



EFFECTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE ON WOMEN'S SELF-ESTEEM AND DATING RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

Psychological abuse, a pervasive yet under-recognized form of domestic violence, can have significant detrimental effects on women's well-being. This study explores the impact of psychological abuse on self-esteem and subsequent dating relationships. Research suggests abusive partners often engage in tactics that erode self-worth, potentially aligning with self-enhancement theory, where negative feedback from a partner weakens a woman's perception of herself. The study examines the potential link between these experiences and the stability and intimacy found in future dating relationships. Understanding this connection can offer

valuable insights for supporting survivors and developing interventions to promote healthy relationships.

Keywords: Psychological Abuse, Women's Self-Esteem, Dating Relationships

Introduction

Romantic relationships are a cornerstone of human experience, offering companionship, intimacy, and support. However, not all relationships provide a healthy and nurturing environment. Psychological abuse, a pervasive form of intimate partner violence (IPV), shattering trust and love foundation, leaving lasting scars on a woman's self-esteem and impacting her ability to navigate future dating relationships. This thesis explores the insidious effects of psychological abuse on women, focusing on the interconnectedness of self-worth and the ability to form healthy, fulfilling romantic bonds. Psychological abuse is distinct from physical violence, encompasses a behavior range aimed at controlling, humiliating, and isolating the victim. Tactics like gaslighting, emotional manipulation, verbal threats, and social isolation.

The psychological abuse experience is often shrouded in secrecy and shame, making it difficult for women to seek help or leave the abusive relationship (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2023). Alfonso (2019) states the constant criticism barrage, belittlement, and gaslighting chips away at a woman's sense of self-worth, leading to inadequacy feelings, self-doubt, and insecurity. Felser (2014) suggests a cyclical relationship between low self-esteem and vulnerability to abuse. Women with low self-esteem may be inclined to enter and remain in abusive relationships, while the abuse experience further erodes their sense of worth.

Karakurt (2013) states that the ripple effects of psychological abuse on women's dating relationships, experiencing manipulation and control can leave lasting scars, creating a sense of fear and distrust towards potential partners. Women who have been psychologically abused may struggle to identify healthy relationship dynamics, leading them to unknowingly enter into situations with similar patterns of control or abuse. Low self-esteem can make it difficult to set healthy boundaries and communicate effectively, hindering the ability to form trusting respectful connections.

By understanding the psychological impact of abuse and its lingering effects, we can work towards empowering women to recognize unhealthy patterns, build healthy self-esteem, and navigate future relationships with greater confidence and clarity.

Psychological Abuse

Defining Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse or emotional abuse, is a behaviour used to control, manipulate, and humiliate a partner. Unlike physical abuse, it leaves no visible marks but can be damaging to a woman's self-esteem, sense of reality, and overall well-being (Montero, 2011).

Psychological Abuse Forms

Psychological abuse manifests in various forms, often overlapping and escalating over time. Here are some common tactics employed by abusers:

- **Verbal abuse:** Name-calling, insults, put-downs, threats, and constant criticism (Violence Against Women, 2021).
- **Gaslighting:** Manipulating the victim's reality perception, causing them to question their sanity and memories (Gupta, 2023).

- **Isolation:** Restricting victim's contact with friends, family, and social support (Emotional and Psychological Abuse, 2021).
- **Intimidation:** Threats, anger outbursts, or weapons to create a climate of fear (Emotional and Psychological Abuse, 2021).
- **Humiliation:** The abuser publicly belittles or shames the victim (Emotional and Psychological Abuse, 2021).
- **Jealousy and possessiveness:** Accusing a victim of infidelity and controlling their movements (Violence Against Women, 2021)
- **Financial control:** Restricting the victim's financial resources, making them financially dependent.

Psychological Abuse Impacts

Radell (2021) explained that the psychological abuse consequences are far-reaching and can negatively impact a woman's mental, emotional, and physical health. Some common effects include:

- **Depression and anxiety:** Abused women are likely to develop depression and anxiety disorders.
- **Low self-esteem:** Constant criticism and belittling can erode a woman's self-worth and confidence.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** The chronic stress and fear associated with abuse can lead to symptoms like flashbacks and nightmares.
- **Physical health problems:** Psychological abuse can manifest in physical symptoms like headaches, stomachaches, and sleep disturbances.
- **Suicidal ideation:** In severe cases, the emotional pain and isolation can lead to suicidal thoughts

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem plays a crucial role in mental and emotional well-being, while self-esteem is a universal human experience, research suggests women may have a more complex relationship with it than men.

Defining Self-Esteem

It encompasses both cognitive and affective components. The cognitive aspect refers to “our beliefs about ourselves, while the affective aspect reflects our feelings of self-worth, high self-esteem is associated with positive self-beliefs, confidence, and a sense of competence.” Low self-esteem can manifest as self-criticism, inadequacy, and tendency to doubt one's abilities (The Feeling Self: Self-Esteem, 2022).

Factors Influencing Self-Esteem in Women

Several factors contribute to self-esteem development in women. These include:

- **Body Image:** Societal pressure to achieve an ideal physique can impact self-esteem, particularly during adolescence and young adulthood.
- **Gender Roles:** Traditional gender roles can limit opportunities and create self-doubt in women, hindering their sense of accomplishment.
- **Media Representation:** The women's portrayal in media often reinforces unrealistic beauty standards, potentially decreasing body satisfaction and self-esteem.
- **Discrimination Experiences:** Sexism or microaggressions can negatively impact self-esteem.

Challenges and Consequences of Low Self-Esteem for Women

Women with low self-esteem might experience a range of challenges, including:

- ***Difficulty Making Decisions:*** Self-doubt can make it difficult to make choices or take risks.
- ***Relationship Issues:*** Low self-esteem can affect the ability to establish healthy and fulfilling relationships.
- ***Mental Health Concerns:*** Low self-esteem is a risk factor for anxiety, depression, and eating disorders.⁸
- ***Career Limitations:*** Negative self-beliefs can hinder career aspirations and limit professional development.

Dating Relationships and Women

Dating relationships are a crucial stage in developing romantic partnerships. They provide a platform for individuals to assess compatibility, build emotional intimacy, and explore long-term potential. Understanding the dating relationship dynamics, particularly for women, is vital for researchers and those navigating this complex social landscape.

Dating Relationships Characteristics

Dating relationships are characterized by a gradual increase in intimacy and commitment. Initially, casual dates allow for initial impressions and surface-level connections. As partners progress, dates become more intimate, involving shared activities, deeper conversations, and potentially, physical intimacy. Communication plays a significant role, with self-disclosure and active listening fostering emotional connection (Buehler, 2000).

Unique Experiences for Women

Women's experiences in dating relationships can be influenced by various factors, including social norms, gender roles, and personal values. Studies suggest women often prioritize emotional connection and communication during the initial dating stages. They may place greater emphasis on a partner's ability to listen, be supportive, and express affection verbally (Solomon, 2003).

Safety and security are also significant concerns for women. Research indicates women are likely to be the target of violence on dates. This can lead to heightened vigilance and a focus on the partner's character and behavior.

Furthermore, societal expectations regarding gender roles can influence women's dating experiences. Traditional norms might suggest men initiate dates and take on a more assertive role. However, these norms are evolving, with women initiating dates and expressing their desires.

Factors Influencing Women's Decisions

Several factors influence women's decisions within dating relationships. These include:

- **Personal Values:** A woman's values and priorities impact her dating choices. She might seek a partner who shares her religious beliefs, desire for children, or career aspirations.
- **Emotional Compatibility:** Women often prioritize emotional connection and compatibility. Feeling understood, respected, and supported by a partner can be a significant factor in deciding to pursue a relationship further.
- **Physical Attraction:** While not the sole factor, however, research suggests attraction often deepens as emotional intimacy grows.

Understanding the characteristics of these relationships and the unique experiences of women within them is crucial. Women's decisions are influenced by a complex interplay of personal values, emotional connection, societal expectations, and safety concerns. Further research is needed to explore the evolving dating landscape and how factors like online dating platforms shape women's experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To Study the Effect of Psychological Abuse on Women's Self Esteem and Dating Relationship.

Research Objectives

- Investigate the Impact of Psychological Abuse on Self-esteem.
- Examine the Effect of Psychological Abuse on Relationship Satisfaction.
- To study the relationship between self-esteem and psychological abuse.
- To study the Significant relationship of relationship satisfaction and psychological abuse.

Hypothesis

- Hypothesis 1: Psychological abuse has a significant impact on self-esteem.
- Hypothesis 2: Psychological abuse has a significant impact on relationship satisfaction.
- Hypothesis 3: Significant relationship between self-esteem and psychological abuse.
- Hypothesis 4: Significant relationship between relationship satisfaction and psychological abuse.

Tools

1. A generic measure of Relationship Satisfaction by Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

Introduction - It is a tool designed to gauge overall satisfaction in a relationship. It's intended for use in various committed partnerships, including marriage, cohabitation, engagement, or even dating relationships.

Tool Description - A 7-item scale designed to measure general relationship satisfaction. Respondents answer each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction).

Reliability and Validity - The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) demonstrates good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > .80) and moderate test-retest reliability.

It exhibits content validity by targeting relationship perception and shows criterion-related validity by correlating with other satisfaction measures. Additionally, predictive validity is evidenced through its ability to forecast relationship outcomes like breakups.

Scoring -

- The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) measures relationship satisfaction through 7 questions, each on a 5-point Likert scale.
- Two questions are reverse-scored, a high score on these questions actually reflects low satisfaction,
- To calculate the total score, reverse the values for these questions and sum up all 7 responses.
- Higher scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction.
- A score closer to 35 (the maximum possible) suggests high satisfaction.
- A score in the mid-20s might reflect moderate satisfaction.

- Scores below 20 could indicate areas for improvement or potential dissatisfaction.

2. To Assess an Individual's Self-Esteem by Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Introduction - It was developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1965 and is used to measure self-esteem in research.

Tool Description - A 10-item scale measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Reliability and Validity - The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) demonstrates strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.88, indicating good reliability.

Test-retest reliability is high over short periods (around 0.85 over 2 weeks), but can decrease over longer periods. In terms of construct validity, the RSES generally measures global self-esteem well. Concurrent validity is supported by correlations with other measures of self-esteem.

Scoring - RSES is a 10-question scale that uses a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 are reverse scored. Sum scores for all ten items. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

3. To assess Psychological Abuse within Romantic Relationships by The Scale of Psychological Abuse in Intimate Partner Violence (EAPA-P).

Introduction - EAPA-P developed by developed by Sonia Rodríguez Cervantes, Susana Medina-Ariza, and Antonia Orellana Ruíz. It's a tool developed to assess psychological abuse within romantic relationships.

Tool Description - It's a 19-question instrument designed to assess psychological abuse within romantic relationships.

The scale focuses on two main types:

- Direct PA strategies: These tactics target the emotional, cognitive, and victim's behavioural aspects.
- Indirect PA strategies: These behaviours focus on controlling and dominating the victim's environment.

Reliability and Validity - The EAPA-P scale demonstrates good reliability, measuring consistent psychological abuse concepts. It also exhibits strong validity, including internal validity, construct validity (distinguishing abuse experience and correlating with mental health indicators), and factorial validity (measuring direct and indirect abuse strategies).

Scoring - The EAPA-P consists of 19 items. Each item uses a 6 Likert-scale format, where responses range from "never" to "continually". Scores are calculated by summing the values chosen for each question. Higher scores indicate a greater likelihood of experiencing psychological abuse.

VARIABLES

Independent Variable: Psychological Abuse

Dependent Variable: Women's Self-Esteem and Dating Relationship

RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Quantitative Approach:** A quantitative research design will be employed in this research. This allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data through standardized tools.

Justification for Quantitative Approach:

Standardized Data: Questionnaires like the Relationship Assessment Scale, RSES and the Scale of Psychological Abuse in Intimate Partner Violence (EAPA-P) ensure consistent data collection across varieties of women.

Large Samples: This approach is suitable for analysing data from a large sample of women enhancing the generalizability of findings to a broader population.

Hypothesis Testing: The research aims to test specific hypotheses regarding the relationships between the 3 study variables. Quantitative methods offer robust statistical techniques for hypothesis testing.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Ethical Considerations

Similar to the example, obtaining informed consent from participants is crucial. This involves seeking consent from the Women.

Participant Selection

Women from various regions of Delhi-NCR can be recruited through online platforms or by giving the questionnaires manually.

SAMPLE

To complete the study, data from 132 women who fall between the range of **18-36 years** old from Delhi-NCR was collected.

DATA ANALYSIS

For the scoring Descriptive Statistics, Correlation analysis by Pearson Correlation coefficient and Regression Analysis were used.

RESULTS

Table 1

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of all the study variables

		Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Psychological abuse	16.18	16.65
2	Self-esteem	28.54	5.36
3	Relationship satisfaction	27.77	6.50

Table 2*Coefficient of correlation between the study variables*

	Psychological abuse	Self-esteem	Relationship Satisfaction
Psychological abuse	-		
Self-esteem	-.47**	-	
Relationship Satisfaction	-.58**	.45**	-

***Correlation is significant at 0.01 level*

The correlation between psychological abuse and self-esteem was significant and negative. The correlation between psychological abuse and relationship satisfaction was significant and negative.

Table 3*Linear regression with psychological abuse as predictor of relationship satisfaction, and self-esteem*

Predictors	Criterion: Psychological Abuse								
	B	S. E.	β	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	α	F
Relationship Satisfaction	-1.18	.19	-.46	6.01**	.63	.39	.38	57.81	42.40**
Self-Esteem	-.82	.23	-.26	3.46**					

***significant at 0.01 level (p<0.01)*

Table 3 represents the stepwise linear regression with relationship satisfaction, and self-esteem as predictor of psychological abuse. Relationship satisfaction, and self-esteem explained about 39% of negative variance on relationship satisfaction psychological abuse.

Discussion

This study aims to see the effects of Psychological Abuse on Women's self-esteem and dating relationships. Psychological abuse, a pervasive form of maltreatment in intimate relationships, has garnered increasing attention in recent years due to its detrimental effects on victims. Among its various consequences, psychological abuse has been linked to diminished self-esteem and reduced satisfaction in romantic relationships, particularly among women. Understanding the intricate dynamics between psychological abuse, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction is crucial for developing effective intervention strategies and support systems for individuals experiencing such maltreatment. This discussion delves into the findings of a study examining the effects of psychological abuse on women's self-esteem and dating relationships, as elucidated by descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and linear regression.

Descriptive Statistics

The study's descriptive statistics reveal the central tendencies and variability of the key variables under investigation. Psychological abuse, as measured by the participants, exhibited a mean score of 16.18 with a standard deviation of 16.65. This indicates a considerable range in reported levels of psychological abuse among the sample. Self-esteem and relationship satisfaction displayed means of 28.54 and 27.77, respectively, with moderate levels of variability denoted by their standard deviations.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis provides insights into the relationships between psychological abuse, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction. Significant negative correlations were observed between psychological abuse and both self-esteem ($r = -.47$, $p < 0.01$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.58$, $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that as levels of psychological abuse increase, women tend to experience lower self-esteem and diminished satisfaction in their dating relationships. The strength of these correlations underscores the detrimental impact of psychological abuse on both individual well-being and relationship quality.

Linear Regression Analysis

Further elucidating the relationship dynamics, linear regression analysis was conducted with psychological abuse as the predictor of both relationship satisfaction and self-esteem. The results indicate psychological abuse predicts both relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.46$, $p < 0.01$) and self-esteem ($\beta = -.26$, $p < 0.01$). For every unit increase in psychological abuse, there is a corresponding decrease in relationship satisfaction and self-esteem. Relationship satisfaction, and self-esteem explained about 39% of negative variance on relationship satisfaction psychological abuse.

The findings of this study underscore the profound impact of psychological abuse on women's self-esteem and dating relationships. The negative correlations and significant regression coefficients suggest psychological abuse undermines the quality and satisfaction of romantic partnerships. These insights have important implications for clinical practice, advocacy efforts, and policy interventions aimed at addressing and preventing psychological abuse in intimate relationships.

By recognizing the interconnectedness of psychological abuse, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction, practitioners and support systems can better tailor interventions to meet the multifaceted needs of survivors. Empowering individuals with resources for self-care, assertiveness training, and healthy relationship skills can mitigate the deleterious effects of psychological abuse and foster resilience. Raising awareness and promoting societal dialogue about the prevalence and consequences of psychological abuse is essential for challenging cultural norms that perpetuate such harmful behaviors.

Conclusion

This study investigated the psychological abuse effects on women's self-esteem and dating relationships. The findings provide strong evidence for a negative association. Women experiencing higher levels of psychological abuse reported lower self-esteem and lower relationship satisfaction. This underscores the detrimental impact of psychological abuse on both personal well-being and the romantic relationships quality.

These results prioritize awareness about the signs of abuse, empowering women to identify and escape abusive relationships while providing support services to help women heal by helping rebuild self-esteem and fostering healthy relationship patterns

Future research can further explore the nuances of this issue. Investigating specific types of psychological abuse and their differential impact can provide deeper insights. Longitudinal studies track changes over time and can offer a clearer picture of the causal relationship between abuse and its consequences. By understanding the full scope of the problem, we can develop more effective interventions and support systems to help women build healthy and fulfilling lives.

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