
**CHILD ABUSE: A NARRATIVE REVIEW ON RATIONAL EMOTIVE
BEHAVIOUR THERAPY (REBT) AS AN EFFECTIVE SOCIAL WORK
INTERVENTION**

***¹Ms Lakshmi Prabha S, ²Dr Sathyamurti K**¹2nd year MSW (M&P), Madras School of Social Work.²Associate Professor, Madras School of Social Work.

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***Corresponding Author: Ms Lakshmi Prabha S**

2nd year MSW (M&P), Madras School of Social Work.

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.7819>**ABSTRACT**

Child abuse is a major issue which causes multiple problems to children. The dimensions of the problem could range from physical deformities to psychological trauma. It's effects not only affect body, but predominantly affects mind. Due to the past horrible experiences which children have encountered, will lead to the development of several psychological issues in them such as anxiety, depression, phobias, and even it may lead to other major or minor psychiatric disorders. Social work discipline plays a major role here. The therapeutic interventions given by social work professionals plays significant role here. Predominantly Behavioural and cognitive behavioural therapies have gained much prominence among various therapies for their effectiveness. One such major therapeutic intervention is REBT (Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy) which is, well known for its effectiveness in changing irrational beliefs to rational ones. The study aims to review the existing papers on REBT as an effective therapeutic intervention in case of children who are affected with abuse. The study adopts a narrative review design which includes the secondary data sources such as journals, research papers, books, newspapers and reports. The findings from the data has highlighted the relevance of REBT in addressing the psychological trauma of the children who are the victims of child abuse through challenging distorted cognitions, irrational beliefs and develop a healthier coping mechanisms. The review also found that there are only limited studies available in Indian context, indicating an important research gap which could be used for further researches.

KEYWORDS: Child abuse, REBT, Therapeutic interventions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Childhood is supposed to be the most memorable phase in an individual's life. It must be filled with joys and good memories. There are many children who are denied of that. They have encountered various atrocities from other individuals which may physically or psychologically affects them. These atrocities towards children can be termed as "child abuse". Child abuse is any harm or neglect of a child by another individual irrespective of the age of the abuser. The seriousness of the abuse may even extend to death of the child. Child abuse thus is a serious threat to the life of children which needs to be addressed significantly. The predominant area the issue could affect is the psychological health of the victim. Psychological health of a child plays a vital role in the overall development. It needs to be on par with physical health. Ours is a society where physical health gives more importance and neglecting the mental/ psychological health side and thus highlighting the seriousness of the issue.

Social work is a discipline which gives importance to psychological health and not just focusing only on the physical wellbeing side. Thus this discipline focuses on providing interventions which are capable to address the psychological problems of victims. The significance of using therapeutic interventions emerges here. Children those who have encountered child abuse might develop certain negative and distorted beliefs later in adolescence regarding themselves, others or even towards the world. These beliefs should be addressed earlier or else it would eventually ends up in negative consequences during the later phase of life. One social work intervention that can be an alternative to help these problems is to use REBT techniques. REBT is an effective therapy which focuses on changing the irrational beliefs of an individual. It helps individuals realise the difference between irrational and rational thinking through ABCDE steps, namely activating events, beliefs, consequences, disputing, and practical new philosophy, using various cognitive, emotive and behavioural techniques (Gandhi M et al., 2025).

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Historically, child abuse often was mostly viewed as a family matter that is it was seen or recognised as a private matter and societies rarely intervened in it. Many of the medical references shows how the early physicians has accepted the idea that those who gives care for

children might injure them also. Recognition of this problem as social and clinical emerged only in late 19th century (Lynch., 1985).

Child abuse includes various acts which are harmful and that targets children, manifesting in diverse forms. The issue has greater prevalence in global standards since newly affected victims emerges daily. Abuse develops in various kinds, with physical abuse being the most occurring one. Physical abuse includes causing harm to a child's physical body. Emotional abuse on the other hand is the next type which involves causing harmful effects on a child's emotional wellbeing and self-esteem. Child abuse also includes various kinds of mistreatments, such as negligence, avoidance, isolation, as well as low family support and high stress. The most common reasons why a child is exposed to suffer these situations are due to their circumstances like low parental education, absent or single parenting, parental substance misuse, domestic violence, or a lack of caregiver warmth. (Murray, Rosanbalm, Christopoulos, & Hamoudi, 2015).

According to meta-analyses of global prevalence of child maltreatment, around 18% reported having physical abuse experience, 36% emotional abuse, 18% of the girls and 8% of the boys reported that they have encountered with sexual abuse. All these maltreatments which the children had encountered has association with poor mental health, with emotional abuse showing the strongest and wide ranging impact (sage choice, soltenburg). It also could lead to mental health problems like anxiety, depression, substance use disorder. Waterman et al.(1993, as cited in Pandey,2024) reported that children who reported experiencing sexual abuse in preschool, exhibited more social incompetence, cognitive problems, emotional difficulties, sexualised behaviour, and behaviour problems comparing a control group attending preschool.

The effect of REBT emerges in this context. Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) is a form of cognitive-behavioural therapy developed by Albert Ellis. REBT is based on the idea that emotional distress is not caused directly by events, but by the beliefs individuals hold about those events. According to this approach, people often develop irrational beliefs that lead to unhealthy emotions and maladaptive behaviours. REBT focuses on identifying, challenging, and replacing these irrational beliefs with rational and realistic thoughts to promote emotional well-being and healthy behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

The study follows a narrative review approach, including collecting and analysing secondary information from previous academic sources related to REBT and Child abuse. Journlas,

Books, Articles, Conceptual papers were analysed to understand how REBT is effective with children those who experienced child abuse. Articles published between 2004 and 2025 were selected for this review. Since it is a narrative review, no primary data was collected. The findings was based completely on information from secondary sources.

Objectives

- To analyse the psychological impact of child abuse on children
- To analyse the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) in addressing distorted thoughts, Irrational beliefs and emotional distress occurring due to child abuse.
- To review existing literature on the application of REBT among children who got psychologically affected due to child abuse.
- To identify gaps in existing literature, specifically in Indian context, to suggest directions for further social work researches and intervention.

Review of Literature

Tulu (2014) in his study examined the effectiveness of REBT counselling in coping with post traumatic stress disorder among orphan children who had experienced trauma in their life. Using quasi experimental design, the study found out significant reductions in PTSD symptoms among the children who got REBT group counselling. The findings implied that, rational emotive behavioural group counselling is effective for the treatment of post traumatic stress disorder in orphan children who had experienced trauma. This study strengthens an empirical support for REBT as an effective intervention for children who are traumatized.

Gonzalez et al (2014) employed a systematic review and meta analysis to analyse the effectiveness of REBT among children as well as adolescents. The findings showed statistically significant and positive overall effect of REBT across multiple outcome domains, including anxiety, distorted thoughts, irrational beliefs, self concept and academic pressure. The major impact occurred observed was in reducing disruptive behaviours, which shows REBT's effectiveness in addressing difficulties in behaviours which are commonly associated with childhood abuse. The study also found that REBT was effective for children as well as adolescents without any discrepancy with and without identified psychological problems and greater benefits observed when interventions were provided for longer duration. Substantially, children got benefitted more than adolescents, which highlights the importance of early intervention. The study concluded that, REBT approach provides effective

intervention for young populations, which strengthens its relevance as a social work intervention for psychological distress experienced children, which also includes children who got abused

David et al., (2017) in his study carried out a systematic review and meta analysis which covers over five decades of REBT and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy research. The study found that REBT emerged as an evidence based therapeutic approach which reduces emotional distress by addressing negative thought pattern. The study highlighted that REBT is particularly effective in addressing trauma contexts since it directly addresses distorted thoughts. This large scale evidence further strengthens the justification for using REBT as an effective intervention in social work practice mainly working with children who survived of childhood abuse.

Zuliani et al., (2025) aimed to assess the effectiveness of REBT Therapy on children who experienced sexual abuse. The study employed a quasi experimental research design reported substantial reduction in trauma based emotional distress following the intervention. The study supports the application of REBT as a trauma focused intervention for children who got sexually abused and deeply showed its effectiveness in addressing irrational beliefs which were deep rooted in them.

Grove et al., (2024) evaluated in their study on the use of REBT informed group interventions for those who experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) difficulties. Although the study concentrated on group settings, its findings are relevant to justify child abuse interventions as it demonstrated that REBT effectively helped in reducing PTSD symptoms by targeting distorted thoughts and irrational beliefs which often connected with guilt, shame. The study also emphasized REBT's ABC model which helps the client in understanding the behaviour which results in the consequence.

Syah (2020) employed a study to assess the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) in reducing the anxiety among adolescents who got affected by bullying. The researcher has employed a quasi experimental collaborative action research design. The study was conducted involving 28 students who were the victims of bullying and implemented REBT counselling as the intervention to address their anxiety symptoms. The findings from the quantitative analysis showed notable decrease in anxiety scores after the REBT intervention, while qualitative data collected through interview method and

observations denoted self confidence and a sense of belonging among the sample. The study proved that REBT can effectively reduce psychological distress and improve emotional control in trauma related scenarios, which suggests its applicability in further scenarios like child abuse. This supports REBT's effectiveness in dealing with children who got traumatically targeted due to any kind of abuses.

Thielemann et al., (2022) employed a comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis which measures the effectiveness of Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT) for abuse victims, particularly children and adolescents. The study highlighted that emotional resilience, cognitive pattern restructuring were central to therapeutic effectiveness. These findings enhances the relevance of cognitive- behavioural approaches in intervening trauma related emotional problems among child abuse victims, thus providing a concrete theoretical base for REBT.

Cohen et al. (2011) examined TF-CBT's long term effectiveness among sexually abused children and found notable reduction in trauma symptoms between 6-12 months follow ups. The study reported improvements in the regulation of emotions and behavioural problems. The durability of the treatment outcomes strongly points out the significance of early psychological intervention which targets distorted beliefs formed due to abuse. This reinforces the relevance of REBT, which is helpful in restructuring irrational beliefs and modifying it into relevant beliefs.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the reviewed studies are discussed under five key themes.

1. Effectiveness of REBT in Reducing Trauma and PTSD Symptoms

Many studies consistently shows the effectiveness of REBT in reducing Trauma related symptoms, mainly PTSD, among children who are victims of adverse circumstances. Tulu (2014) reported major reductions in traumatic symptoms among children who are orphans after receiving REBT group counselling, focusing its therapeutic value for children who got traumatised. Zuliani et al., (2025) also found major reductions in trauma based distresses by children who are the victims of sexual abuse after getting REBT therapy. Grive et al, (2024) also emphasises these findings through pointing out in his study that REBT informed group interventions has effectively reduced PTSD symptoms through addressing guilt and shame which are trauma linked emotional responses. These findings all together establish REBT as an effective intervention which reduces trauma for children affected by abuse.

2.Cognitive Restructuring and Modification of Irrational Beliefs

Another major theme viewed across the researches is the role of REBT in irrational belief restructuring which are formed due to traumatic events which people have experienced. David et al., (2017) highlighted that REBT slows down emotional distress through challenging distorted cognitions, making the therapy to particularly suitable for trauma events. Zuliani et al., (2025) demonstrated that REBT effectively addresses the irrational beliefs which got deeply rooted among sexually abused children. Grove et al., (2024) emphasised the ABC model, which helps the children understand Consequences are the byproduct of Activating event and Behaviour occurred from that activated event. These findings underlines REBT's theoretical strength in addressing maladaptive behaviours which is observed among child abuse victims.

3.Emotional and Behavioural Regulation Outcomes

The reviewed research studies indicates that REBT improves emotional regulation and behavioural changes. Gonzalez et al., (2014) in their systematic review and meta analysis, found that REBT produced positive effects across multiple domains which includes anxiety reduction, reduction of disruptive cognitions, improvement in self concept. Syah (2020) also found significant reductions in anxiety and improvements in self confidence and regulation of emotions among adolescents who are the victims of bullying, highlighting REBT's multiple domain positive influence in trauma related consequences.

4. Importance of Early and Structured Intervention

Another major theme emerging from the literature is the importance of early and structured intervention. Gonzalez et al.(2014) has found that children who are victims of abuse got benefited more from REBT than adolescents, highlighting the significance of intervention which is done early before maladaptive behaviour got permanently established. Cohen et al., (2011), focused on TF- CBT reported reductions in trauma symptoms and behavioural maladaptiveness among sexually abused children over long term follow ups, which further strengthens the value of early psychological interventions. These findings suggest that structured cognitive restructuring interventions like REBT are particularly effective when introduced at trauma recovery's early stage.

5. Relevance of Cognitive- Behavioural Approaches in Child Abuse Interventions.

Some reviewd studies has focused on Trauma- Focused Cognitive Behavioural therapy (TF-CBFT), and the findings from these provides strong indirect support for REBT as an effective

social work intervention for child abuse survivors. Thielemann et al., (2022) highlighted the emotional resilience and thought restructuring are considered as central mechanisms of change in trauma focused interventions for children and adolescents who had encountered abuse. Cohen et al., (2011) demonstrated that targeting distorted beliefs and emotional dysregulation leads to long term therapeutic benefits. REBT shares core cognitive behavioural principles with TF-CBT, thus these studies provides a solid theoretical and empirical foundation for applying REBT in child abuse scenarios within social work practice.

CONCLUSION

Child abuse remains a major problem which still prevails in world especially in a developing countries like India. It also has severe and long term psychological and emotional effects caused to children. This narrative review highlights that Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) is an effective therapy which addresses psychological issues by helping children to identify irrational thoughts and restructuring those to rational ones. Evidences from existing studies highlights that REBT contributes to emotional regulation, better psychological functioning and improved behaviour among abused children. From a social work perspective, REBT is a structured approach that can also be used effectively in settings which focuses children as the primary target group. Further research is needed to strengthen evidence across diverse cultural contexts.

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