

EFFECTS OF RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY MODULE
ON IRRATIONAL BELIEFS AND JOB STRESS AMONG UNIVERSITY
SUPPORT STAFF

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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SUPPORT STAFF

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Thank You, Allah...

Specially dedicated to Ummi, Marlina Mohd Daud...

Abah, Abdul Jalil Abdullah...

Husband, Nik Muhammad Mustaqim...

my siblings Hani, Ehsan, Huzairah, Kautsar, Hazim, Iffah, Najah, Anis, ...

and my daughter, Nik Khaulah Insyirah...

Thank you so much...

I really love all of you...

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ABSTRACT

The pressure of workforce to perform maximum output and enhance competitiveness caused the employees to experience stress at the workplace especially among support staff. Based on the Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) approach, stresses among individuals are largely due to irrational beliefs of a person. The REBT is one of the cognitive behaviour therapy approaches that concentrates on cognitive, emotive and behaviour. However, the development of module that focuses on cognitive aspects in the REBT approach to lessen irrational beliefs and job stress among university support staff is yet to be fully developed. The study developed a REBT Module that has high validity and reliability, and investigated its effects on irrational beliefs and job stress among university support staff. An experimental research which used control group experimental design was employed in this research. The developed REBT Module and Staff Beliefs Questionnaire (SBQ) were tested for their validity and reliability in this study. Using random sampling, 60 support staff from a private university in Perak answered the SBQ and Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI). Data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science version 16.0. Inferential statistic, namely independent *t*-test and paired sample *t*-test were employed in order to test the hypotheses. The effect size was also used to determine the magnitude of REBT Module treatment. The findings indicated that the REBT Module which consists of four sub modules, namely Self-acceptance, Feelings, Beliefs and Disputation had high validity (.91) and reliability (.98) values. In addition, the results of the experimental study showed that there were significant differences between the pre-test and post-test of experimental group, and post-test between experimental group and control group for irrational beliefs, job stress, subscales of irrational beliefs and subscales of job stress. In conclusion, the module developed based on the REBT approach is suitable for support staff in the university to lessen irrational beliefs and job stress.

ABSTRAK

Desakan tenaga kerja untuk melaksanakan hasil yang maksimum dan meningkatkan daya saing menyebabkan pekerja mengalami tekanan di tempat kerja terutama dalam kalangan kakitangan sokongan. Berdasarkan pendekatan Terapi Rasional Emotif TingkahLaku (REBT), tekanan dalam kalangan individu adalah sebahagian besarnya disebabkan oleh kepercayaan seseorang yang tidak rasional. REBT adalah salah satu pendekatan terapi tingkah laku kognitif yang menumpukan kepada kognitif, emosi dan tingkah laku. Walau bagaimanapun, pembangunan modul yang memberi tumpuan kepada aspek kognitif dalam pendekatan REBT untuk mengurangkan kepercayaan tidak rasional dan tekanan kerja dalam kalangan kakitangan sokongan universiti masih belum dibangunkan sepenuhnya. Kajian ini membangunkan Modul REBT yang mempunyai kesahan dan kebolehpercayaan yang tinggi, dan mengkaji kesannya terhadap kepercayaan yang tidak rasional dan tekanan kerja dalam kalangan kakitangan sokongan universiti. Satu kajian eksperimen yang menggunakan reka bentuk kumpulan kawalan eksperimen telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Modul REBT dan soal selidik *Staff Beliefs Questionnaire* (SBQ) telah dibangunkan dan diuji kesahan dan kebolehpercayaannya dalam kajian ini. Dengan menggunakan persampelan rawak, 60 kakitangan sokongan dari sebuah universiti swasta di Perak telah menjawab SBQ dan Petunjuk Tekanan Pekerjaan (OSI). Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan *Statistical Package for Social Science* versi 16.0. Statistik inferensi, ujian-*t* berpadanan dan ujian-*t* tidak berpadanan telah digunakan untuk menguji hipotesis. Kesan saiz juga digunakan untuk menentukan magnitud rawatan Modul REBT. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa Modul REBT yang terdiri daripada empat sub modul, iaitu Penerimaan-Kendiri, Perasaan, Kepercayaan dan Mencabar mempunyai nilai kesahan (.91) dan kebolehpercayaan (.98) yang tinggi. Di samping itu, hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara praujian dan pascaujian bagi kumpulan eksperimen serta pascaujian antara kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan untuk kepercayaan yang tidak rasional, tekanan kerja, skala sub kepercayaan tidak rasional dan skala sub tekanan kerja. Kesimpulannya, modul yang dibangunkan berdasarkan pendekatan REBT ini adalah sesuai untuk kakitangan sokongan di universiti bagi mengurangkan kepercayaan tidak rasional dan tekanan kerja.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBT	-	Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
CG	-	Control Group
CSDU	-	Counselling and Students Development Unit
CT	-	Cognitive Therapy
DASS-21	-	Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21
EG	-	Experimental Group
HRM	-	Human Resource Management
MASCO	-	Malaysian Standard Classification of Occupations
OSI	-	Occupational Stress Indicator
PPUKM	-	Pusat Perubatan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
QMU	-	Quality Management Unit
REBE	-	Rational Emotive Behaviour Education
REBT	-	Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy
REE	-	Rational Emotive Education
RET	-	Rational Emotive Therapy
SBQ	-	Staff Beliefs Questionnaire
SPSS	-	Statistical Packages for Social Sciences
SSDS	-	Student Support Services Department
UTP	-	Universiti Teknologi Petronas

LIST OF SYMBOLS

$\%$	-	Percentage
α	-	Cronbach's Alpha
f	-	Frequency
N	-	Total Sample
M	-	Mean
p	-	Significant Level
t	-	Computed value of t -test
d	-	Cohen's Effect Size
Df	-	Degree of Freedom
SD	-	Standard Deviation
$>$	-	More Than
$<$	-	Less Than

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Work life is one of the vital parts of our daily lives that causes a great deal of stress. Nilufar Ahsan, Zaini Abdullah, David Yong and Syed Shah Alam (2009) stated due to the competitive nature of the job environment, most people in the world spend their time for job related purposes. Furthermore, in this high technology and modern era, where high performance is expected to be a norm, many organizations demand a high level of quality, service and overall business success (Swee, Anza, & Nor Hassim, 2007).

Sang, Teo, Cooper and Bohle (2013) stated that the possible sources of occupational stress are due to the globalisation and increased demands for better service quality, greater efficiency, adaptability to continuously change the work environment and uncertainty of employment. According to Nelson and Simmons (2003), stress can be classified into two categories namely eustress and distress. Eustress is a result of positive perception of the stressors, and distress is a result of negative perception of the stressors. The study carried out by Benjamin Chan Yin-Fah, Yeoh Sok Foon, Lim Chee-Leong and Syuhaily (2010) showed that job stress occurs when employees perceive an imbalance between their work demands and their capabilities and resources to meet these demands. Employees around the world have reported that they feel increasingly stressed at work (Murphy & Sauter, 2003).

The types of stressors such as time, information; supervisory; work environment; staffing and pay; and career stressors are closely connected to reduce job satisfaction (Pick, Teo & Yeung, 2012).

Currently, most universities are setting new goals to compete with other institutions which may lead to increase of stress among academic staff, which may affect their job satisfaction to the extent of affecting their physical and mental health (Nilufar *et al.*, 2009). However, this pressure is equally distributed towards all levels including non-academic personnel. Rothmann and Barkhuizen (2008) stated that, when the academic staff members feel stressed and pressured, it is highly likely that other groups of employees such as support staff will be pressured which make the environment very stressful and difficult to work.

Non-academic personnel are the key performers to establish service quality and they have to support academic staff in their main role of research and teaching at higher institution level (Essenko, 2003). The nature of their work is continuous and demanding. They must deal with various tasks simultaneously from administering, supervising, giving instruction, being accessible, delegating and accepting responsibility and their multiple personals as well as professional qualities seem to be needed to carry out the job successfully (Essenko, 2003). A case study of higher education in a Malaysian Institution by Melissa Ng Lee Yen Abdullah and See Ching Mey (2012) was based on the fundamental lifestyle of a university community presenting recognitions such as pay rises, awards and promotion are the focus of the university community including administrative officers and support staff.

The general staff in the study by Gillespie and Walsh (2000) reported high levels of stress less often than academic staff. On the other hand, study on academic and general staff from Australian universities revealed that both groups experience a dramatic increase in stress during the previous 5 years although the academic staff obtained higher levels of stress rather than general staff (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua & Stough, 2001). Besides that, work stress such as being under-valued or under-appreciated is one of the ways workers express their discomfort when they are not treated well (Harkness, Long, Bermbach, Patterson, Jordan, & Kahn, 2005).

In addition, Mostert, Rothmann, Mostert and Nell (2008) who utilized Organisational Screening Tool (ASSET) in their study reported that respondents of university support staff at a higher education institution in the North West Province presented average levels of occupational stress on work-life balance, resources and communication, work relationships, overload, job insecurity, job control, physical ill health and psychological ill health. Besides that, a research by Pick, Teo and Yeung (2012) on general staff involving technical, administrative and clerical support staff at Australian Universities demonstrated that the respondents experienced two different types of stressors related to human resource and job-context. The human resource stressors are those associated with time (workload); supervisory (superior/team member relationships); staffing and pay (resources); and career (job prospects) whilst, job-context correlated with information (organisational change) and work environment (job characteristics).

Sang *et al.* (2013) also reported that occupational stressors have a negative result on the mental health and wellbeing of academic and non-academic staff and it is proven that it is the source of job dissatisfaction in the university which leads to low commitment. Whilst, a study on academic and non-academic staff in Chinese higher education institutions revealed that stressors linked to work-life balance and workload showed a significant difference in job stressors between these staff (Sang *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, for this study, the researcher considered the cognitive-behavioural programs to overcome the problem. Richardson and Rothstein (2008) mentioned cognitive-behavioural programs consistently produced larger effects than other types of interventions in the effectiveness of stress management.

1.2 Background of the Study

The failure of the educational institutions in providing a healthy working environment or even a working environment with minimal level of unhealthy job stress would lead to many problems in the near future, especially in employees' work performance in teaching students and administrative part of the university (Nilufar Ahsan *et al.*, 2009). Nilufar Ahsan *et al.* (2009) remarked that almost all the

universities are now setting new goals as well as involved with the ultimate goal. This may cause them to face plenty of stress and therefore affect their satisfaction and even their physical and mental health. Furthermore, Sheikh Muhamad Hizam and Zafir Khan (2011) asserted that universities no longer provide stress-free environment that the staff once enjoyed.

Hence, in order to reduce the stress among employees, the researcher employs the Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) theory introduced by Albert Ellis in 1994 in this study. Based on the REBT approach, stress among individuals are largely due to irrational beliefs of a person. REBT views psychological problems as learned maladaptive responses, maintained by irrational beliefs (Bora, Bernard, Trip, Decsei-Radu, & Chereji, 2009). Irrational beliefs are defined as beliefs that are unlikely to find objective empirical support, not pragmatic, and generally reflect demandingness, leading to dysfunctional consequences (Szasz, 2011).

As David, Szentagotai, Eva and Macavei (2005) remarked that even though REBT is a general psychological theory, not only a clinical theory, it has stimulated applications and research in several areas such as in clinical psychology, education, industrial or organizational psychology. The strength for REBT is an educational system with suggestions for nonclinical and subclinical populations which has an interest in self-help materials as well as personal development and has been used for nonclinical populations related to life problems, optimization of human potential, occupational stress management, REBT coaching and rational mentoring (David *et al.*, 2005).

Besides that, according to Ellis (1973), REBT is a form of humanistic psychology that helps individuals live happier, more productive, more self-actualizing and more creative. This theory was developed since 1955 by hundreds of researches and theoretical articles and by integrating many developments in cognitive science (David *et al.*, 2005). For example, irrational beliefs are conceptualized as irrational cognitive processes that can cover various areas of content, rather than established based on clinical practice.

The foundation of REBT is the “ABCDE” model (Dryden, 1999). David *et al.* (2005) summarized the function of this model. At A, individuals experience undesirable activating events (A), while B, they have beliefs (B) either irrational that leads to dysfunctional consequences or rational that leads to functional consequences. These beliefs result in cognitive, emotional and behavioural consequences (C). The individuals who employ REBT promote active dispute (D) their irrational beliefs and assimilate more efficient (E), adaptive, and rational beliefs, with positive impact on their emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses. Although the activating event contributes to what an individual thinks or believes, it does not cause it (Bora *et al.*, 2009).

Furthermore, Choudhury (2013) remarked that the REBT concept is when the events do not lead a person to feel depressed, sorrowful, frightened, furious or highly anxious. It is one’s beliefs and thoughts about the events which primarily cause unhealthy distressful feelings and self-defeating behaviours (behaviours that prevent us from being happy and/or are harmful for us). Nucci (2002) asserted that REBT is a therapeutic approach to reduce undesirable behaviours by identifying and changing the behaviours’ precursors namely beliefs, and feelings. Behaviours that are not in the individual’s best interest need to be eliminated or changed into productive, positive and rational behaviours by initially changing the source the individuals have control over which is their own thoughts and beliefs.

Criddle (2007) listed some irrational ideas and their consequences in the workplace to his business clients which may result from holding the given irrational attitude or management philosophy. He is an independent practitioner at United States of America who had practiced REBT clinician for fifteen years before changing the focus of his practice from consulting to business. Those irrational ideas and some of its consequences are stated below:

- i) An *over-concern* about being *liked* or *approved* of (by subordinates, superiors, peers) and/or about receiving any disapproval from others can result in agreeing to deadlines, tasks, etc. that one should not agree to; not being able to comfortably say “no” where appropriate; not risking speaking up with one’s own ideas that differ from others;

- ii) An overly *rigid* and *demanding* attitude about the exact way tasks, assignments, procedures *must be* or *should be* carried out, and which can result in becoming angry with individuals who make errors or don't follow procedures to the letter; anger that breaks down or prevents the building of good relationships and undermines morale; a very tense workplace, work atmosphere, which inhibits smooth productivity;
- iii) A philosophy that puts significant weight on *how one feels* about doing something when deciding whether or not to do it which can result in the avoidance of unpleasant or difficult tasks, procrastination, time management problems of lack of self-discipline and good organization in one's work.

Hsin-Hui 'Sunny' Hu and Chien-Wei Cheng (2010) remarked when individuals are able to cope with stress, they can overcome stress, which results in the increase of job performance under stress. Nevertheless, when coping is in doubt, individuals view the stressor as a threat. In addition, employees with a pessimistic outlook, appear to be people who fail to adapt with their working conditions (Mohd Awang Idris, Dollard, & Winefield, 2010). As one respondent said, by looking into the positives, stress can be avoided.

Morris (1993) claimed the REBT approach to organizational development helps employees identify self-defeating beliefs evolving from inappropriate mental models (the model that influence perceptions, feelings, thoughts and behaviours and lead to over-generalizations, lack of assertiveness and self-defeating beliefs) and replace them with appropriate patterns of thinking. When the staff employed this approach, they will develop a shared vision, capable of living with change, maintain interrelatedness with the organization, operate from a healthy personal system and perhaps most importantly, develop a flexible, non-rigid attitude about self, others, and the organization (Morris, 1993). In addition, Kushnir and Malkinson (1993) conducted an experimental research using Rational-emotive Group intervention and the result indicated that somatic complaints and irrationality decreased in short term. While, cognitive weariness was also reduced eighteen months later.

Therefore, the researcher proposed REBT to be employed in this research as Bora *et al.* (2009) asserted that REBT can be applied in the educational field and in organizations. According to Vernon (2011), the philosophical basis of REBT and the ABC approach created by Ellis remains salient and REBT should continue to be prominent in both the clinical and the educational arena. Furthermore, the continuing effort to produce high quality research at testing the efficacy of the theory will help keeping REBT not only alive, but thriving. Moreover, Vernon (2011) mentioned training at the university level, which is a critical area that needs to be addressed. Furthermore, REBT helps to strive energetically, to change overly stressful thoughts, feelings and action especially when they are harming individuals and teaches them to desperately strive (Ellis, 2006). Thus, the individuals refuse to give themselves more stress.

In conclusion, the REBT theory with the ABCDE Model will be applied in developing the REBT Module among support staff in order to lessen their irrational beliefs and job stress. From the REBT perspective, Banks (2011) asserted that an effective mental health programme should increase rationality and decrease emotional disturbance.

1.3 Statement of Problem

Based on the information obtained from the representative of Human Resource Management and Administration (HRM), Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) (2013), the support staff in UTP refers to the non-executive staff. The representative stated that the misconduct or disciplinary report in UTP for the support staff is divided into six categories namely attendance, discipline (other than attendance), ethics, integrity, work related and others. The data from February 2010 until April 2013 indicated that the percentage of total cases related to the misconduct or disciplinary report are 33.33 per cent for attendance, 25 per cent for discipline, 8.3 per cent for ethics, integrity and work related accordingly and others are 16.67 per cent. According to Ellis (1973) who introduced REBT, it is initially the thought or belief behind the uncomfortable feeling and unproductive behaviour. Gardner, Rose,

Mason, Tyler and Cushway (2005) stated that absenteeism, problems in staff retention and early retirement reflect the increase in stress. The implications of failure to manage stress among support staff will cause them to have misconduct or disciplinary problems. Although the data above shows the small numbers of it, the problem still continues over months and years.

Besides that, Counselling and Students Development Unit (CSDU) under Student Support Services Department (SSDS), UTP administered a Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21) survey on UTP support staff in 2014. Table 1.1 below presents the analysis of the DASS on 94 support staff. The distribution percentage for extremely severe, severe, moderate and mild scores of depression were 32 support staff (34.04%), anxiety was 48 support staff (51.07%) and stress was 27 support staff (28.72%) respectively. Therefore, these results showed that support staff at UTP are still experiencing depression, anxiety and stress although the percentage was not too big. As stated by Gillespie *et al.* (2001), their finding of the study revealed that general staff experienced a wider range of stress levels with some general staff reporting very high levels of stress while others reported very low level of stress.

Table 1.1: Analysis of DASS 2014

Score	Depression (N = 94)		Anxiety (N = 94)		Stress (N = 94)	
	<i>f</i>	(%)	<i>f</i>	(%)	<i>f</i>	(%)
Extremely severe	-	-	4	4.26	-	-
Severe	6	6.38	6	6.38	3	3.19
Moderate	4	4.26	18	19.15	8	8.51
Mild	22	23.40	20	21.28	16	17.02
Normal	62	65.96	46	48.94	67	71.28

Note: N = total sample, *f* = frequency, % = percentage

(Source: Counselling and Students Development Unit (CSDU), 2014)

Although there is no direct evidence showing irrational beliefs among support staff at UTP, as they never conduct any research using the REBT perspective, with the availability of support staff who encountered anxiety, depression and stress, the

researcher referred to the finding from Dudau, Sfeatcu, Funieru and Dumitrache (2015) in which the results showed that irrational beliefs can be associated with the three dimensions of DASS namely depression, anxiety and stress. In addition, depression, anxiety and stress are the negative emotions that refer to consequences 'C' in the REBT theory. According to this theory, it occurs due to the irrational beliefs 'B' that are possessed by individual. Choudhury (2013) asserted that emotional sufferings, miseries and sorrows resulted from perceptions and evaluations of a negative event.

As the global scene is rapidly changing, the pressure of workforce to perform maximum output and enhance competitiveness will be increased. This pressure will cause the employees to have stress at the workplace in their life. According to Lundberg and Cooper (2011), empirical evidence shows that the experience of occupational stress causing alterations in physiological, psychological and behavioural functions which may be harmful to individual health, organisational and national productivity.

Bond and Dryden (1996) stated that it has been found that irrational beliefs are closely related to specific automatic thoughts during stressful events. The REBT is based on the principle that one's thoughts or beliefs determine one's life habits. This explains products of feelings that respond to the irrational beliefs are undesirable, unproductive, negative, stressful or irrational behaviours (Nucci, 2002). Moreover, Palmer and Gyllensten (2008) remarked that Rational Emotive Behaviour can be prevented by helping employees tackle issues related to performance such as procrastination at an earlier stage before it leads to negative or serious outcomes at college, work or other areas of life.

Thus, it is important for the employees to know how to use their cognitive process rationally when facing the job stress and it is hoped that, it will assist them when facing any form of stress in the future. Morris (1993) remarked that the REBT approach would be the medium of instruction, and subjects such as anger-management, relationships, job-stress, other life issues or concerns would become the focus of training. Research by Harris, Davies and Dryden (2006) indicated that the type of belief had a significant effect on anxiety and concern. Harris *et al.* (2006)

concluded that although the subjects experience the same real-life stressful situation, the difference is on how they hold onto their beliefs.

In occupational settings, REBT is one of the approaches that concentrates on cognitive, emotive and behaviour. Besides, REBT approach developed a more comprehensive approach that promotes lasting change because it teaches clients to maintain their emotional upset, encompasses numerous strategies for addressing the distorted thinking that characterizes concrete thinkers (Vernon, 2011). Moreover, REBT also teaches individual to understand themselves and others, to act differently as well as to change the basic life philosophy by modifying the faulty thinking (Okun & Kantrowitz, 2015). The study by De Jesus and Conboy (2001) showed that utilization of RET to alter the irrational beliefs produced significant reductions in professional stress and irrational beliefs in the post-test scores. Therefore, it supports the hypotheses that the REBT approach does improve irrational beliefs and job stress.

According to Lamarine (1990), there should be three categories of the educational programmes based on the REBT principle, which are self-acceptance, understanding feelings and examining personal beliefs. In addition, Knaus stated that before learning the cognitive model, the primary skill that participants need to obtain and practice is understanding feelings. Meanwhile, Vernon and Bernard (2006) also emphasized that it is important to have a complete understanding of the fundamental of REBT and the disputation process before using this approach.

Besides, Woods (1987) claimed that changes in 'dependent' variables, for example Type A behaviour, anxiety, anger, depression, assertiveness, and physical illness are associated with the amount of changes in irrational beliefs. When individual challenges, explores and examines the reality of certain beliefs that cause emotional disturbance, their cognitive beliefs will change (Anderson, 2000). Vernon and Bernard (2006) also mentioned that disputation of the irrational beliefs helps individual to reduce their emotions and place the problem in a better perspective. Ultimately they will reach a stage where they could communicate more efficiently about how they felt and listen to the other side of the story.

Therefore, for this research the development of REBT Module consists of four main sub modules which are Self-acceptance, Feelings, Beliefs and Disputations as recommended by previous researchers. Meanwhile, as this study is related to the support staff who are adults, thus, the researcher referred to the andragogy to deliver the content of REBT Module so that the learning process can be more effective. Norrie and Dalby (2007) highlighted the six principles or assumptions of andragogy introduced by Knowles (1980) which are learners need to know, self-concept of the learner, prior experience of the learner, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and motivation to learn. Norrie and Dalby (2007) also stated that the adult learner is portrayed as being much more active in learning.

Hence, considering the problems existed among support staff at UTP as well as the synthesis of the current and relevant literature, there is a need for developing a suitable module that can be applied in UTP, especially in helping the university support staff to manage their irrational beliefs and stress at the workplace based on rational thinking skills. Mohd Awang Idris *et al.* (2010) said that occupational stress intervention strategies are still underdeveloped in Malaysian organizations. Hence, to fulfil the gaps of the research, this study will focus on three research questions which are “*How to develop REBT Module for university support staff that contain a high validity and reliability?*”, “*Is there any effect of REBT Module on irrational beliefs among support staff?*” and “*Is there any effect of REBT Module on job stress among support staff?*.”

In summary, the support staff need to undergo the REBT Module treatment to understand the differences between the irrational beliefs and rational beliefs as well as the various methods of disputation especially when encountered with any problems regarding their work, colleague or leader. At the same time, with the REBT Module, it will assist the support staff to think rationally, to know how to respond to any problems encountered either in the way of thinking, emotional and action.

1.4 Research Objectives

According to Ranjit Kumar (2005), research objectives are goals set by the researcher to be achieved in a study. Based on the literature review, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) To develop an REBT Module for university support staff that has high validity and reliability.
- 2) To identify the effects of the REBT Module on irrational beliefs among support staff in UTP, Perak.
- 3) To identify the effects of the REBT Module on job stress among support staff in UTP, Perak.

1.5 Research Questions

Christensen (2004) remarked that research questions ensure that the researcher has a good understanding of the variables to be investigated and to aid the experimenter in designing and carrying out the experiment. The research questions in this study are as follows:

- 1) How to develop an REBT Module for university support staff that has a high validity and reliability?
- 2) Is there any effect of REBT Module on irrational beliefs among support staff in UTP, Perak?
- 3) Are there any effect of REBT Module on job stress among support staff in UTP, Perak?

1.6 Hypotheses

Hypothesis is a statement that provides a tentative description or explanation for the relationship between variables (Gravetter & Forzano, 2006). Jackson (2009) stated that it is a prediction regarding the outcome of a study involving the potential relationship between at least two variables. There are two types of research hypotheses which are null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis that consist of directional hypothesis and non-directional hypothesis (Creswell, 2009). However, for this study, the researcher chooses alternative hypotheses based on Jackson (2009) who asserted that researchers support the prediction that a significant difference exists between the groups being compared.

Moreover, non-directional hypothesis being used in this study referred to the statement by Jackson (2009) that the researcher anticipates to find differences between the groups but is unsure what the differences will be. Furthermore, it is due to the researcher not knowing what can be predicted from past literature and a prediction has been made but the exact form of differences, for instance higher, lower, more, or less is not specified (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the research hypotheses are formulated and tested involving irrational beliefs, dimensions of irrational beliefs and occupational stress in experimental group (EG) and control group (CG). The hypotheses are as follows:

Irrational Beliefs

H₁: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of EG for irrational beliefs among support staff at UTP.

H₂: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of CG for irrational beliefs among support staff at UTP.

H₃: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for irrational beliefs among support staff at UTP.

Dimensions of Irrational Beliefs

H_{4a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for demandingness among support staff at UTP.

H_{4b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for demandingness among support staff at UTP.

H_{4c}: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for demandingness among support staff at UTP.

H_{5a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for awfulizing among support staff at UTP.

H_{5b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for awfulizing among support staff at UTP.

H_{5c}: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for awfulizing among support staff at UTP.

H_{6a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for low frustration among support staff at UTP.

H_{6b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for low frustration among support staff at UTP.

H_{6c}: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for low frustration among support staff at UTP.

H_{7a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for global evaluation among support staff at UTP.

H_{7b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for global evaluation among support staff at UTP.

H_{7c}: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for global evaluation among support staff at UTP.

Job Stress

H₈: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of EG for job stress among support staff at UTP.

H₉: There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of CG for job stress among support staff at UTP.

H₁₀: There is a significant difference in the post-test between the EG and CG for job stress among support staff at UTP.

Dimensions of Job Stress

H_{11a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for factor intrinsic to the job among support staff at UTP.

H_{11b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for factor intrinsic to the job among support staff at UTP.

H_{11c}: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for factor intrinsic to the job among support staff at UTP.

H_{12a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for the managerial role among support staff at UTP.

H_{12b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for the managerial role among support staff at UTP.

H_{12c}: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for the managerial role among support staff at UTP.

H_{13a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for relationship with other people among support staff at UTP.

H_{13b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for relationship with other people among support staff at UTP.

H_{13c}: There is significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for relationship with other people among support staff at UTP.

H_{14a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for career and achievement among support staff at UTP.

H_{14b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for career and achievement among support staff at UTP.

H_{14c}: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for career and achievement among support staff at UTP.

H_{15a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for organizational structure or climate among support staff at UTP.

H_{15b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for organizational structure or climate among support staff at UTP.

H_{15c}: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for organizational structure or climate among support staff at UTP.

H_{16a}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of EG for home or work interface among support staff at UTP.

H_{16b}: There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test of CG for home or work interface among support staff at UTP.

H_{16c}: There is a significant difference in the post-test between EG and CG for home or work interface among support staff at UTP.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the effects of Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy Module on irrational beliefs and job stress among support staff at Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP). This study may have some significant contributions to the field of human resource, industrial and organizational psychology, counselling and particularly in improving stress management among support staff in university. There are numerous factors which make this study significant to be carried out and can give some contributions to the current knowledge about the variables. Baker (1994) stated that a study is considered important when it can contribute to the body of knowledge and should be useful to practitioners or people who are involved in the study.

First, this study may have the potential on developing a highly reliable and valid REBT Module by referring to The Sidek's Module Development Model (2001) and a questionnaire based on the objectives of the module as recommended by Sidek Mohd Noah and Jamaludin Ahmad (2005). The researcher hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge in terms of methodology in developing modules in Malaysia. This study will be able to produce empirical proofs regarding the validity, reliability and usefulness of module.

Secondly, this research could help to provide the organizations and the participants of the program with further and more detailed information related to REBT approach and assist the support staff in disputing their irrational beliefs and strengthening their rational beliefs (Ellis, 2006). Thus, the findings from this study

would contribute additional information regarding the effects of REBT Module in lessening the irrational beliefs and job stress among support staff.

Although there are many researches about stress management, this study emphasizes on cognitive aspect that is related to job stress among support staff. Therefore, this module could be carried out on UTP's support staff in order to reduce the problem of stress at the workplace related to their cognitive aspect. Moreover, the content of the REBT Module will contribute to adding some new knowledge to the counsellor in UTP. For example, the REBT Module can be used as the module to develop rational beliefs among support staff as well as to identify their problems according to their irrational beliefs as remedial approach. Moreover, it would be able to contribute to the existing literature especially for support staff at the university.

In addition, the aims of the REBT Module is to assist the support staff to live realistically, be non-judging, accepting, patient and non-compulsive striving (Ellis, 2006), by challenging their irrational beliefs. When the staff employs this approach, they will develop a shared vision, capable of living with change, maintain interrelatedness with the organization, operate from a healthy personal system and perhaps most importantly, develop a flexible, non-rigid attitude about self, others and the organization (Morris, 1993). An early exposure to the REBT Module will act as a preventative approach when dealing with any future problems among university support staff. Thus, the expected result from this study might guide the organizations to identify ways to reduce stress in the workplace.

In conclusion, this study might contribute to the new data and empirical evidence on the effectiveness of REBT Module on irrational beliefs and job stress. If this study succeeded in providing new knowledge regarding the variables, it may prove that the REBT Module could be useful to lessen the irrational beliefs and job stress among university support staff.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study is about the effects of Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) Module on irrational beliefs and job stress among support staff in Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP). The number of samples involved is 60 support staff from UTP. The development of REBT Module that is as an independent variable was based on the REBT approach. Salkind (2009) defined independent variable as variables controlled by the researcher in an attempt to test the effects on some outcomes which are dependent variables and at the same time; it is also known as treatment variables owing to their manipulation and exposure to groups and individuals as the discretion of the researcher. This module covers four sub modules namely self-acceptance, feelings, beliefs and disputation. Some activities are conducted related to each sub modules.

Besides that, there are two dependent variables which are irrational beliefs and job stress. Salkind (2009) remarked that dependent variable is the outcome variable of a research and it is observed for effects resulting from the influence of another factor which is independent variable. For this research, the dimensions of irrational beliefs are demandingness, awfulizing, low frustration tolerance and global evaluation. Whereas, the dimensions of job stress are factor intrinsic to the job, managerial role, relationship with other people, career and achievement and organizational structure or climate. The researcher measured both of these dependent variables generally and by dimensions. According to the REBT approach, the irrational belief system is a vital element that causes stress among individuals. In other words, mostly stress among people are largely due to their irrational beliefs.

1.9 Limitation of the Study

This study only focuses on support staff in Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP). Since the selection of subjects in this study is based on the population of the

UTP's support staff in Perak, thus, these findings cannot be generalized to other populations unless it has the similar characteristics with this subject of the study.

Moreover, this study is restricted to one independent variable only, REBT Module only and two dependent variables namely irrational beliefs and job stress. Other variables such as gender, age, race, education level, work experience, type of faculty or department, socioeconomic status, motivations and so forth are not controlled in this study so, the findings can be generalized to the population of study. Meanwhile, the overall data analysis of the research were based on Staff Belief Questionnaire (SBQ), which was specifically developed by the researcher to measure irrational beliefs and Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI) Malay version, to measure job stress among support staff. Thus, these two instruments cannot be used to measure other than these two variables.

1.10 Conceptual and Operational Definition

According to Gravetter and Forzano (2006), operational definition is a procedure for measuring and defining a construct. It specifies a measurement procedure (a set of operations) for measuring an external, observable behaviour and uses the resulting measurements as definition and a measurement of the hypothetical construct. It is also used as a definition of a concept in terms of the operations that must be performed to demonstrate the concept (Kantowitz, Roediger III, & Elmes, 2005). The terms that are being used in this study are listed below with their conceptual and operational definitions for the purpose of the study.

1.10.1 Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) Module

REBT is one of the most prominent Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBTs). The main component of the REBT approach is the ABC Model which is the fundamental of irrational beliefs and emotional disturbances of individuals (Ellis &

Dryden, 1997). According to Ellis and Bernard (1983), there are three main parts in the ABC Model namely events (A), the system of belief (B) and emotional and behavioural effects of an individual (C).

Most individuals assumed that their emotional and behavioural effects (C) are due to the events that occur (A). On the other hand, the rational or irrational beliefs (B) of an event are the cause of emotional and behavioural effects to individuals (C). Thus, the emotional and behavioural disturbances of the individual are caused by the irrational beliefs that are held by them. Dryden (1999) remarked that REBT does not hold the past events at 'A' which leads to psychological disturbance at 'C'. Rather it holds that people make themselves disturbed at 'C' by bringing their tendencies to think irrationally at 'B' to events that happened in the past 'A'. According to Jenkins and Palmer (2003) the key objectives of REBT approach is that stress does not exist in the event but encompasses a set of cognitive, affective and coping variables which focus on changing appraising and coping abilities.

Sidek Mohd Noah and Jamaludin Ahmad (2005) claimed that module is a unit of teaching and learning to discuss a particular subject in a systematic and sequential way which facilitate the students to master a learning unit easily and accurately by their own. In this research, the researcher will utilize the training module. They remarked that it is a form of development training undertaken by certain parties to increase the efficiency among employees of an organization. It is usually conducted in the form of short-term courses or long-term courses and the participants will need to follow all the instructions handled by certain parties appointed by the organization (Sidek Mohd Noah & Jamaludin Ahmad, 2005).

Thus, operationally, the REBT Module in this research consists of four sub modules namely Self-acceptance, Feelings, Beliefs and Disputation which were developed by referring to the Sidek's Module Development Model (2001) (Sidek Mohd Noah & Jamaludin Ahmad, 2005). All of these sub modules have 19 activities and were conducted within a period of two months.

1.10.2 Irrational beliefs

According to Dryden and Branch (2008) irrational beliefs are any ideas that are rigid or extreme, inconsistent with reality, illogical, largely dysfunction in emotional, behavioural and cognitive consequences and largely determine the individuals' action in attaining their basic goal and purposes. In addition, Szasz (2011) defined irrational beliefs as unlikely to find objective, empirical support, not pragmatic and generally reflect demandingness, leading to dysfunctional consequences. However, rational beliefs are flexible or non-extreme, consistent with reality, logical, largely functional in emotional, behavioural and cognitive consequences and largely helpful to the individuals in attaining their basic goals and purposes (Dryden & Branch, 2008). There are four types of irrational beliefs which are;

- i) Demandingness: This type of irrational belief is viewed as someone feeling that he or she must have what he or she wants in an unqualified way (Dryden, 1999). While Dryden (2006) also described this belief as rigid ideas that individual holds about how things absolutely must or must not be. David *et al.* (2005) mentioned that demandingness refers to absolutistic requirements expressed in the form of "should," "ought" and "musts" while Maag (2008), pointed out that words that indicate demandingness are which show no choice involved for instance 'must', 'need to', 'have to', 'got to', 'ought to', or 'should and shouldn't'. For instance, "I must be a good worker in all what I am doing" or "Others must treat me fairly".

While rational correspondents of demandingness are full preference which means that it is bad if the individuals do not get what they want, but acknowledge that they do not have to get it (Dryden, 1999). Dryden (2006) also defined this belief as flexible ideas that individuals hold about how they would like things to be without demanding that they have to be that way. The example statement is "I want to get a good assessment from employer after working hard, but not necessarily I will get it.

- ii) Awfulizing: This belief is when the individual asserts that it is the end of the world if they do not get what he demands (Dryden, 1999). While Dryden (2006) also interpreted awfulizing beliefs as extreme ideas individual holds about how bad it is when their demands are not met. For example, “It is awful when my suggestion is being rejected by others”.

While anti-awfulizing belief refers to when the individual asserts that it is bad if they do not get what they want, but acknowledges that it is not the end of the world if this happens (Dryden, 1999). Dryden (2006) also defined this belief as non-extreme beliefs individual holds about how bad it is when their non-dogmatic preference are not met. The example statement is “It is uncomfortable for me when my colleagues dislike me, but the situation is not that bad for me”.

- iii) Low frustration tolerance: This irrational belief can be defined as when the individual asserts that it would be intolerable if they do not get what they demand (Dryden, 1999). While Dryden (2006) explained it as extreme ideas that individual holds about the tolerability of events when their demands are not met. For instance, “If my boss does not accept my paperwork, it would be intolerable”.

While high frustration tolerance beliefs is when the individual asserts that it would be difficult for them to tolerate not getting what they want, but acknowledges that it would not be intolerable (Dryden, 1999). In other words, it can be explained as non-extreme ideas that individual holds about the tolerability of events when their non-dogmatic preferences are not met (Dryden, 2006). For example, "It would be difficult for me when my opinion is rejected by other colleagues, but I could bear with that situation”.

- iv) Global evaluation: This belief can be described as when individual asserts that either themselves, another person or life conditions have a negative aspect which their demand must not exist (Dryden, 1999). As a result, they depreciate themselves, the other person or life conditions since they think that it does exist. Whereas Dryden (2006) defined it as extreme ideas that

individual holds about self, other(s) and/or world when they do not get what they demand. For example, “I am worthless if I make a mistake in my work”.

Whereas the rational counterpart of global evaluation is acceptance belief which means that when the individual asserts that person, another person or life conditions have a negative aspect, but admits that themselves, the other person or life conditions are not defined and lessened by the aspect (Dryden, 1999). For instance, "It is uncomfortable when my employer always controls the actions of its employees, however, this does not mean that he is not a good employer”.

Operationally, in this research, irrational beliefs refer to the items of questionnaire that focus on four main categories of irrational beliefs proposed by Palmer and Gyllensten (2008), DiLorenzo, David and Montgomery (2007), David *et al.* (2005), Ellis, Gordon, Neenan and Palmer (1997) and Wallen, DiGiuseppe and Dryden (1992) namely demandingness, awfulizing, low frustration tolerance and global evaluation. For examples,

- i) Demandingness refers to rigid ideas that support staff holds about how things absolutely must or must not be towards themselves, others and their working conditions at the university. For instance, “*My colleagues have to treat me well*”.
- ii) Awfulizing refers to extreme ideas that support staff hold about how bad it is when their demands are not met. For instance, “*It is awful when colleague does not respect me as an employee*”.
- iii) Low frustration tolerance refers to extreme ideas that support staff holds about the tolerability of events when their demands are not met. For instance, “*I can't bear if my leader biased against employee*”.
- iv) Global evaluation refers to extreme ideas that support staff holds towards themselves, others and their working conditions at the university which may have a negative aspect yet their demand does not necessarily exist. For instance, “*My leader is a bad person if he/she fails to show a good role model to his/her employees*”.

Irrational beliefs were generally measured through four subscales as above, using Staff Beliefs Questionnaire (SBQ). The SBQ consists of 66 items that require the staff to indicate the statements related to the irrational beliefs on a Likert Scale.

1.10.3 Job Stress

Coon and Mitterer (2007) defined stress as a condition where the mental and physical state of an individual need to be arranged or adapted according to the environment. Besides that, stress is an adaptive response that is experienced by the individuals due to an action, situation or event that place a specific demand on the person (Gibson, Donnelly, Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2003). However, Amat Taap Manshor, Fontaine and Chong Siong Choy (2003) asserted that stress at the workplace can occur when employees feel “under loaded” through lack of stimulus and social contact.

According to the Guidance for The Prevention of Stress and Violence at The Workplace (2001) from Department of Occupational Safety and Health Malaysia, Ministry of Human Resource Malaysia, stress can be defined as the physical and emotional response that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the employees (Di Martino & Mohtar, 2001). While Palmer and Gyllensten (2008) remarked that within cognitive definitions of stress there is focus on the perceptions of the individual. In addition, Palmer, Cooper, and Thomas (2003) proposed that stress occurs when the perceived pressure exceeds the perceived ability to cope.

In an organizational context, job stress is also interpreted as work stress and/or occupational stress. According to Ismail, Mohamed, Sulaiman, Ismail and Wan Mahmood (2010) these terms are often used interchangeably in the workplace, but their meaning refer to the same thing.

Operationally, for this research, job stress was generally measured through six subscales of job stress sources using Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI). The subscales are factor intrinsic to the job, the managerial role, relationship with other people, career and achievement, organizational structure or climate, home or work interface. The measurement of support staff occupational stress is done based on the sum of scores obtained from the items representing the source of stress in (OSI). For example

- i) Factor intrinsic to the job refers to support staff working conditions, workload, working hours, new technology, risk and hazards as well as lack of control in the university. For instance, *“Having to work very long hours”*.
- ii) The managerial role refers to ambiguity, conflict, overload and responsibility of support staff at the university. For instance, *“Ambiguity in the nature of job role”*.
- iii) Relationship with other people refers to relationship of support staff with supervisors, peers and subordinates at the university. For example, *“Lack of social support by people at work”*.
- iv) Career and achievement refer to job insecurity and promotion of support staff at the university. For example, *“Under promotion-working at a level below my level of ability”*
- v) Organizational structure or climate refers to communication, culture, leadership and politics of support staff at university. For example, *“Morale and organisational climate”*.
- vi) Home or work interface refers to resources, behavioural conflict and emotional interference of support staff at the university. For example, *“Taking my work home”*.

1.10.4 Support Staff

According to Malaysian Standard Classification of Occupations (MASCO) 2008, the task for clerical support workers are to record, organize, store and retrieve information related to the work in the questions, compute financial, statistical and

other numerical data and perform a number of client-oriented clerical duties especially in connection with money-handling operations, travel arrangements and business information and appointments. Most occupations in this major group require skills at the second skill level. The term ‘support staff’ in this research refer to all non-academic staff employed within the university sector, including in academic support, administrative support, library and technical areas.

Operationally, for this study, the support staff at UTP can be considered as those who are in the category of non-executive staff. Based on the information gained from Human Resource Management and Administration of UTP, there are 267 non-executive staff in UTP which consist of 21 departments which are Registry Office, Chief Financial Officer Office, Academic Central Services, Information Resource Centre, Information Technology and Media Services, Corporate Services, Human Resource Management and Administration, Computer Information Sciences, Student Support Services, Fundamental and Applied Science, Centre for Graduates Studies, Property Management and Maintenance, Deputy Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation Office, Residential College, Security Services, Industrial Internship Unit, Health, Safety and Environment, Transformation Office, Mosque Administration, Quality Management Unit (QMU) and Vice Chancellor Office.

Those non-executive staff are from many positions such as clerk, technologist, supervisor, secretary, administrative assistant, security personnel, library assistant, technician, customer relation assistant, graphic and photography (CRPA), assistant engineer; electrical engineer and office assistant and so on. Thus, for this research, support staff refer to a total of 60 support staff from many departments in UTP as the respondents.

1.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, the frame of the study for this research had been discussed in this chapter. Firstly, the background of the study and the statement of problems were explained briefly. Then, the researcher listed the research questions, research

objectives and hypothesis so that this study is clearly noticeable. After that, the researcher clarified the significance of the study, scope of the study and limitation of the study. Finally, the conceptual and operational definition based on this research are also included.

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