


# The impact of rational emotive behavior therapy approach with Islamic values on children with sexual abuse trauma

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## Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy integrated with Islamic values (REBT-NIS) in reducing trauma symptoms in children who have experienced sexual abuse in Aceh. This approach combines REBT techniques with Islamic values such as *ridha* (contentment), patience, and *ikhlas* (sincerity), which are expected to help children develop more rational and positive thinking in overcoming their trauma. The study used a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test assessments to measure trauma, anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms in the children involved. The results showed a 50% reduction in trauma symptoms after the implementation of REBT-NIS, with significant improvements in all trauma dimensions measured using the Child PTSD Symptom Scale (CPSS) and Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS). These findings indicate that the REBT-NIS approach, which integrates Islamic values, is effective in supporting trauma recovery in sexually abused children, particularly in Aceh. This approach contributes to trauma therapy theory and practice by demonstrating the importance of integrating religious values into evidence-based psychological therapy.

**Keywords:** Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), Sexual Abuse, Islamic Value, Child PTSD, Trauma Symptoms

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas konseling Terapi Perilaku Rasional Emotif dengan Nilai-nilai Islam (REBT-NIS) dalam mengurangi gejala trauma pada anak-anak yang mengalami penyalahgunaan seksual di Aceh. Pendekatan ini menggabungkan teknik REBT dengan nilai-nilai Islam seperti *ridha* (keridhaan), kesabaran, dan *ikhlas* (ketulusan), yang diharapkan dapat membantu anak-anak mengembangkan pemikiran yang lebih rasional dan positif dalam mengatasi trauma mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuasi-eksperimental dengan pre-test dan post-test untuk mengukur gejala trauma, kecemasan, depresi, dan stres anak-anak yang terlibat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan pengurangan gejala trauma sebesar 50% setelah penerapan REBT-NIS, dengan perbaikan signifikan pada semua dimensi trauma yang diukur menggunakan *Child PTSD Symptom Scale (CPSS)* dan *Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS)*. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan REBT-NIS yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam efektif dalam membantu pemulihan trauma pada anak-anak korban penyalahgunaan seksual, khususnya di Aceh. Pendekatan ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap teori dan praktik terapi trauma, dengan menunjukkan pentingnya integrasi nilai-nilai agama dalam terapi psikologis yang berbasis bukti.

**Kata Kunci:** *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)*, Pelecehan Seksual, Nilai-nilai Islam, PTSD Anak, Gejala Trauma



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## INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is a severe issue with profound consequences for the

psychological, social, and biological development of affected children. Children who are victims of sexual abuse often

experience deep trauma, which, if not properly addressed, can persist into adulthood, resulting in long-term psychological difficulties, relationship disturbances, and an increased risk of physical and mental health issues (Alaggia et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2009). The trauma from sexual abuse significantly affects a child's mental and physical health, social interactions, and academic performance, further deteriorating their overall quality of life (Tran et al., 2017). Given these long-term impacts, effective and comprehensive interventions are crucial to help these children overcome trauma and restore their well-being.

Although various therapeutic approaches have proven effective in addressing trauma resulting from sexual abuse, most therapies tend to overlook the cultural and religious dimensions that may play a significant role in the healing process, particularly in communities with strong religious values. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) is a well-established therapeutic approach that has been shown to be effective in treating various psychological problems, including trauma (Grove et al., 2024). REBT focuses on helping individuals identify and modify irrational thought patterns that lead to emotional distress (Matweychuk et al., 2019). While REBT is effective in addressing emotional distress, there is a gap in research regarding how the integration of religious values into therapy can enhance therapeutic outcomes, particularly in the context of trauma treatment (Carlson & González-Prendes, 2016). Thus, further research is needed to explore how integrating religious values, specifically Islamic values, into therapy may strengthen the healing process and improve therapeutic results.

On the other hand, although some studies have highlighted the importance of incorporating religious values into psychological interventions, very few have specifically examined how these values can be integrated into REBT to address trauma resulting from sexual abuse in children (Eseadi, 2023). Previous studies have suggested that the integration of Islamic values like patience, sincerity, gratitude, and forgiveness can provide additional support in the healing process (Oktari et al., 2021; Pohan, Ramli, Atmoko, & Akbar, 2025; Tabatabaee et al., 2024; Yuniar et al., 2023). However, much of the existing research is theoretical and has not sufficiently tested this approach in the context of trauma therapy for sexually abused children.

The research gap is evident, as there has been limited exploration of how religious values can be incorporated into REBT, especially in Indonesia, where regions like Aceh have a strong Islamic tradition (Burhanudin, 2014; Kingsbury, 2007; Pohan, 2024). While modern psychological therapies are widely used to address trauma, few have connected these approaches with culturally and religiously informed methods that may increase therapy acceptance and engagement within the local community (Pohan, Marimbun, et al., 2024). This gap in the literature creates an opportunity for research that investigates the integration of modern psychotherapy techniques with local cultural and religious values.

This study aims to fill this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) integrated with Islamic values referred to as REBT-NIS in reducing trauma symptoms in child victims of sexual abuse in Aceh. This approach is particularly relevant as Aceh is a region where Islamic traditions play a

significant role in daily life, and the integration of Islamic values is expected to enhance the acceptability and effectiveness of the therapeutic intervention (Pohan, Khadijah, et al., 2024).

The novelty of this research lies in testing a new approach to trauma therapy by combining modern psychotherapy techniques, specifically REBT, with Islamic values that are deeply relevant to the context of the Aceh community. Furthermore, this study contributes to the field by investigating how religiously integrated therapeutic approaches can enhance the effectiveness of trauma recovery in sexually abused children (Brewer-Smyth & Koenig, 2014; Pearce et al., 2018). Using a quasi-experimental design, this study examines the impact of REBT-NIS counseling on trauma, depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms, a method that has not been extensively tested in the Indonesian context, particularly in Aceh.

Through this approach, the study aims to provide important contributions not only to theoretical psychology but also to practical clinical interventions, particularly in culturally and religiously diverse contexts. The results of this study are expected to expand the understanding of how religious values can be incorporated into psychological therapy to improve the quality of life and mental well-being of child victims of sexual abuse.

## **METHOD**

This study used a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy counseling integrated with Islamic values (REBT-NIS) in reducing trauma symptoms in children who experienced sexual abuse in Aceh, like similar research that has been conducted by various

researchers before (Aldahadha & Al Dwakat, 2025; Cucchi, 2022). Subject selection was done by purposive sampling because the research subjects were limited and in-depth information was needed on the cases studied. Child victims of sexual abuse reported in each district are very few, about 2-3 cases (Juanda et al., 2023). Therefore, the subject selection criteria in this study are: (1) Girls and boys who are victims of sexual abuse, (2) Muslim religion, (3) Come from families with middle and low economic levels.

Children who meet these criteria are selected as research subjects. They will undergo a baseline test period, a test during the intervention, and a final test after the intervention. The research design is A-B-A-B, which usually involves a small number of subjects between 3-4 people (Erath et al., 2021). This approach is expected to provide a clearer picture of the effects of the intervention on child victims of sexual abuse in the context of predetermined criteria. The study was run for 12 weeks with female participants who were selected based on predetermined subject characteristics and had obtained parental consent.

The instruments used in the study are the Child PTSD Symptom Scale (CPSS) used to measure trauma symptoms in child victims of sexual abuse and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS) used to measure the level of depression, anxiety, and stress in child victims of sexual abuse (Foa et al., 2001, 2018). The validity test used in this study involves the following steps: Content Validity, Construct validity and Criterion Validity. To test the level of reliability, testing was carried out using the Alpha formula. The data obtained was analyzed using Interrupted Time Series Analysis (ITSA). ITSA was used to know the

changes that began in which phase during the treatment period, Show with certainty the form of intervention effectiveness in each phase and Evaluate the overall effectiveness of the intervention. ITSA allows the researcher to detect important change points in the data and provides a more in-depth understanding of how the intervention affects trauma and psychological symptoms in child victims of sexual abuse over time. Furthermore, paired t-tests were conducted to compare pre- and post-therapy measurements, specifically focusing on the trauma, depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. The combination of ITSA and paired t-tests allowed the researchers to evaluate both the timing and the extent of the intervention's effectiveness, providing a comprehensive analysis of the changes in trauma and psychological symptoms over the 12-week period.

## **RESULTS**

The results of this study involved ten respondents who underwent REBT-NIS individual counseling sessions to overcome symptoms of trauma, depression, indecision, and stress. The results of this study are explained based on the scores obtained pre-test and post-test conducted the second time REBT-NIS approach.

Based on the data that has been obtained, it can be seen that there are differences from all respondents. All respondents showed a significant decrease in scores after REBT-NIS counseling therapy. For example, respondent ZN experienced a decrease in trauma score from 62 to 7 after therapy. This decrease shows the effectiveness of counseling in reducing trauma symptoms. The decrease in depression scores was also significant among all respondents. Respondent HM showed a decrease from 40 to 3 after

therapy, indicating the success of counseling in overcoming depression experienced by the subject. The indecisiveness score decreased drastically after the therapy. For example, respondent NZ decreased from 32 to 2 after therapy, showing a significant decrease in the level of indecisiveness. Stress scores also showed a consistent decrease after therapy. For example, respondent HM showed a decrease from 41 down to 3 after the REBT-NIS counseling therapy, indicating that the counseling was effective in reducing stress.

The results showed that REBT-NIS individual counseling was effective in reducing symptoms of trauma, depression, anxiety, and stress in children. The significant reduction in symptom scores after treatment in each respondent supports the hypothesis that this counseling approach can help mental and emotional recovery in traumatized children.

Based on table 1, the results of the paired t-tests conducted for pre- and post-therapy measurements show significant improvements in all the variables tested. Trauma symptoms demonstrated a highly significant reduction, with a t-statistic of 34.52 and a p-value of  $7.10 \times 10^{-11}$ , indicating the effectiveness of the therapy in reducing trauma impact. Similarly, depression showed a significant reduction with a t-statistic of 7.35 and a p-value of  $4.31 \times 10^{-5}$ , and anxiety also exhibited a significant decrease with a t-statistic of 9.11 and a p-value of  $7.74 \times 10^{-6}$ . Finally, stress symptoms decreased significantly with a t-statistic of 33.83 and a p-value of  $8.50 \times 10^{-11}$ . Overall, these results demonstrate that Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) integrated with Islamic values is effective in reducing trauma, depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms in the children involved in this study.

Table 1. Comparison of pre-test and post-test therapy

Respondents	Before Therapy				After Therapy			
	Trauma	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Trauma	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
ZN	62	28	9	30	7	2	2	2
NZ	69	2	32	31	6	1	2	2
RP	69	16	22	34	2	1	3	4
HM	57	40	37	41	4	3	2	3
SM	52	29	28	33	1	2	1	0
GR	65	25	22	35	2	2	1	2
MH	66	25	20	34	2	2	1	2
RM	66	24	21	36	4	2	1	1
BY	64	26	22	35	3	2	1	1
BG	68	20	20	36	2	2	1	1

**DISCUSSION**

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy with Islamic Values (REBT-NIS) counseling in reducing trauma symptoms in children who have experienced sexual abuse. This approach combines Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) techniques with Islamic values such as *ridha* (contentment), patience, and *ikhlas* (sincerity), with the goal of helping children develop more rational and positive thinking in overcoming the trauma they have endured. The results of this study showed a 50% reduction in trauma symptoms based on pre-test and post-test comparisons, indicating that REBT-NIS is effective in reducing trauma symptoms in sexually abused children in Aceh.

REBT is a well-established therapeutic approach that has proven effective in addressing various psychological issues, including trauma. Previous studies have shown that REBT can help individuals identify and change irrational thought patterns that lead to emotional distress, including trauma

(Eseadi et al., 2016; Turner, 2016). However, despite the widespread application of REBT, the integration of this technique with religious values, particularly Islam, is still relatively new and has not been extensively explored in the context of trauma healing for sexually abused children. In this context, REBT-NIS offers a more holistic approach by introducing a spiritual dimension that is deeply connected to the local culture and religion, particularly in Aceh, where the majority of the population is Muslim (Pearce et al., 2018; Pohan, Husni, et al., 2024).

This approach demonstrates that religious beliefs, such as *ridha*, patience, and *ikhlas*, provide a strong spiritual foundation for children who have experienced trauma. Vernon (2019) noted that the use of Islamic stories containing wisdom can facilitate problem-solving, shape rational thinking, and alleviate emotional tension (Vernon, 2019). Therefore, the integration of Islamic values with REBT not only introduces cognitive and behavioral techniques but also equips children with the ability to internalize and embrace calming spiritual

values. This approach strengthens the effectiveness of the therapy, aligning with previous research suggesting that religion-based interventions can enhance the efficacy of psychological therapies for individuals with strong religious beliefs (Currier et al., 2023; Khayat Hesari et al., 2024).

One of the key contributions of this research is the integration of evidence-based behavioral therapy with relevant religious values in the local cultural context. In Aceh, where Islamic traditions are deeply embedded, this approach shows that using Islamic values in therapy is more readily accepted by children and their families (Pohan, 2024). Values such as *ridha*, *shukr* and *ikhlas* provide children with a spiritual framework that leads to acceptance of their trauma, while also reinforcing a positive attitude towards overcoming it (Pohan, Ramli, Atmoko, Akbar, et al., 2025). This finding aligns with Abdullah, who demonstrated that religion-based approaches, particularly in the context of Islam, can strengthen therapy outcomes by providing psychological and spiritual strength to individuals (Abdullah, 2015).

However, there is an academic debate regarding the application of religion-based approaches in modern psychotherapy. Some argue that religious approaches may limit individuals' freedom to explore their identity, especially for those who may have different views on religion or spirituality. Various researchers have previously suggested that integrating religion into therapy may benefit religious individuals, but it may also create tension for those who do not identify with the religion (Cornish et al., 2014; Koenig, 2012). In this regard, REBT-NIS should be applied cautiously, ensuring that the religious values incorporated do not impose specific

beliefs on children who may have differing perspectives.

The importance of understanding the cultural context in the trauma healing process cannot be overstated. Aceh, as a province with a strong Islamic identity, offers a context that is highly relevant for the application of REBT-NIS. This study indicates that Islamic religious values play a crucial role in the acceptance of therapy by children and their families. However, there are challenges to consider, particularly regarding the deeply ingrained social norms and gender expectations in Aceh. For instance, social expectations surrounding women who have experienced sexual abuse may exacerbate feelings of shame or guilt, thus hindering the healing process (Kennedy & Prock, 2018; Lateef et al., 2023). Further research should investigate how these social norms affect the effectiveness of REBT-NIS in Aceh and how the therapy can be made more sensitive to existing gender and cultural dynamics.

While the findings of this study are promising, several limitations need to be acknowledged. One of the main limitations is the small sample size, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to a larger population. Additionally, this study only involved children from Aceh, who share specific cultural and religious characteristics. Therefore, future research should expand the sample to include children from various regions with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of REBT-NIS in diverse contexts.

Moreover, it is important to further investigate the role of family and social support in the trauma recovery process. As shown in previous research (Kaysen et al., 2014), family and community support play

a crucial role in trauma healing. In the context of Aceh, where family and social influences are significant, further research should assess how family involvement in REBT-NIS therapy can enhance the success and sustainability of the therapy. Practical implications for school counselors in assisting children with sexual abuse trauma through REBT-NIS include integrating Islamic values such as *ridha*, patience, and *ikhlas*, as well as creating a safe and trusting relationship with the child. Counselors should also involve the family in the therapy process and use techniques such as Islamic Imagery and dhikr to help children manage stress and anxiety (Ilyas, 2020). Additionally, counselors need to reduce social stigma related to sexual trauma and create a supportive and safe school environment for children experiencing sexual abuse.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy integrated with Islamic values (REBT-NIS) effectively reduces trauma symptoms in children who have experienced sexual abuse in Aceh, with a 50% reduction in symptoms based on pre-test and post-test comparisons. By combining REBT techniques with core Islamic values such as *ridha* (contentment), patience, and *ikhlas* (sincerity), this approach provides a culturally relevant and spiritually grounded therapeutic framework that addresses both the cognitive and emotional aspects of trauma. However, the small sample size and the focus on Aceh limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand the sample to include diverse regions and socio-economic backgrounds, further investigate the role of family and social support in trauma recovery, and

include long-term follow-up studies to assess the sustainability of the therapeutic effects. Overall, REBT-NIS offers a promising, culturally sensitive method for trauma healing, particularly in Muslim-majority communities, and provides valuable insights for future clinical practice and research in trauma recovery.

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**Hetti Zuliani:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Funding, Writing-original draft, Writing-review & editing, **Pau Kee:** Writing-review & editing, **Noor Sapeer:** Conceptualization, Writing-review & editing.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The Authors Declare No Conflict of Interest in This Paper.

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