Marriage breakdown presently appears to be on the increase. Available literature such as Omeje (2015), Aroh (2016) Asogwa (2017), Mirror (2019) and researchers' observation from the Nigerian Society, indicate that marriage breakdown appears to be on the increase and it is becoming increasingly stressful on the part of the divorcees, their children and the society. According to National Centre for Health Statistics (2018), the divorce rate in United States has been steadily increasing during the past fifteen years and shows no sign of reduction.

In Nigeria as well as other parts of the globe, many divorced people remarry and about half of those who do are already parents (Eze, 2018). This, according to Avugu (2018) results in the creation of "blended families" also called "step families". For instance, in 2017, over 18% of all Nigerian children were living with one biological parent and one step parent (Eze, 2018). Estimates are that a fourth of Nigerian children will live with a step parent before reaching the age of sixteen (Obi, 2019). In the same vein, Nigeria in recent years has witnessed a high rate of divorce as a result of urbanization and industrialization (Adegoke, 2017). The periods triggered to a monetary industrial economy. Thus, the extended family that used to resolve conflicts or rather misunderstanding between couples was no longer functioning effectively like in the past (Mbiti, 2009; Olaniyi, 2015 & Obi, 2019).

It could be argued that, the most important factor in the increase in divorce throughout the twentieth century has been the greater social acceptance of divorce. In particular, this increased tolerance has resulted from relaxation of negative attitudes toward divorce among various religion denominations (Avugu, 2018). Although, divorce is still seen as unfortunate,

it is no longer treated as sin by most religious leaders (Gertel, 2007). Many states including Nigeria have adopted more liberal divorce laws in the last two decades. Divorcee has become a more practical option in newly formed families, since they now tend to have fewer children than in the past (Avugu, 2018). Divorcee is a divorced woman or woman who is separated from her husband (Olaniyi, 2015). It is a person or persons in a marriage union who has agreed to dissolve their union due to disagreement arising from the union (Eze, 2018). In this present study, divorcee is a woman who is separated from her husband. Adegoke (2017) observed that the search for employment by family members in the labour market or their inability to find work can be considered as a disruptive force in maintaining marital stability. It is also believed that as society provides greater opportunity for women, more and more wives are becoming less dependent on husbands economically and emotionally (Avugu, 2014). They feel more able to leave on their own if the marriage seems hopeless.

Divorcees need adjustment to enable them leave on their own if the marriage crash. Adjustment is an important factor that helps divorcees to be successful in any endeavour. Adjustment is a prerequisite for individuals understanding and stability (Zuri, 2013). Adjustment is the interaction between a person and his environment (Ritu, 2015). In this present study, adjustment is the application of the essential techniques by divorcees to triumph over marriage breakdown. This involves how divorcees live a healthy, social and emotionally balanced lifestyle.

Emotional adjustment is an important factor for divorcees to cope in the marriage breakdown. This is because; it helps individuals to be successful in their endeavors (Bryauh, 2018). Emotional adjustment is the maintenance of emotional equilibrium in the face of internal and external stressors (Zuiy, 2014). It is a psychological process which an individual acquire to cope with common symptoms like anxiety, anger, depression among others (Eze, 2018). Marriage breakdown ushers in anger, anxiety and depression, among others and needs urgent solution for divorcees to adjust. In this study, therefore, emotional adjustment is a psychological process that enables divorcees to cope with depression, anger and anxiety occasioned by marriage breakdown.

In other words, divorcees are equally affected socially when their marriage crash. Social adjustment as an important indication of psychological health is a topic attracting the attention of many experts. Social adjustment is an effort made by an individual to cope with standards, values and needs of society in order to be accepted (Bryauh, 2018). In this study, social adjustment is used to refer to an effort made by divorcees to cope with standards, values and needs of a society when their marriage breakdown.

Marriage breakdown has ushered the country into the novel period culminating into the largest disruption of society. In such situation, there is no stability and this could lead to maladjustment. Based on the above observation, the best option to adopt in the event of any crisis remains recourse to behavior modification. Different kinds of behavior modification techniques like reinforcement, aversive therapy, psychodrama, logotherapy among others have been used for intervention on maladjustment behavior among divorcees (Okeke, 2014; Anagbogu, 2016; Susswan, 2018).

However, Avugu (2018) has also suggested that psychological principles and the experiences of family counsellor and those who have worked with divorcees support the following techniques for helping divorcees and their children achieve a place in the society. These techniques include finding special skills, using family counsellors, training in skills

such as discussion, and group guidance. Besides, all the techniques are used in counselling approaches like cognitive restructuring technique (CRT), hence; the researchers sought to investigate the effect of CRT on social and emotional adjustment of divorcees.

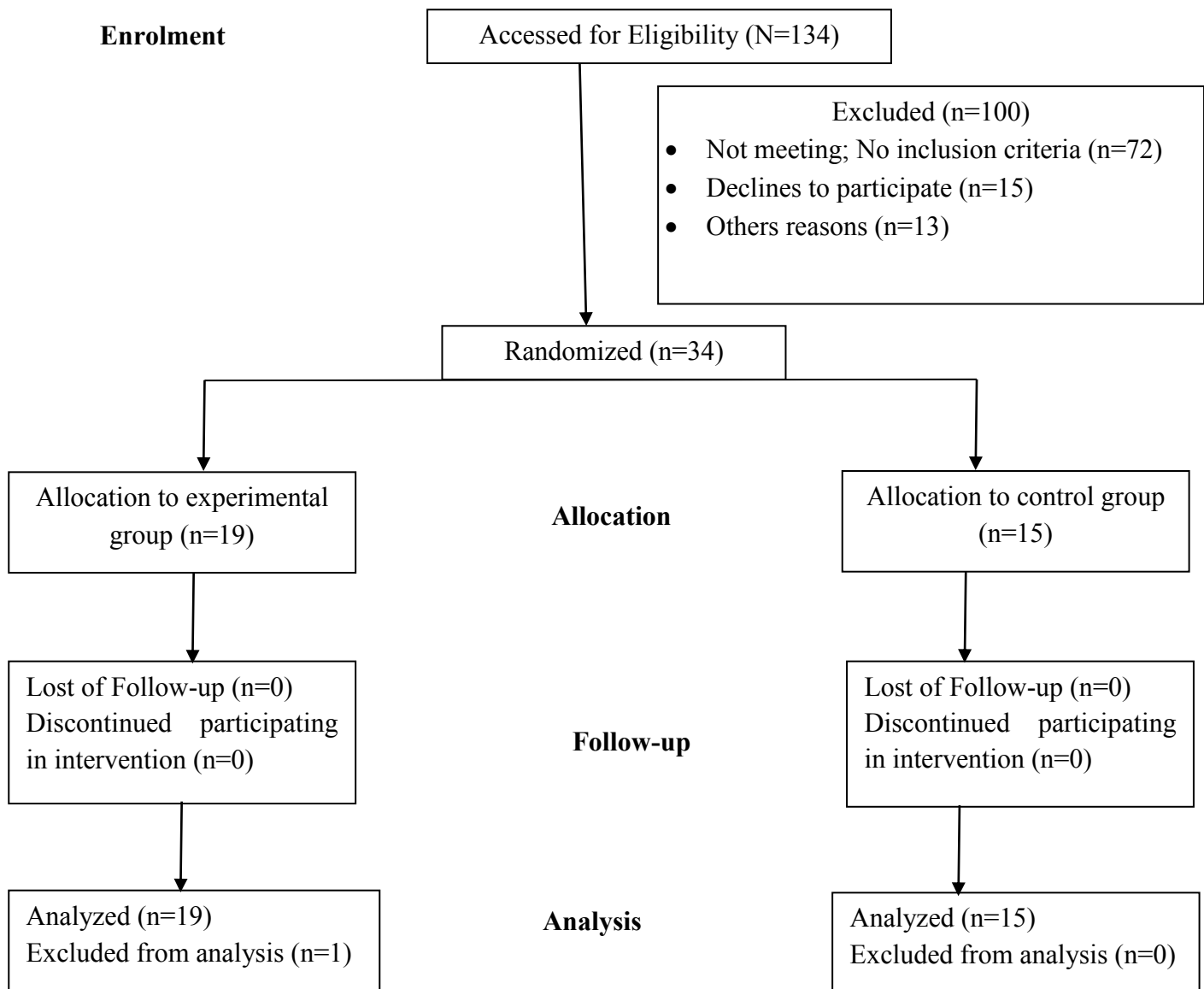
Cognitive restructuring technique (CRT) stated that couple divorce because of negative and unrealistic thoughts, and within this framework, CRT highlights the importance of replacing negative and unrealistic thoughts with realistic and positive thinking (Beck, 2011). Numerous experimental studies have focused on the management of divorcees (Enofa, 2017; Undaah, 2015). Lack of effective intervention programs has been emphasized in both local and international literature. However, experimental studies on managing divorcees are new and quite limited in developed countries which include Chad (Enofa, 2017).

Mostly, existing reproach focuses on organizing psycho-educational programs on the management of these behaviors, providing counseling and highlighting the need to create and increase awareness through seminars and conferences (Balkis & Duru, 2012; Kandemir, 2010; Ozer & Altun, 2016; Uzun, 2010). In Nigerian context, there is a dearth of empirical evidence on the effect of CRT on social and emotional adjustment of divorcees in Delta State, Nigeria. From the foregoing, this research was necessitated to investigate how to use CRT program in adjusting and overcoming the widespread of divorce among married couples, which remains vital as long as it continues to have negative consequences for these divorcees. In the CRT context, according to Ojaa (2019), practices in these groups aims to improve divorcees' basic skills at overcoming depression and anxiety and can be easily applied in their environment. Because divorce is connected to maladaptive behaviors such as nervousness, emotional instability, low self-efficacy, and negative thoughts, the use of cognitive restructuring technique (CRT) has been suggested as a remedy (Bkoyo, 2016). Andy (2015) and Linz (2010); Zing (2017) opined that in CRT, divorcees are taught to dispute their unrealistic and negative thoughts, develop goal, and develop a mindset that enables them to persist better in doing aversive task. Thus, this study assessed the effectiveness of a CRT-based program in the adjustment of divorcees socially and emotionally. The researchers, therefore, tested the hypothesis that there is a significant effect of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on the social and emotional adjustment of divorcees.

### **Methodology**

The pre-test-post-test randomized control trial experimental design was adopted. Subjects were randomized into experimental and control groups. A total of 34 divorcees comprising male (n=15) and female (n=19) from sampled registered divorced couples in Delta State, Nigeria who met the inclusion criteria constituted participants for the study. G-power, Version 3.1 gave 0.93 which is an adequate sample size for this study (Faul et al., 2007). Thirty Four registered divorced couples from customary court who were drawn through proportionate stratified random sampling technique constituted the sample for the study. These divorcees were stratified based on the high number of registered divorcees in (Uhali, Customary Court, Delta East, and Delta North) from where the divorcees were proportionately sampled (6 customary courts, 4 customary courts and 5 customary courts). A total of 134 divorcees showed interest and volunteered to participate in the intervention program. All the 134 divorcees volunteers participated in the study were screened for eligibility based on the eligibility criteria set by the researchers, including that: (1) the divorcees must be in the register of customary court, (2) divorcees must have an element of

depression and anxiety. Volunteers who did not meet all the inclusive criteria were excluded. After that, 34 divorcees who met all the inclusion criteria were randomly assigned to experimental and control group conditions using a simple randomization procedure (participants were asked to pick one envelope containing pressure-sensitive paper labeled with either E-experimental group or C-control group from a container). The divorcees were randomly assigned to experimental (19) and control (15) groups as shown in figure 1.



**Figure 1**

## Measures

### Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire was administered to the divorcees (participants) in order to obtain their demographic characteristics such as gender, age, location. Each of the participants was instructed to tick the appropriate demographic information that may be applicable to him or her.

Table 1 shows that there is a significant difference in the number of male and female divorcees who participated in the program. The same results apply to age, tribe and religion of the participants.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

Demographic Characteristics	CRT Group	No. Intervention	N(%)	X <sup>2</sup>	P
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	8	6	30(46.87)	4.51	.002
Female	11	9	33(52.12)		
<b>Age</b>					
30	6	4	10(15.42)	35.4	.000
30-50	13	11	51(78.56)		
>50	2	1	3(4.58)		
<b>Tribe</b>					
Igbo	12	11	34(51.21)	11.02	.000
Others	2	4	21(41.11)		
<b>Religion</b>					
Christian	15	13	20(11.21)	6.02	.000
Moslem	4	2	16(20.56)		

### Social Adjustment Assessment Scale for Divorcees (SAASD)

Social Adjustment Assessment Scale for Divorcees (SAASD) developed by the researchers was used for data collection. SAASD is a 22-items scale with five response options of Not AT All (1), Almost Never (2), Sometimes (3), Nearly Always (4), and Always (5), which was properly validated by three experts in the area of test development. Example of item statement on SAASD is “I relate well with others”. A minimum of 20 points and a maximum of 100 points can be earned on the scale, with higher scores indicating greater divorcees’ behavior. However, the initial development of the SAASD involved 30 items but after construct validation, the number of the items was reduced to 22. After that, the internal consistency reliability index of 0.88 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha method for the 22 items of SAASD that survived the construct validation. However, the test-re-test reliability of the SAASD was established to be 0.91 using Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation

Coefficient. This was done by re-administering the SAASD after the 2 weeks of first administration.

### **Social Adjustment Assessment Scale of Divorcees (SAASD)**

Social Adjustment Assessment Scale of Divorcees (SAASD) developed by the researchers is a 15-item scale with five response options of Not At All (1), Almost Never (2), Sometimes (3), Nearly Always (4), and Always (5) with lowest and highest scores of 10 and 50 respectively. Example of item statement on EAASD is “I love and accept others easily”. Besides, the initial development of the EAASD involved 20 items but after construct validation, the number of the items was reduced to 15. After that, the internal consistency reliability index of 0.82 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha method for the 15 items of EAASD that survived the construct validation. However, the test-re-test reliability of the EAASD was established to be 0.89 using Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. This was done by re-administering the EAASD after the 2 weeks of first administration.

### **Procedure**

A demographic questionnaire was administered to the eligible participants to access their age, gender, and location. In order to remove randomization bias, information from the demographic questionnaire were not made known to the person who randomized the participants to experimental and control conditions. Before the commencement of the testing and treatment package, the researchers assured the participants of confidentiality of interactions and personal information as they work together in self-disclosure. Thereafter, pre-treatment assessment (pre-test) was conducted using the SAASD and EAASD in order to collect baseline data (Time 1). After that, the experimental group was exposed to 90 minutes of the CRT program twice a week for period of 6 weeks. The treatment took place between September and November 2019. Post-test (Time 2) assessment was conducted 1 week after the last treatment session. However, a follow-up assessment was conducted after 2 months of the treatment (Time 3). Data collected from the experimental group at each evaluation were compared to that from the non-intervention control group.

### **Intervention Program**

The program that was used in this study was designed by Ncheke (2016) to improve the experimental group’s ability to analyze their divorce maladjustment and was based on Beck’s Cognitive Restructuring Technique (CRT). According to Linz (2016), Beck (2011) outline some fundamental principles of cognitive restructuring technique and these principles guided the development of six, 90 minutes group education sessions, a general plan for the whole process was prepared as well as specific plans for each session. The experimental program content focused on reframing negative and unrealistic thoughts related to divorcees’ behavior. During each of the treatment sessions, 30 minutes were spent on the reframing negative thoughts while the remaining 60 minutes were spent on the unrealistic thoughts and discussion sessions. In addition, based on the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions of divorcees, problem-solving, cognitive and behavioral techniques were used together. The

contents of the sessions were supported by purposive activities, visual materials (illustrations, diagrams, among others) and homework and other techniques.

Each session began with a summary of previous session (except for the first session, followed by discussing the homework, explaining the current session’s agenda, and warm-up activities. The sessions ended with summarizing, giving feedback and home work (except for the eight session), and a closing activity. The general outline of the sessions and brief information are provided below:

- To help divorcees become familiar with the basic logic of CRT-based psycho-educational program and determine their personal goals.
- To ensure that divorcees were informed about the cognitive restructuring technique approach.
- To assist divorcees in adjusting maladaptive behavior.
- To assist divorcees that whenever unpleasant and unfortunate activities/events occur in people’s live, they have a choice of making themselves feel healthily.
- To help divorcees learn that man’s unrealistic thought leads to his undesirable behavior.

The manual as adopted from Ncheke (2016) was written in English and can be accessed from [https://www.researchgate.net \(publication/edu.ng\)](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/edu.ng). Effects of cognitive restructuring and rational emotive behavioral therapy on social isolates behaviors of secondary school students.

## Data Analysis

The effect of cognitive restructuring technique on adjustment on social and emotional of divorcees in Delta State, Nigeria was established statistically using repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA), partial eta squared and adjusted R<sup>2</sup> values were used on the dependent measure. The assumption of the sphericity of the test statistics was tested using the Mauchly test of sphericity which was not significant (Mauchly W=0.768, P=.647), implying that the assumption was not violated. Thus, the variances of the differences between all combinations of the related measures are equal.

The analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 18.0

**Table 2: Repeated Analysis of Variance for the effect of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on Social Adjustment of Divorcees**

	Time	Measures	Group	Mean (SD)	F	P	N <sup>2</sup>	Δ R <sup>2</sup>	95%CI
1	Pre-treatment	SAASD	Experimental	82.10(5.22)					
			Control	78.12(4.05)	.123	.711	.004	.006	0.01,666
		EAASD	Experimental	32.44(10.3)	1352	.451	.006	.010	0.25,188
			Control	31.97(11.32)					
2	Pre-treatment	SAASD	Experimental	20.21(1.33)					
			Control	62.22(5.38)	676.132	.000	.421	.771	804.32,123.5
		EAASD	Experimental	14.28(2.43)	104.221	.000	.298	.621	100.25,120.2
			Control	31.20(5.42)					
3	Pre-	SAASD	Experimental	21.10(3.02)					



treatment							
EAASD	Control	61.10(8.21)	621.421	.000	.420	.770	.32,611.30
	Experimental	15.01(1.46)					
	Control	40.94(6.02)	120.123	.000	.625	.706	108.56,147.72

SAASD = Social Adjustment Assessment Scale for Divorcees

EAASD = Emotional Adjustment Assessment Scale for Divorcees

Mean = (SD), Mean = (Standard Deviation), P= Probability value, CI = confidence interval,

$n^2$  = effect size,  $\Delta R^2$  = adjusted  $R^2$

**Table 3: Test of within subjects effects for the intervention group**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F Sig.	Partial Eta Square
<b>Measure: EAA Time</b>					
Sphericity Assured	74.224	2	45.623	10.524.000	.670
Greenhouse-Geisser	74.224	1.951	4.642	10524.000	.670
Huguh-Feldt	74.224	2.000	45.623	10524.000	.670
Lower-bound	74.224	1.000	57.456	10524.000	.670
<b>Significant effect of time</b>					
<b>(I) Time</b>	<b>(J) Time</b>	<b>Mean difference (I-J)</b>		<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Pre-treatment	Post-treatment	52.550		.008	.000
	Follow-up	52.120		.007	.000
Post-treatment	Post-treatment	-52.551		.008	.000
	Follow-up	-.435		.008	.000
Follow-up	Post-treatment	-52.12		.007	.000
	Follow-up	.436		.008	.000

## Results

Table 2 revealed that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control group in initial divorcees by SAASD,  $F(1,33)=0.123$ ,  $P=.711$ ,  $R^2=.004$ ,  $\Delta R^2=.066$ . At the post treatment and follow-up measures, the efficacies of cognitive restructuring technique on the adjustment of social and emotional of divorcees were significant,  $F(1,33)=676.132$ ,  $P=.000$ ,  $n^2=.421$ ,  $\Delta R^2=.771$ . At the post-treatment and follow-up measures, the efficacies of cognitive restructuring technique on the social and emotional adjustment of divorcees,  $F(1,33)=104.231$ ,  $P=.000$ ,  $n^2=.298$ ,  $\Delta R^2=.621$ .

Similarly, using EAASD as a measure, there was no significant difference in the initial divorcees of the participants,  $F(1,33)=135$ ,  $P=.451$ ,  $n^2=.006$ ,  $\Delta R^2=.010$ . At the pos-treatment and follow-up measures, the efficiencies of cognitive restructuring technique on the social and

emotional adjustment of divorcees were significant,  $F(1,33)=421$ ,  $P=.000$ ,  $n^2=.420$ ,  $\Delta R^2=.770$  and  $F(1,33)=120$ ,  $P=.000$ ,  $n^2=.625$ ,  $\Delta R^2=.706$ .

Table 3 reveals that the mean adjustment scales of divorcees of the intervention group were significantly different at pre-treatment, post-treatment and follow-up measures,  $F(2,18)=45.623$ ,  $P=0.05$ ,  $n^2=.670$ .

Table 4 gives us the significance level for differences between the individual time points. It shows that there were significant differences in divorcees behaviors between post-treatment and pre-treatment ( $p=0.000$ ), and between pre-treatment and follow-up ( $p=0.000$ ). This implies that the divorcee's behaviors drastically adjusted after the intervention program.

## **Discussion of the Results**

The findings of the study revealed that at the post-treatment and follow-up measures, the efficacy of cognitive restructuring technique on the social and emotional adjustment of divorcees was significant. This finding has shown the superiority nature of the CRT over the conventional counselling approach in the adjustment of maladaptive behaviors among divorcees. The divorcees who were counselled on the dangers of maladaptive behavior using CRT were optimally motivated during the intervention sessions and that led to the drastic adjustment in their maladaptive behaviors after the intervention and even at the follow-up measure. This finding is similar to the findings of Bkoyo (2016) whose empirical finding indicated that CRT is a remedy for maladaptive behavior such as nervousness, emotional instability, low self-efficacy among others. Supporting these findings are the findings of Alidy (2015); Linz (2010); Zing (2017). According to Beck (2011), couple divorce because of negative and unrealistic thoughts. Researchers have focused on the cognitive restructuring technique to address the maladjustment behaviors (Enofa, 2017; Undaah, 2015; Umah, 2015). Some researchers have focused on organizing psycho-educational program on the management of maladaptive behavior (Balkis & Duru, 2012; Kandemir, 2010; Ozer & Altun, 2011; Uzun, 2010).

The above findings validated the efficacy of the CRT intervention for adjusting divorcees socially and emotionally in Delta State, Nigeria. The implication of these findings is that if divorcees are not properly counselled, thus maladjustment behaviors will continue to increase. Like other empirical-based studies, this present study has some limitations. Firstly, the researchers did not give treatment to the participants in waitlisted control group immediately. Secondly, we did not take account of the clinical and psychological characteristics of the participants. Thirdly, we did not target a specific disorder associated with divorcees' maladaptive behavior during the intervention. These may have affected the outcome of the study. Consequently, the generalization of the findings should be done with care. However, future studies should target a more specific clinical condition caused by divorcees' behavior.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that CRT is efficacious in the social and emotional adjustment of divorcees. Based on the conclusion, it is therefore expedient that family counsellors should be properly trained on how to use CRT in adjusting

divorcees socially and emotionally. It is also relevant that Federal Government should provide enough family counsellors who will assist in the counselling of the divorcees on the dangers of maladaptive behaviors using CRT.

- **Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. The authors adhered to the ethical standard specification of the American Psychological Association (APA) 2017) and that of the World Medical Association (2013).

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