

The psychological consequences of domestic violence

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence, also referred to as domestic abuse, encompasses a range of behaviors employed in relationships to establish and maintain power and control over an intimate partner. These abusive behaviors can be physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological, causing fear, intimidation, manipulation, pain, degradation, and blame. Domestic violence affects individuals irrespective of their gender, age, sexual orientation, or race, occurring in various relationship scenarios, including marriage, cohabitation, and dating. Its impact extends across different socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels.

Domestic violence has significant adverse effects on individuals' overall

health and well-being, leading to physical harm, anxiety, sadness, and diminished social skills. Moreover, it increases the risk of engaging in self-destructive behaviors like substance abuse and self-harm. Anyone, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or socioeconomic class, can become a victim of domestic violence. Additionally, other household members, including children and family members, can also fall victim to domestic violence. It commonly manifests as a pattern of abusive behavior by an intimate partner in a romantic or familial relationship, with the abuser exerting control and authority over the victim.

Key Words: *Violent behavior; Inhumane behavior; Psychological trauma; Menfolk*

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in an environment where repetitive and ongoing physical, psychological, and emotional abuse occurs can have detrimental effects on a child's development. Such an environment normalizes abuse, making the child more likely to seek out relationships that resemble what they witnessed at home. Studies have shown that boys who are exposed to domestic violence tend to replicate their fathers' actions, using offensive language, slurs, and physical force to assert control over women. Similarly, girls imitate their mothers' behavior, including submission and engaging in sexual activities before being ready. Girls exposed to domestic violence may also justify their boyfriends' abusive actions [1].

Causes of domestic violence

- Women and children are often the most vulnerable targets of domestic abuse, leading to numerous fatalities. Illiteracy and financial dependence on males are two common factors

contributing to marital violence (Figure 1).



Figure 1) Causes of violence

- The male-dominated nature of society significantly contributes to domestic violence, with dowry being a major

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factor in violence against newlywed wives. Physical abuse and verbal insults against women are prevalent in many regions.

- Children are frequently victims of domestic violence, and it is crucial to recognize society's hypocrisy and double standards. In some cases, the abuser may require mental health therapy or exhibit signs of instability.

It is essential to understand that domestic violence is the result of repeated abusive behavior exhibited by certain members of society [2]. Those who enable or witness abuse are equally responsible as the abuser. Recognizing the signs of domestic abuse:

Does your partner...

- Mock or embarrass you in front of friends or family?
- Belittle your accomplishments?
- Make you feel incapable of making decisions?
- Use threats or intimidation to control you?
- Make you feel worthless without them?
- Physically harm you by grabbing, pushing, hitting, or other violent acts?
- Constantly check up on you or question your whereabouts?
- Use drugs or alcohol to justify abusive behavior?
- Blame you for their emotions or actions?
- Pressure you into unwanted sexual activities?
- Limit your freedom to do things you enjoy, such as spending time with friends or family?
- Prevent you from leaving or abandon you as a form of punishment?

The cycle of violence in domestic abuse (Figure 2)



Figure 2) Cycle of violence

- Abuse: The abusive partner displays violent, aggressive, or abusive behavior to assert dominance.
- Guilt: Following the abuse, the abuser experiences guilt, mainly due to fear of exposure and consequences for their actions.
- Excuses: The abuser justifies their behavior, offering a range of defenses or shifting blame onto the victim.
- Normal behavior: The abuser tries to regain control and keep the victim in the relationship. They may act as if nothing happened or display charm, creating a temporary honeymoon period where the victim may feel hopeful for change.
- Making plans and fantasizing: The abuser begins to envision repeating the abuse, analyzing the victim's perceived wrongs and planning how to carry out future abuse.
- Set-up: The abuser sets up the victim, executing their plan and creating circumstances to rationalize their behavior.

Leaving an abusive relationship can be challenging due to intermittent apologies and kind gestures from the abuser. They may manipulate the victim into believing they can change, that they care deeply, and that only the victim can help them. However, staying in such a situation poses significant risks [3].

If you can relate to any of the following, seek assistance:

- Do you fear your partner's actions?
- Constantly make excuses for your partner's behavior?
- Believe that changing yourself could change your partner?
- Avoid actions that might upset your partner?
- Prioritize your partner's instructions over your own desires?
- Stay in the relationship out of fear for your safety?
- Reach out to someone for help if you are experiencing any of these signs. Without assistance, the abuse will likely continue. Reaching out for help is a courageous step.

The most evident forms of domestic abuse—physical and sexual assaults or threats are often what brings attention to the issue. However, these physical acts of violence reinforce the abuser's ongoing use of other abusive behaviors, creating a cycle of abuse. Even if physical assaults are infrequent, they create fear and give the abuser power over the victim's life and environment [4-6].

Types of abuse

- Emotional abuse: This includes insults, frequent criticism, lack of trust, isolation from friends and family, controlling behavior, and threats to harm family members, pets, or children.
- Psychological abuse: This involves instilling fear through intimidation, threats of physical harm to oneself, one's

partner, or one's children, destroying possessions or pets, and employing manipulative tactics to isolate the victim [7].

- Financial or economic abuse: This encompasses exerting control over finances, restricting access to money, and limiting participation in work or education, leading to financial dependency [8].
- Physical abuse: This refers to causing physical harm or attempting to do so through various forms of violence, including hitting, kicking, burning, choking, and withholding medical attention [9-10].
- Sexual abuse: This involves coercing a partner into unwanted sexual activities, engaging in sexual insults, using force during sexual encounters, or involving others without consent [11].

CONCLUSION

Domestic abuse should be treated as a public health issue rather than a private matter. To effectively address domestic violence, it is crucial to recognize how it is rooted in and perpetuated by the larger structural inequality and lack of power that women experience in relation to men. No one deserves to be mistreated, and victims are not to blame for the abuse they endure. If you suspect you are experiencing any form of abuse or fear for your safety or the safety of your children, reach out to the Critical Incident Stress Management Unit (CISMU) or seek support from relevant organizations to find the assistance you need.

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