

How do you deal with stress? In Nigeria, swinging a sledgehammer in a 'rage room' helps

August 25 2024, by CHINEDU ASADU and DAN IKPOYI



Olaribigbe Akeem, wearing protective gear, uses a sledgehammer to break a television set to vent his anger inside the Shadow Rage Room in Lagos, Nigeria, Sunday, July 28, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba

How do you deal with stress? In Lagos, Nigeria's largest city, people are finding their reset button in a "rage room" where they pay to smash electronics and furniture with a sledgehammer as a break from the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation.

The Shadow Rage Room, apparently the first of its kind in Nigeria, offers "a safe space" for people to let out pent-up emotions, according to Dr. James Babajide Banjoko, the founder and a physician. The idea, he said, came during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 after he lost his mother and struggled with work.

For 7,500 naira (\$5), customers are left alone with [protective gear](#) and a sledgehammer or bat in a room for a 30-minute session with the items that are later recycled.

Times are tough in Nigeria, a country of over 200 million people where growing frustration among youths led to recent mass protests in which several people were killed by security forces. The inflation rate has reached a 28-year-high of 33.4%, while the naira currency has fallen to record lows against the dollar.

Mental health services remain foreign or unaffordable for many in Africa's most populous country, where 40% of citizens live below \$2 per day.

The West African nation has fewer than 400 registered psychologists, according to the Nigerian Association of Clinical Psychologists. That means one psychologist for about every half a million people.



James Babajide Banjoko, the founder of the Shadow Rage Room, speaks during an interview in Lagos, Nigeria, Sunday, July 28, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba

Even when therapy is available, stigma remains a challenge, NACP president Gboyega Emmanuel Abikoye said in an interview.

Rage rooms aren't necessarily new in other parts of the world. There is no documented evidence of their mental health benefits beyond the momentary relief that comes with venting your feelings, Abikoye said.

Experts in Nigeria instead see a growing need for more long-term [emotional support](#), especially among [young people](#).

In Lagos, an overcrowded city of about 20 million people and a magnet for those seeking [better opportunities](#), such needs are even more pronounced. Daily stressors include [traffic jams](#) notorious for trapping drivers and passengers on streets for hours in heat and smog in one of the world's most polluted cities.

Some Nigerians have turned to social media platforms like Tiktok as a way to cope with stress. Some find support in communities wherever they can, from the church or mosque to the gym.



Olaribigbe Akeem, wearing protective gear, uses a sledgehammer to break a television set to vent his anger inside the Shadow Rage Room in Lagos, Nigeria, Sunday, July 28, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba

And now there's the rage room, which opens on weekends and is usually fully booked up to two weeks ahead, according to Banjoko, the founder.

At the end of one session of smashing, Olaribigbe Akeem, a recent visitor, came out sweating but relieved and visibly happy.

"As an average Nigerian, you get to deal with a lot every day," Akeem said. "The anger has been piling up (and) instead of venting on somebody, this is the best avenue for me, and I feel a lot renewed."

Rage room visitors also include couples who want to get something off their chest.

At times, people come in for recreation but find something more.

"My favorite people are those that ... just want to try it, and at the end of the day, you see them, they break down, they cry, they become very expressive," Banjoko said. He said he often refers them to therapy.



A man laughs after breaking a television set to vent his anger outside the Shadow Rage Room in Lagos, Nigeria, Sunday, July 28, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba

Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri, a Lagos-based psychiatrist, said any benefit from smashing things is usually short-lived and can't be a replacement for therapy.

There is also the risk of such a practice making someone less likely to use "healthy coping strategies," she said, and expressed concern that "repeated engagement ... might reinforce aggressive tendencies."



People wearing protective gear use sledgehammers to break a television set to vent their anger outside the Shadow Rage Room in Lagos, Nigeria, Sunday, July 28, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba



Olaribigbe Akeem, reacts after breaking a television set to vent his anger inside the Shadow Rage Room in Lagos, Nigeria, Sunday, July 28, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba



People wearing protective gear use sledgehammers to break a television set to vent their anger outside the Shadow Rage Room in Lagos, Nigeria, Sunday, July 28, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba



Eka Stephanie Paul, wearing protective gear, uses a bat to break a television set to vent her anger inside the Shadow Rage Room in Lagos, Nigeria, Sunday, July 28, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba

At the rage room, some customers said their problems feel lighter only until they leave and re-enter [daily life](#).

But being vulnerable with yourself while inside, sledgehammer in hand, is still worth it, said Eka Stephanie Paul, an actor and TV host.

"Problem no dey finish anyway," she said in the pidgin widely spoken across Nigeria, acknowledging that the rage room is hardly a cure. "But right now, I feel very light."

© 2024 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: How do you deal with stress? In Nigeria, swinging a sledgehammer in a 'rage room' helps (2024, August 25) retrieved 25 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-08-stress-nigeria-sledgehammer-rage-room.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.