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## **Emotional abuse in intimate relationships: Is that surviving because it is not physical?**

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### **Abstract**

The present study is aimed to explore and describe the meaning and impact of emotional abuse in intimate relationships. Emotional abuse is any kind of abuse that is emotional rather than physical in nature. People often see the victim as unstable or dramatic. They seem angry, depressed and sometimes lash out. They are experiencing overwhelming emotions and are unable to make people explain their pain. Emotional abuse leaves no scars physically but it surely leaves long-lasting scar in your personality, your outlook and self identity. Include anything from verbal abuse and constant criticism to more subtle tactics such as intimidation, manipulation, and refusal to ever be pleased. This abuse occurs when someone uses words or actions to try and control the other person, to keep someone afraid or isolated, or try to break someone's self-esteem. Blaming, shaming, and name calling are a few verbally abusive behaviours which can affect a victim emotionally. The victim's self-worth and emotional well-being are altered and even diminished by the verbal abuse, resulting in an emotionally-abused victim. The victim may experience severe psychological effects. This would involve the tactics of brainwashing, which can fall under psychological abuse as well, but emotional abuse consists of the manipulation of the victim's emotions. The victim may feel their emotions are being affected by the abuser to such an extent that the victim may no longer recognize their own feelings regarding the issues the abuser is trying to control. The result is the victim's self-concept and independence are systematically taken away. This study seeks to assess the nature and extent of emotional abuse in intimate relationships.

**Keywords:** Manipulation, depression, criticism, low confidence, commenting

### **Introduction**

There are wounds that never show on the body but that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds. Mental abuse doesn't happen suddenly, it is insidious, creeping in slowly, until one day they do not recognise yourself. It is the epitome of domestic violence. It can include anything from verbal abuse and constant criticism to more subtle tactics such as intimidation, manipulation, and refusal to ever be pleased. This abuse occurs when someone uses words or actions to try and control the other person, to keep someone afraid or isolated, or try to break someone's self-esteem. Emotional abuse leaves no scars physically but it surely leaves long-lasting scar in your personality, your outlook and self identity. People will manipulate you, blame you and make you feel low about yourself. Constant criticism and making demeaning comments about their life, background and family add to emotional abuse for the victim. Communicating in a sarcastic tone, yelling, commenting are hurtful for the victim. Emotional abusers do not take responsibility but place blame elsewhere. They ignore feelings and put people down intentionally. They use guilt to control you. One of the prominent sign of a people being mentally abused is that they feel like they are not enough. They break down during small arguments. They need a lot of reassurance. They apologize constantly.

Emotional abusers hurt you in other ways without touching you. The abused may look healthy and beautiful physically but mentally they are drained. In many ways emotional abuse can be more psychologically harmful than physical abuse. The abused persons becomes unmotivated and under confident. They even lose the confidence to face the world. Just because a person does not put hands on someone that doesn't mean he is not abusive. Abuse is control, blatant disrespect and also hurtful words.

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An abuser hits with accusations, manipulation, control, criticism, silence, betrayal, slander, abandonment and yet he never touched his victim.

Many abusers are able to control their victims in a manipulative manner, utilizing methods to persuade others to conform to the wishes of the abuser, rather than to force them to do something they do not wish to do. For partner rage or obvious emotional manipulation, the absence of caring and respectful partner behaviours was just as powerful in creating an emotionally abusive experience as openly abusive behaviours, and being emotionally abused was a life journey, encompassing multiple culminations, secondary physical and mental health symptoms, and quality of life issues that extended well beyond the immediate abuse experience.

### Objectives

1. To understand the meaning and definition of emotional abuse.
2. To know the immediate signs of Psychological abuse.
3. To know the short and long term Impact of emotional abuse.
4. To understand the types of emotional abuse.
5. To know the preventive measures of emotional abuse.

### Methodology

This study is purely qualitative in nature. The study is phenomenological study based on self understanding and data taken from secondary sources such as books, magazines, newspapers, articles etc.

### Signs of emotional abuse in an individual

A relationship is still abusive if people face emotional abuse rather than physical abuse. People may be facing emotional abuse if they feel as though something in their relationship is not right, feel scared, or think nothing they do is right in the eyes of their partner.

### Signs that a person may be emotionally abusive include

- Belittling a partner, calling them names, or putting them down
- Humiliating or intentionally embarrassing a partner
- Threatening to harm their partner or themselves if a partner leaves
- Stalking
- Gaslighting
- Controlling their partner's actions or monitoring their phone and emails
- Pressuring a person into sexual activity
- Being upset when a partner spends time alone or with other people
- Being overly jealous or possessive
- Blaming their abusive behavior on their partner

### Types of emotional abuse

Abusive people may try to make a person feel shame for their shortcomings or feel as though they are much worse for these shortcomings. This takes many forms, including:

**Lectures:** The abusive person may give lectures about the other person's behavior, in a way to make it clear that the other person is inferior.

**Outbursts:** This involves aspects of control, as well. Not doing what an abusive person wants may result in an outburst of angry behavior from them. It is both a way to control the person and make them feel shame for "not listening."

**Lies:** Abusive people may blatantly lie, telling the person false opinions from their friends about their "bad" behavior.

**Walkouts:** Abusive people may leave a situation rather than resolve it. In a disagreement at home, for example, they may remark about how the other is "crazy." This can put all the blame on the other person and make them feel ashamed while also never solving the issue.

**Trivializing:** If the other person wishes to talk about their issues or problems, the abusive person may criticize them for even having the issue or tell them that they are making a big deal out of nothing.

**Blame:** Blame typically stems from the abusive person's sense of insecurity. By blaming others, they do not have to feel their shortcomings. This may take many forms, such as:

**Jealousy:** Jealousy can be an abuse tactic. The abusive person may regularly confront the other for talking to or "flirting with" other people. They may accuse the other person of cheating on them regularly.

**Playing the victim:** The abusive person may try to turn the tables on the other person by blaming them for the issues the abusive person has not dealt with. They may even accuse the other person of being the abusive one in the relationship.

**Egging the person on:** The abusive person typically knows how to get the other one angry. They may irritate them until the person becomes upset, and then blame them for getting upset.

**Humiliation:** Much of the time, an abusive person's actions or words seem to serve no purpose other than to humiliate the other. This type of behavior includes:

**Blatant name calling:** Abusive people may blatantly call the other stupid, "an idiot," or other harmful names. If confronted, they may try to pass it off as sarcasm.

**Joking or sarcasm:** Although sarcasm can be a tool for comedic release if both people enjoy the joke, sometimes, abusive people disguise their derogatory remarks as sarcasm. If the other person feels offended, the abusive one may make fun of them further for "lacking a sense of humour."

**Harmful nicknames:** Nicknames or pet names may be normal in relationships. However, a name that hurts is unacceptable.

**Public displays:** Abusive people may openly pick fights in public, only to blame the other person if they become angry. They may also pick on the other person or openly make fun of them in a social setting.

**Patronizing:** This may include talking down to another person for trying to learn something new, or making it obvious that the person is “not on their level.”

**Insults on appearance:** An abusive person may insult the other’s appearance around others.

**Cheating:** Abusive people may cheat on their partners to hurt or humiliate them, or to imply that they are highly desirable.

**Unpredictability:** Abusive people may seem to make situations chaotic for no other reason than to keep the other in check. Unpredictable behaviours may include:

- Drastic mood swings, such as from being very affectionate to full of rage and breaking things
- Emotional outbursts
- Starting arguments for seemingly no reason
- Self-contradiction, such as making a statement that contradicts the one they just said
- Gaslighting, such as denying facts or making the other feel as though they do not remember the situation correctly
- Acting two faced, such as being charming in public but completely changing the minute they get home

### **Impact of emotional abuse**

The most salient feature of overt emotional abuse is the openly demeaning way in which men treat women, while covert emotional abuse is striking because of its insidious nature (Loring, 1994) <sup>[5]</sup>. However, self-deception also prevents one from recognising how betrayed, burdened and unloved one may feel. Because of the gradual and insidious way this behaviour develops in couples, women are often unable to take preventative measures before the abuse has become chronically established in the relationship. By that time their sense of self may be weakened to such an extent that they do not have enough personal resources left to take action.

The impact of emotional abuse may differ depending on what type of abuse is used, and whether it was perceived as intentional, as well as on an individual's personality, and it may impact on women's emotions, behaviour and physical and mental health. Each of these will be addressed in turn.

### **Emotions**

Men and women may, therefore, feel the same emotion but may express it differently because of the way in which they have been socialised. An emotionally abused person becomes emotionally weak. He often shows heightened emotions in any matter.

### **Codependency**

Long-term emotional abuse can make you feel as if your needs don’t matter as much as everyone else’s. This can lead to co-dependent or ignoring your own needs and boundaries. You might also engage in people-pleasing behaviors or tend to establish relationships with abusive partners.

### **Fear of abandonment**

If emotional distance was used as a manipulation tactic, you might feel high levels of stress or abandonment anxiety in your relationships. This could manifest as a behavior sometimes labeled “clinginess” that’s often rooted in a deep fear of losing your support system.

### **Trust challenges**

Past emotional abuse can make it harder for you to trust even a supportive, compassionate partner. When you’ve been let down in the past, it can take courage and vulnerability to trust that another person won’t hurt you again on purpose.

### **Difficulty being authentic**

If the emotional abuse you experienced often took the form of criticism or picking you apart, you might have internalized some of these comments leading you to feel shame. As a result, it could seem difficult and scary to open up to a partner, leading to emotional distance in the relationship.

### **Effects of emotional abuse on self-image**

The way you view and relate to yourself can also change in the wake of chronic or isolated emotional abuse:

#### **Low self-esteem**

Emotional abuse that consists of put-downs can wear your self-esteem thin, leading to feelings of worthlessness. It might make you feel like you’re less deserving or valid than the people around you.

#### **Self-doubt**

Emotional abuse called gaslighting can make you question your own thoughts, abilities, and perception of reality. If you’ve been continuously gaslit, you might notice you have less confidence in your own instincts. You might question yourself more often, tend to self-sabotage, or have more difficulty identifying and trusting your own feelings.

#### **Shame**

Sometimes emotional abuse involves behaviours intended to making you feel ashamed of parts of who you are, such as personality quirks, likes and dislikes, or hopes for the future. This can cause you to stifle parts of your identity to avoid feeling the shame associated with them.

#### **Lesser clarity of thoughts**

Psychologically abused person is mentally missing and absent in any social situation. He is unable to express and explain himself. He is indecisive and under confident.

#### **How to overcome**

Recognition of abuse is the first step to prevention. It is often difficult for abuse victims to acknowledge their situation and to seek help. For those who *do* seek help, research has shown that people who participate in an intimate partner violence prevention program report less psychological aggression toward their targets of psychological abuse, and reported victimization from psychological abuse decreased over time for the treatment group.

1. Consider writing in a journal to put your feelings into words.
2. Make new friends who appreciate you and accept you as you are.
3. Never lose the belief that you can achieve anything you put your mind into.
4. Make new goals and work towards them everyday.
5. Your happiness is your responsibility. Never put that responsibility on other’s shoulders.

6. Be selfish and never feel guilty for putting yourself first.

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