

# Effect of Cognitive Restructuring and Psycho-Educational Therapies in Fostering Marital Harmony among Couples in Domestically Abused Marriages in South-South Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study investigated the effect of cognitive restructuring and psycho-educational therapies in fostering marital harmony among couples in domestically abused marriages in South-South Nigeria, with marital efficacy and trust as moderating variables. A pre-test, post-test control group quasi-experimental design was adopted for this study, with 81 (eighty-one) couples as participants. The result indicates that the expressed marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages in the experimental groups (cognitive restructuring training and Psycho-Educational training groups) improved positively after training, unlike those in the control group. Cognitive restructuring had the highest adjustment impact on marital harmony, followed by Psycho-Educational therapy. A significant moderating effect of marital efficacy was observed on participants' marital harmony. It was recommended that counsellors should expose couples experiencing domestic abuse to therapeutic interventions applying cognitive restructuring and psycho-educational training techniques.

**Keywords:** cognitive restructuring, couples, domestically abused marriages, marital harmony, psycho-educational therapies

## 1. Introduction

A harmonious marital relationship serves as an essential catalyst for growth, celebration of love, happiness and mutual companionship between couples. Harmony in marriage is a powerful dynamic that helps couples unite their strengths to overcome life's challenges, support each other unconditionally, and commit to being happy and content in their marriage. Thus, the experience of marital harmony is undeniably vital in marriages, as it enhances positive marital cohesion, a critical component of a stable and prosperous family relationship. However, this seems to be a mirage for some couples that have consistently been experiencing a toxic marital relationship that has ignited frustration, distrust, disappointment, animosity, persistent marital domestic abuse and violence injurious to their developmental well-being in all ramifications (Smith, 2023).

Observably, in recent times, domestic abuses in marriages are gradually becoming a recurring incident and a common phenomenon in Nigeria, as domestic violence, mostly against married women in Nigeria, is often accepted culturally as a way of disciplining women by their husbands, either when they express negative dispositions or at the slightest provocation. Unfortunately, the culturally biased domestic violence measure of controlling behaviour in a coercive manner via beating, kicking, slapping, emotional assault, financial deprivation, etc, is often life-threatening and in some situations has led to deaths of some women who are entangled in a domestic violent marital relationship in Nigeria. For example, Kelani (2023) report revealed that the rate of wife battering in Nigeria is becoming disgusting and a national embarrassment, as 2,543 cases of violent domestic abuse against married women by their husbands were reported at Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (DSVA) between January and September 2022, out of which 47 women died at the hands of their husbands. Also, Mrs Osinachi, a popular Christian gospel artist in Nigeria who sang the multiple award-winning song "Ekwueme," was murdered by her husband in Abuja via consistently prolonged violent domestic marital abuse in April 2022. Also, in 2023, Fadinatu, a 38-year-old housewife, was beaten to death by

her husband in Yola South Local Government Area in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. Likewise, in Benin City, the same year, Osaretin, a 23-year-old pregnant housewife, had her throat slit with a knife by her husband due to domestic violence (Kelani, 2023). This development is quite terrifying, as it occurs across Nigeria.

In Nigeria as the real number of married women who have died from the abuse of their husbands due to domestic violence in their marriage remains unknown mainly because most married women who are victims of domestic marital abuse are often reluctant to report their experiences due to fear of cultural and societal stigmatization and records indicates that hardly issues of domestic marital abuse is not in news every week in Nigeria (Oguntola & Ibeh, 2022). Still green in the memory of most Nigerians is the arrest of Idibie David in Ajah, Lagos State, for beating his wife, Juliana Idibie, to death in 2022. Likewise, a mother of seven, Anulika Uguru, died in April 2022 in Ebonyi State due to extreme physical domestic violence by her husband, just to mention a few incidents out of the lots (Oguntola & Ibeh, 2022). Thus, the persistent, unabated surge in the number of domestic marital abuse incidents against women is the focus of this study.

Sexual coercion and assault are frequently part of the dynamics of a violent relationship (Klein et al, 2021). Family and domestic violence are estimated to affect 100 million people globally every year, and this makes it a global public health problem. Virtually all healthcare professionals will at some point evaluate or treat a patient who is a victim of some form of domestic or family violence (Gao et al, 2021), because it causes diminished psychological and physical health, decreases the quality of life, and results in decreased productivity (Gao et al, 2021; Klein et al, 2021).

Among married couples, the occasional occurrence of negative thoughts often has devastating, self-defeating, and destructive effects on their relationships and overall well-being. However, when this happens, counselling psychologists and associated mental health practitioners can help reframe the mindset of affected couples through the practical application of cognitive restructuring principles. Positively reorienting the thinking patterns of distressed individuals toward the reality of life, thereby facilitating a healthier lifestyle, is a crucial component of cognitive restructuring therapy (Stanborough, 2023). Cognitive restructuring is a therapeutic technique that has been used to help maladjusted and domestically violent marital couples experiencing cognitive distortions that have created a distorted view of their marital companionship and harmonious relationship, leading to relationship problems, self-verbalising negative behaviour, anxiety and depression, and become conscious of their inadequacies and positively change their negative maladaptive thinking patterns (Stanborough, 2023).

According to Rojin and Özlem (2021), the cognitive restructuring technique is recognised as highly effective in the treatment of a wide range of psycho-emotional and socio-relationship problems within psychotherapy because its use involves the systematic examination of an individual's assumptions, beliefs, and distortions arising from unrealistic automatic thoughts. The use of Cognitive restructuring technique is often characterized by the application of problem-solving skills that would help domestically abused married couples in distressed marriages develop the capacity to fight against their negative attitudes toward their marital challenges and improve their interpersonal relationships by utilizing their problem-solving ability and consequently, help promote and maintain good physical, mental and emotional feelings between the couples (Shayan et al, 2018). Cognitive restructuring therapeutic technique is found to help domestic violent husbands and wives become humbler by doing a modest rehearsal of the mind, avoiding adverse outcomes, examining their mental understandings and emotional dispositions towards each other in a more positive manner (Jaberi et al, 2015).

Psycho-educational training is a pragmatic, well-defined process that provides relevant information, resources, coping skills, and knowledge to help people address challenges related to their developmental well-being. The application of psycho-educational therapeutic training techniques empowers people with adequate knowledge and capacity to improve the mental health outcomes of individuals with challenges, reduce stigma, and increase their self-awareness of their ability to manage their situations (Sarkhel, Singh, & Arora, 2020). Psycho-educational training has a substantial and far-reaching impact on an individual's mental well-being and is an essential part of mental health care (Latifian et al., 2023).

Psycho-educational techniques are found to be a creative problem-solving method effective in enhancing the coping capabilities of couples in emotionally distressed marriages, as they help them find effective and appropriate adaptive solutions to their daily marital problems ((Ghamari, 2011; Abad, Vaghee, & Aemmi, 2021). Evidence affirmed that the use of psycho-educational training technique interventions to address issues of domestic abuse in marriages is beneficial in increasing the abilities of couples to navigate and manage their daily stressors of life following abuse (Trabold, McMahon, Alsobrooks, Whitney & Mittal, 2020). Also, the findings of a systematic review established that psycho-educational training interventions focused on some strategies, such as problem-solving, that lead to decreases in domestic marital abuse and enhance the capacity to improve physical and mental health and quality of life of couples who experienced violence (Abad et al., 2021; Soltanifar, Moharari, Rajai & Salimi, 2019). Psycho-educational training

intervention programmes effectively increase domestically abused couples' marital adjustment, values and their level of social support towards spousal concerns (Abdullah & Murat, 2015). Okoiye, Anyanwu and Agbajor (2025) found that counselling services are beneficial in marital relationships.

Marital efficacy is a vital catalyst that enhances marital harmony and the positive well-being of married couples. Couples that express firm marital-efficacy beliefs report intense feelings of harmony and stability (Jaleel & Chandola, 2023). Marital efficacy is hypothesised as a couple's capacity to carry out specified relationship actions in order to attain marital harmony (Jaleel & Chandola, 2023). It is the ability of married couples to take the initiative to create a comfortable, accommodating home. It can also be expressed as couples' ability to act in a specific manner to fulfil responsibilities that foster family intimacy and harmony (Etele, Ejimchukwu, & Ifeanyi, 2021). Marital efficacy refers to a married person's cognitions about their ability to exhibit behaviours necessary to make their marriage functional and fruitful. Additionally, marital efficacy is conceptualised as married people's confidence in their ability to positively manage relationship crises, resolve conflicts, initiate resourceful communication with their partners, provide support and nurturance, control feelings of hurt and anger, and sustain feelings of joy and happiness (Anyamene & Etele, 2020). It has been established that for couples in a marital union, expressed marital efficacy has consistently been associated with improved mental and physical health, as well as overall satisfaction with their marital life experience (Anyamene & Etele, 2020).

Marital efficacy fosters a strong belief in their ability to improve the quality of their marriage through effective marital relationship skills (Arzeen, Arzeen, & Mohammed, 2023). According to Bandura, couples who possess a strong sense of marital efficacy can manage the multiple demands of family life and experience a positive sense of well-being (Bandura, 1997). A study of 250 married couples revealed a significant correlation among marital efficacy, social adjustment, and harmony (Sarpoulaki & Kolahi, 2016). Marital efficacy is a vital factor that positively stimulates and makes married life functional. Marital efficacy in marriage impacts the quality of the relationship (Sarpoulaki & Kolahi, 2016). The study by Erus and Canel (2016) reported that married couples' problem-solving skills predict their level of marital efficacy. This indicates that marital efficacy is a critical factor in marriage. For a fruitful and healthy marital life experience, couples should express a high level of marital efficacy.

Trust is a vital element in all forms of human social interaction. It is essentially an evolving asset that drives interaction among at least two individuals, each of whom trusts the other in a reciprocal manner established through communication. Ideally, trust represents the affective and cognitive states of people involved in relationships. Trust is an essential aspect of the conscious experience of both the trustor (a person who trusts) and the trustee (the person who is trusted) (Maehigashi et al., 2022; Splegelhalter, 2020). Trust in a marital relationship provides the security couples need to hold fast to each other. It serves as the foundation of harmony, enabling couples to experience psychological, socio-emotional, and emotional safety. Established marital trust opens the heart to a deeper connection and motivates couples to overcome the challenges they face (Mandrekar, 2025).

Trust plays a dynamic role in fostering marital harmony, as the level of trust couples express influences their decision-making and commitment to sustaining their marriage. Trust enables couples to experience a sense of belonging, security, and a desire to be committed (Dessyrianti & Setiawan, 2023). Studies found that trust facilitates positive communication, increases marital bond, intimacy, marital satisfaction, stability and harmony (Asif & Saim, 2018; Dessyrianti & Setiawan, 2023). Without trust in a marital relationship, married couples are quick to be suspicious of each other's dispositions and socio-personal countenances (Asif & Saim, 2018; Dessyrianti & Setiawan, 2023). Trust, intimacy, marital satisfaction, and stability are substantial and positive signs of harmony among married couples (Shah, Ahmad, Zia, & Ali, 2021). Watore and Matsagar (2023) established a significant positive correlation between trust, marital adjustment and harmony. Married couples' ability to experience closeness and relatedness with one another, to maintain marital harmony, and to eliminate psychological barriers to share their private feelings and thoughts is a significant characteristic of trust (Makhdoom & Malik, 2019). The rock-solid pillars of marriage often become unstable when marital trust, an intensely emotional experience, is undercut, and enthusiasm for problem-solving and overcoming doubts, anxieties, and obstacles deteriorates. According to the same research, the unions of highly trusting couples exhibit more outward displays of affection, lower levels of conflict and greater marital commitment (Makhdoom & Malik, 2019). Trust Institute Foundation for a fulfilling, healthy and fruitful relationship and a sure way to attain marital satisfaction and harmony (Peace, 2023).

### *1.1 Research Questions*

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance in this study:

1. There is no significant main effect of treatment on marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages in South-South Nigeria.
2. There is no significant main effect of marital efficacy on marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused

marriages in South-South Nigeria.

3. There is no significant main effect of trust on marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages in South-South Nigeria.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participant (Subject) Characteristics

The participants for this study are 81 (eighty-one) couples in domestically abused marriages in South-South Nigeria, trying to seek divorce in the Customary Court, whose cases are adjourned and given leverage of time to go back home for family settlement and compromise. These couples are given four months to work out a peaceful resolution and mend fences of discord. They were purposively selected from fifteen randomly selected Customary Courts in fifteen Local Government Areas within three randomly selected states (Edo, Delta, and Rivers States) in South-South Nigeria.

### 2.2 Instrument

The following instruments were used in the study.

**Marital Harmony Scale**, this scale was developed by the researchers to measure couples in domestically abused marriages expressed level of harmony in their marriage. It has 10 items on a 5-point scale. The response structure includes "Never" to "Always", with a potential score range of 10 to 50. It includes items such as: I communicate easily with my spouse; I always appreciate my spouse's presence at home; we discuss issues as a family, etc. Higher scores indicate a high level of marital harmony. It has a Coefficient (Cronbach's)  $\alpha$  of .82.

**Marital-Efficacy Scale**, this scale was developed by the researchers to measure the level of marital efficacy expressed by couples in domestically abusive marriages. It has 10 items on a 4-point scale. The response pattern ranges from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with a potential score range of 10 to 40. It has items such as: I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems that arise in my marriage; I am able to do the things needed to resolve our conflicts; I have little control over the conflicts that occur between my partner and I, etc. Higher scores indicate high level of marital-efficacy. It has a Coefficient (Cronbach's)  $\alpha$  of .86.

**Marital-Trust Scale**, this scale was developed by researchers to measure the level of marital trust expressed by couples in domestically abusive marriages. It has 10 items on a 4-point Likert scale. The response pattern ranges from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with a potential score range of 10 to 40. It includes items such as: "I feel safe and protected in my marriage"; "I rely on my spouse's words"; "I hold my spouse in high esteem," etc. Higher scores indicate a high level of marital efficacy. It has a Coefficient (Cronbach's)  $\alpha$  of .78.

### 2.3 Instrument Validity

Instruments underwent validation with the processes of face and content validity. To ascertain accuracy, the instrument was given to measurement and evaluation experts. Their critique focused on the challenges, relevance, importance, and adequacy of the instrument's language in relation to the study objectives. Their feedback was used to revise the instruments.

### 2.4 Procedure

The researchers obtained permission from the designated authorities and the clients involved to conduct this study. Participants were given adequate orientation to the essence of the study, and, through this measure, the researchers obtained their consent. Participants in Edo and Delta states were used as treatment groups, and those in Rivers State as the control group. Domestically abused couples in the two treatment groups were exposed to an 8-week treatment training programme, and those in the control group were not exposed to any form of training. All groups received pre- and post-treatment assessments.

### 2.5 Study Design

A pre-test, post-test control group quasi-experimental design of a 3x2x2 factorial matrix was adopted for this study. This design consists of three rows, representing the two therapeutic treatment techniques (cognitive restructuring and psycho-educational training) and the Control Group (non-treatment group). There are also two columns denoting the levels of marital-efficacy and distrust of couples in domestically abused marriages in South-South Nigeria, signifying high and low among participants. The therapeutic treatments are coded as follows: Cognitive Restructuring Training (A1), Psycho-Educational Training (A2), and the Control Group (A3). These constitute the rows of the treatment design, and the columns represent the level of marital efficacy and trust expressed by the participants (high/low). The participants with high marital-efficacy are represented by B1 and low marital-efficacy are represented by B2. Also, C1 represents participants with a high level of trust, and C2 represents those with a low level. This is highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1. 3x2x2 Factorial Matrix Quasi-Experimental Design for treatment

Treatment	MARITAL HARMONY				
	Marital Efficacy		Trust		Total
	High	Low	High	Low	
A1 Cognitive Restructuring	A1 B1n=04	A1 B2n=09	A1 C1n=03	A1C2n=11	n=27
A2 Psycho-Educational Training	A2 B1n=03	A2 B2n=12	A2 C1n=04	A2 C2n=08	n=27
A3 Control Group	A3 B1n=03	A3 B2n=13	A3 C1n=04	A3 C2n=07	n=27
<b>Total</b>	<b>n=10</b>	<b>n=34</b>	<b>n=11</b>	<b>n=26</b>	<b>N=81</b>

### 2.6 Data Analysis

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used as the statistical tool for the study to compare the differential effectiveness of the treatments. To determine the direction of the difference and to assess the amount of variation due to each independent variable, a Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) was conducted.

## 3. Results

### Hypothesis One

There is no significant main effect of treatment on marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages.

Table 2. Summary of Analysis of Covariance of marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Remark
Covariates	2762.161	1	2762.161	90.604	.000	
Main effects	3226.012	4	806.503	26.455	.000	
Treatment Groups	3141.116	2	1570.558	51.517	.000	Sig.
Marital-Efficacy	188.109	1	188.109	6.170	.003	Sig.
Trust	191.062	1	191.062	6.267	.003	Sig.
3-ways Interactions	171.112	3	57.037	1.871	.614	
Trust Groups x Marital-Efficacy x Trust	54.168	3	18.056	.592	.127	n.s.
Explained	5046.481	11	458.771	15.049	.000	
Residual	2103.505	69	30.486			
Total	7149.986	80	89.375			

The result in table 2 showed that there was significant main effect of treatment in the pre-test/post-test marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages in the experimental and control groups ( $F(3,78) = 51.517, p < .01$ ). This indicates that couples in domestically abused marriages in the experimental groups benefited from the treatment package as they were able to manage their marital challenges and improve their marital harmony experience than couples in domestically abused marriages in the control group that were not exposed to any treatment package. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected. To determine the magnitude of the group's mean scores, Table 3 is presented.

Table 3. Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) on marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages

Variable + Category	N	Unadjusted variation	Eta	Adjusted for independent + covariates deviation	Beta
Grand Mean = 25.21					
Treatment Groups:					
Cognitive Restructuring Training	27	4.84		3.19	
Psycho-Educational Training	27	3.55		2.05	
Control	27	-3.91		-4.19	
			.73		.76
Marital Efficacy:					
High	10	.58		.64	
Low	34	.47		.57	
			.61		.18
Trust:					
High	26	.66		.45	
Low	11	.55		.31	
			.49		
Multiple R-squared					.628
Multiple R					.743

The MCA, as observed in Table 3, shows that couples in domestically abused marriages in the cognitive restructuring training group had the highest adjusted marital harmony posttest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 30.05$ ), followed by the psycho-educational training group with the adjusted mean score ( $\bar{x} = 28.76$ ) and those in the control group had the least adjusted marital harmony posttest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 21.30$ ). Therefore, the result indicates that cognitive restructuring and psycho-educational therapies were effective in fostering marital harmony among couples in domestically abused marriages. It further revealed the differential values of the pre- and post-treatment outcomes and the effectiveness of the treatment package compared to the control (i.e., non-treatment group). These values were obtained by adding the grand mean ( $\bar{x} = 25.21$ ) to the respective adjusted deviation. The table also indicated that treatment accounted for as much as 63 per cent (MR2 0.63) of the variance of couples in domestically abused marriages' marital harmony scores. In comparison, the remaining 37 per cent is due to other unexpected sampling errors.

### Hypothesis Two

There is no significant main effect of marital-efficacy on marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 4. Summary of Analysis of Covariance of the effect of marital efficacy on marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Remark
Covariates	2762.161	1	2762.161	90.604	.000	
Main effects	3226.012	4	806.503	26.455	.000	
Treatment Groups	3141.116	2	1570.558	51.517	.000	Sig.
Marital-Efficacy	188.109	1	188.109	6.170	.003	Sig.
Trust	191.062	1	191.062	6.267	.003	Sig.
3-ways Interactions	171.112	3	57.037	1.871	.614	
Trt Groups x Marital-Efficacy x Trust	54.168	3	18.056	.592	.127	n.s.
Explained	5046.481	11	458.771	15.049	.000	
Residual	2103.505	69	30.486			
Total	7149.986	80	89.375			

Table 4 shows that there was a significant main moderating effect of marital-efficacy on marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages in the pretest-posttest marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages between high and low Marital-Efficacy ( $F(2,79) = 6.170$ ,  $P < .05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The MCA table 3 showed that the mean score for the high Marital-Efficacy group is ( $\bar{x} = 25.79$ , while that of the low marital-efficacy group is ( $\bar{x} = 25.68$ ). This shows that the high marital-efficacy group had a higher post-test marital harmony mean score than the low marital-efficacy group. this is achieved by adding the grand mean to the unadjusted variation figures for high and low marital efficacy.

### Hypothesis Three

There is no significant main effect of trust on marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages in South-South Nigeria.

Table 5. Summary of Analysis of Covariance of the effect of trust on marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Remark
Covariates	2762.161	1	2762.161	90.604	.000	
Main effects	3226.012	4	806.503	26.455	.000	
Treatment Groups	3141.116	2	1570.558	51.517	.000	Sig.
Marital-Efficacy	188.109	1	188.109	6.170	.003	Sig.
Trust	191.062	1	191.062	6.267	.003	Sig.
3-ways Interactions	171.112	3	57.037	1.871	.614	
Trt Groups x Marital-Efficacy x Trust	54.168	3	18.056	.592	.127	n.s.
Explained	5046.481	11	458.771	15.049	.000	
Residual	2103.505	69	30.486			
Total	7149.986	80	89.375			

Table 5 shows that there was a significant main moderating effect of trust on marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages in the pre-post marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages between high and low levels of expressed trust ( $F(2,79) = 6.267$ ,  $P < .05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The MCA table 3 showed that

the mean score for the high-level trust group is ( $\bar{x} = 25.87$ ), while that of the low-level trust group is ( $\bar{x} = 25.76$ ). This shows that the high-level trust group had a higher post-test marital harmony mean score than the low-level trust group. This is attained by adding the grand mean to the unadjusted variation figure of the high and low levels of expressed trust.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of the first hypotheses revealed in Table 3 indicates that there was significant main effect of treatment in the pre-test/post-test marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages in the experimental and control groups ( $F(3,78) = 51.517, p < .01$ ). This implies that the treatment programme significantly affected the mean posttest marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages exposed to treatment. This indicates that couples in domestically abused marriages in the experimental groups benefited from the treatment package as they were able to manage their marital challenges and improve their marital harmony experience than couples in domestically abused marriages in the control group that were not exposed to any treatment package. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected. Furthermore, the MCA as observed in Table 3 shows that couples in domestically abused marriages in the cognitive restructuring training group had the highest adjusted marital harmony posttest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 30.05$ ), followed by the Psycho-Educational training group with the adjusted mean score ( $\bar{x} = 28.76$ ) and those in Control group had the least adjusted marital harmony posttest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 21.30$ ). Therefore, the result indicates that the expressed marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages in the experimental groups (cognitive restructuring training and Psycho-Educational training groups) improved positively after training, unlike those in the control group who were not exposed to any therapeutic training programme. This shows that cognitive restructuring and psycho-educational therapies were effective in fostering marital harmony among couples in domestically abused marriages. This development can be hinged on the fact that couples in domestically abused marriages exposed to therapeutic treatment programmes realised that a harmonious marital relationship serves as an essential catalyst for growth, celebration of love, happiness and mutual companionship between couples. Therefore, having a harmonious marital relationship became a top priority for them. According to Rojin and Özlem (2021), the cognitive restructuring technique is recognised as highly effective in the treatment of a wide range of psycho-emotional and socio-relationship problems within psychotherapy because its use involves the systematic study of an individual's assumptions, beliefs and distortions created by unrealistic automatic thoughts. These are eventually reorganised with functional, logical, and realistic thoughts, emotions and behaviours leading to positive change in attitudinal and behavioural dispositions towards life challenges (Rojin & Özlem, 2021). Positively reorienting the thinking patterns of distressed individuals to the reality of life, thereby enabling them to live a healthier life, is an essential component of the cognitive restructuring therapeutic technique (Stanborough, 2023). Also, Psycho-educational training has been shown to improve mental health treatment outcomes. It provides the information and tools needed by people to deal with challenging situations (Sarkhel et al., 2020). Psycho-educational training has a substantial and far-reaching impact on an individual's mental well-being and is an essential part of mental health care (Latifian et al., 2023). Psycho-educational training therapies are found to be effective in reducing all constituents of marital conflict and fostering marital harmony among couples in domestically abused marriages (Ghamari, 2011).

The result of the second hypothesis shows that there was a significant main moderating effect of marital-efficacy on marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages in the pretest-posttest marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages between high and low Marital-Efficacy ( $F(2,79) = 6.170, P < .05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The MCA table 3 showed that the mean score for the high Marital-Efficacy group is ( $\bar{x} = 25.79$ ) while that of the low Marital-Efficacy group is ( $\bar{x} = 25.68$ ). This shows that the high Marital-Efficacy group had a higher post-test marital harmony mean score than the low Marital-Efficacy group. This is achieved by adding the grand mean to the unadjusted variation figures for high and low marital efficacy. This is consistent with the fact that marital efficacy is a vital catalyst that enhances marital harmony and the positive well-being of married couples. Couples that express high marital-efficacy beliefs report intense feelings of harmony and stability (Jaleel & Chandola, 2023). Marital efficacy is hypothesised as a couple's capacity to carry out specified relationship actions in order to attain marital harmony (Jaleel & Chandola, 2023). Marital efficacy increases couples' motivation and optimism to solve daily marital communication problems and fosters a strong belief in their ability to improve the quality of their marriage through effective marital relationship skills (Arzeen, Arzeen, & Mohammed, 2023). According to Bandura, couples who possess a strong sense of marital efficacy can manage the multiple demands of family life and experience a positive sense of well-being (Bandura, 1997).

Furthermore, the result of the second hypothesis shows that there was a significant main moderating effect of trust on marital harmony of couples in domestically abused marriages in the pre-post marital harmony scores of couples in domestically abused marriages between high and low levels of expressed trust ( $F(2,79) = 6.267, P < .05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The MCA table 3 showed that the mean score for the high-level trust group is ( $\bar{x} = 25.87$ ) while that of the low-level trust group is ( $\bar{x} = 25.76$ ). This shows that the high-level trust group had a higher post-test marital harmony mean score than the low-level trust group. This development corroborates the assertions of Mandrekar

(2025) that trust in a marital relationship provides the security couples need to hold firm in each other. Trust is a treasured asset in every marital relationship. Trust serves as the foundation of harmony in marriages, as it enables couples to experience psychological, socio-emotional, and emotional safety (Mandrekar, 2025). Established marital trust opens the heart to a deeper marital connection and provides couples with the motivation to overcome the challenges they face (Mandrekar, 2025). The presence of trust serves as a significant pillar for a successful marriage, as it strongly influences marital relationships at both practical, social, emotional, and economic levels (Mandrekar, 2025). Trust plays a dynamic role in fostering marital harmony, as the level of trust couples express influences their decision-making and commitment to sustaining their marriage (Dessyrianti & Setiawan, 2023). Trust enables couples to experience a sense of belonging, security, and a desire to be committed (Dessyrianti & Setiawan, 2023). Studies found that trust facilitates positive communication, increases marital bond, intimacy, marital satisfaction, stability and harmony (Asif & Saim, 2018; Dessyrianti & Setiawan, 2023).

#### *4.1 Conclusion*

The complexities involved in marital relationships can make it challenging for some couples to live in harmony. However, they can be helped to overcome this negative experience through exposure to therapeutic interventions applying cognitive restructuring and psycho-educational training techniques.

#### *4.2 Recommendations*

The researchers developed recommendations through their study analysis.

1. Counsellors should organise pre-marital counselling programmes for intending couples as a proactive measure to forestall marital challenges.
2. Married couples experiencing marital abuse should not be labelled or stigmatised as failures or irresponsible. However, they should be encouraged and supported positively to overcome their marital challenges and achieve a functional marriage.
3. Counselling/psychological intervention programmes such as cognitive restructuring and psycho-educational training should be put in place to help couples in domestically abused marriages to self-rediscover their potentials, abilities and capabilities to resolve conflict peacefully and live in harmony.
4. Married couples should endeavour to build trust as a measure to live in a happy, supportive and committed marriage.

#### *4.3 Study Limitations*

This study is subject to several limitations. The study sample of eighty-nine (81) couples in domestically abused marriages in South-South Nigeria does not sufficiently represent all couples in Nigeria. The treatment of two therapeutic techniques was also limited, just to ensure smooth administration of the study. It is believed that applying more treatment techniques might lead to a better generalisation of the study's results. Thus, an extension study with a larger sample size is suggested. Furthermore, the collected data were from South-South, Nigeria, excluding Northern, Western and Eastern Nigeria, which may limit the external validity of the study findings. None of these may allow for broader generalisation of the findings of this study.

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#### **Competing interests**

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#### **Informed consent**

Obtained.

#### **Ethics approval**

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#### **Provenance and peer review**



Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

### Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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