Lived Experiences of Psychological Abuse and Psychosocial Vulnerabilities among Men in Dating Relationships: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored psychological abuse among men in dating relationships, an area that remains underrepresented in intimate partner violence research. Five male participants aged 20 to 30 years were recruited through a two-phase process: initial screening using the Multi-dimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA) questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed using a phenomenological approach and thematic analysis guided by the Attride-Stirling model, resulting in four global themes, eight organising themes, and eighteen basic themes. Findings revealed multiple forms of psychologically abusive behaviours, including manipulation, humiliation, and controlling actions, which had significant adverse effects on participants' mental health. The study also highlighted the critical role of social support in coping and recovery, underscoring its importance in intervention strategies aimed to improve well-being. These results contribute to the limited literature on male psychological abuse and the need for further research on early detection, long-term consequences, and gender-specific support systems.

Keywords: Psychological Abuse; Intimate Partner Violence; Male Survivors; Qualitative Research; Thematic Analysis; Dating Violence

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is considered a universal public health issue irrespective of social, economic, religious, or cultural group [1]. While there are reports of prevalence of physical violence among men in intimate relationships [2], majority of the studies concerning IPV have been looked at from a gendered perspective- i.e. violence perpetrated by men on women [3]. Hence, there is limited understanding of the effects and the consequences IPV has on men- the similarities or uniqueness IPV experience, the support or the lack thereof for male victims of IPV [4-5].

Psychological abuse then becomes a crucial component in understanding Intimate Partner Violence. While there is no universally accepted definition of psychological abuse, The European Institute of Gender Equality defines psychological violence as "Any act or behaviour which causes psychological harm to the partner or former partner. Psychological violence can take the form of, among others, coercion, defamation, a verbal insult, or harassment" [6] WHO differentiates psychological violence i.e., "insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g., destroying things), threats of harm, threats to take away children" from controlling behaviour, "isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education, or medical care" [6].

While the current study acknowledges that women are more vulnerable to violence in general and the effects of IPV on women, it nevertheless aims to understand men experiencing one type of Intimate Partner Violence- Psychological Abuse. Gubi and Wandera's 2022 study estimated a global prevalence of IPV in men to be around 17-20% yet an accurate account is not recorded due to fewer reports by men due to the stigma attached, stereotypes and gender roles which predominantly look at men from the perspective of a perpetrator [7]. Furthermore, a systematic review with over 58,357 male participants has reported that 20% of men report physical violence, the number is more than double for psychological IPV (44%) [4]. This corroborates the fact that numerous studies have concluded that men seem to report psychological violence more than any other kind of IPV. The findings are in line with a cross-sectional study conducted in the Indian context revealed the presence of IPV at 52.4% in which the majority of them which the majority of them were subjected to emotional/psychological violence at 51.6%, followed by physical violence (6%) and sexual violence (0.4%) [8].

'Men as victims' has been a difficult narrative to accept due to the role men play in society. Men are perceived to being strong, emotionally restrained, 'traditional elements of machismo', [4], dominant, stoic [9]. The stereotypes might play an important role in reluctance in reporting as they would be shamed, embarrassed, fear of being ridiculed, even when reported, they

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would be viewed with suspicion, disbelief or not taken seriously. Over time, the impact of IPV on men has been associated with anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, alcohol and substance misuse, PTSD, decreased self-worth, increased social isolation and so on [7] .

Studying the experience of men becomes pertinent and adds to the scarce body of existing knowledge regarding the difference in psychological abuse in men and women. Especially since studies have established that abuse manifests differently for men and women, but only narratives from female victims have been studied in detail, while experiences and narratives from men have largely been neglected [10,7] . Therefore, the current study aims to understand the less explored area of male experiences of Intimate Partner Violence, specifically Psychological Abuse in dating relationships, by employing a qualitative framework while trying to work against the stereotype and interviewing men as victims of psychological abuse.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

To identify men in dating relationships facing psychological abuse by their partner.

To explore the psychosocial factors that contributes to abuse.

Research Question

What psychosocial factors contribute or play a role in psychological abuse of men in dating relationships?

Sample Population

The sample consists of men the age 20-30 years, who have been in an abusive relationship at least for 6 months in the past or are in a relationship currently for at least 6 months.

Inclusion criteria

* Men in heterosexual relationships.
* Men in an abusive relationship in the past or at present at least for 6 months.

Exclusion criteria

* Men who are married.
* Men who have multiple partners.
* Men under psychiatric medication/ treatment.

Sample size

The researcher received a total of 12 Google Forms, from which seven participants with the highest scores on the questionnaire were selected for the next phase of the study, i.e., a one-on-one, semi-structured interview. Of the seven participants, only five responded to the email. Hence, the semi-structured interview was conducted on the final sample size consisting of five individuals. The sample size had to be limited to five as not many men were willing to take part due to the sensitive nature of the study.

Tools Used

The scale used to screen the participants in stage 1 is the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA) to identify men who are being psychologically abused by their partners. It is an 8-point rating scale, ranging from 0-7, depending on the frequency of the behaviour displayed by the partner. The scale contains a total of 28 items, divided into 4 subscales, having an internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) of the four subscales- Dominance/Intimidation (.84), Restrictive Engulfment (.80), Denigration (.87) and Hostile Withdrawal (.88) [11] .

Research design

The study uses a Qualitative research method of data collection. Phenomenology in qualitative research aims to illuminate how individuals experience and interpret phenomena within their lives, with a special focus on subjective meaning [12]. Thematic analysis is an effective method for rigorously Organising and interpreting these experiential accounts, allowing researchers to identify, code, and refine key themes that represent participants lived realities [13-14].

Together, these approaches provide a powerful framework for understanding psychological experiences from the participant's perspective. Guided by Attride-Stirling's thematic network model, analysis identified global, organizing, and basic themes, providing depth and clarity to participants' accounts [14].

Procedure

The study was divided into two phases. In phase 1, the participants were given a questionnaire (MMEA) to screen for psychological abuse. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms, along with the informed consent and informing them about the two phases of the study. Among them, seven individuals were selected for phase 2, i.e. A semi-structured interview based on the high scores they obtained, as the questionnaire states higher the score, the higher the emotional abuse.

The participants were sent an email to the given email ID, which consisted of details of the guidelines for the interview, stating the purpose and arranging the date for the semi-structured interview. Out of the seven individuals, five participants responded to the mail sent, and an online meeting was arranged through Zoom meetings as an in-person meeting was not feasible due to the given conditions of the ongoing nature of the pandemic. The guidelines comprised information regarding the nature of the interview and the recording of the sessions. The during of the session is 40-60 minutes. The sessions started with building rapport, informing them about confidentiality, and obtaining permission for the audio recording after which the sessions started.

As the study looked to explore factors of psychological abuse and psychosocial vulnerabilities, a semi-structured interview was considered to be a very suitable option, especially for a one-time interview with the participant, as it allows for both structured and unstructured interview methods, containing open-ended questions [15]. After the interview, the data was transcribed, and coding on three levels was undertaken. These

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codes were then classified into major themes to carry out thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interview were analysed using Thematic Analysis. Thematic Analysis refers to "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data"- The study followed the six-step process of Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic framework - Familiarization with data (1), generating initial codes (2), searching for themes (3), reviewing themes (4), defining and naming themes (5), and writing up (6) Haan & Venema, 2025 [18].

The data was coded on three levels using interview transcripts: open coding, the first level of coding to create categories and the development of theoretical domains. This was followed by axial coding, which focuses on refining and further aligning the themes that emerged from open coding. The third level, selective coding, enabled the researcher to select and integrate the themes developed during the axial coding, which helped in interpreting the themes. This extensive process was undertaken to explore the prominent experiences to keep in check the researcher's bias. The themes were finalised after the coding process.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical considerations for the study were in line with the American Psychological Association's ethical principles and code of conduct. Participants received a detailed briefing on informed consent (8.03) and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Stringent procedures were followed to ensure that the researcher's personal beliefs and opinions did not influence any phase of the research.

All data and recordings were securely stored with exclusive access granted to the researcher (4.03) American Psychological Association. Participant information remained strictly confidential (4.01 and 4.02) and was used solely for academic purposes. Any disclosure of data occurred only with the explicit consent of participants. Participants were withdrawn from the study if circumstances arose that warranted such action. No monetary or other forms of incentives were offered for participation [16].

Given the qualitative nature of the research, the potential for bias in data collection and interpretation was acknowledged. The researcher sought to minimise such bias through the use of appropriate probing and prompting techniques, including objective, open-ended questioning while avoiding leading or double-bind questions [17]. As the topic involved sensitive and personal aspects of intimate relationships, the researcher completed online training on conducting qualitative interviews to reduce potential ethical and emotional risks associated with the research process.

RESULTS

The study attempts to explore the experiences of men in abusive relationships, along with the psychosocial factors that play a role in the relationship. The themes derived from the data look at the extent of abuse and its manifestations, as well as the various areas that had an impact on the participants. The study conducted a semi-structured one-on-one interview, which was audio-recorded and coded for thematic analysis. The study employs the Attride-Strilling Thematic network model, a web-like network that aims to explore the significance of the idea to ensure the interpretation of the data into multiple levels having a 3-order network to organise data in a systematic manner. The current study consists of eighteen basic themes (the lower-order themes that are found in the transcripts, during the initial coding); eight organising themes (organising themes organise the basic themes into clusters, which signifies the first-order themes), and four global themes (the super-ordinate themes that encompass the data as a whole) [18].

Figure 1

Attride Stirling's Thematic Network Model representing Basic themes, Organizing themes and Global themes.
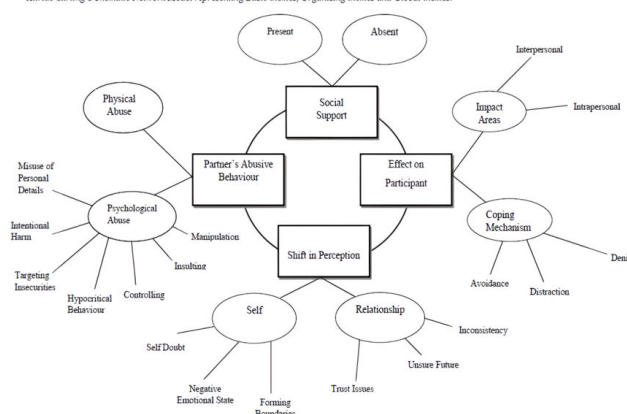
ANALYSIS

The following are the Global themes, organizing themes, and basic themes.

Partner's Abusive Behaviour

While both physical and psychological abuse were reported, most of the participants had experienced psychologically abusive behavior from their partners on multiple occasions. This theme looks at how the partner's behavior caused difficulties to the participants, on multiple fronts. The theme has occurred over 63 times across the data set, reinforcing the manifestation of various forms of psychological abuse. By the obtained data, abusive behavior is further categorized into-

Physical abuse

It is characterized as deliberate actions which lead to bodily harm. Although not many participants reported in this aspect, the presence of physical abuse was reported by only one participant on two occasions, both of which happened when the partner was under the influence of alcohol. As the participant reported "She came and she was like you can't tell him to leave. He's my guest. And she pushed me, ripped my shirt out and yeah, she has hit me with a pan on the head" (AP).

Psychological abuse

Most of the participants reported having faced at least one form of psychological abuse in the duration of their relationship. It refers to the more intentional covert behavior that involves

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manipulation, verbal abuse, shouting or frightening the person, and so on. "She's going to peel off my skin, she gets really personal, she really hurts me and that hurts" (SS), a statement by the participant that concisely captures the feelings of anguish that the victims of psychological abuse go through

Manipulation

The participants' change in behavior would be undertaken, in indirect ways to achieve whatever the partner wants. As mentioned by the participant "So every time, whenever I move away from the relationship, she would throw something in there...like really emotionally traumatize me" (AP).

Controlling

The partner tries to dominate and wants the participant to comply with either needs, even at the expense of the other person. "I won't let you eat so that you don't put on weight. But I still love you. I want you to be the best, the right version of you" (SS)

Insulting/taunting

Disrespectful marks made by the partner could be covered in the form of humor. As stated by the participant- "But she called me skinny all the time 'you're so skinny, you're that, this and all that'. Damn" (AK).

Hypocritical behavior

The partner indulges in behaviors and actions, but criticizes, making the participant feel bad for the same. "As long as I don't cheat. It means that she shouldn't too. That kind of issues did happen" (AP).

Targeting insecurities

The partner points out or passes comments on a particularly sensitive issue about the participant which triggers a lot of negative emotions, which they couldn't express. As stated by the participant "Comment on physical appearance yeah. It was more of a joke. So yeah, once or twice, I had to take it as a joke." (TM)

Intentional harm

The partner makes comments regarding the participant to hurt them". She's gonna know to hurt a person and she's going to attack that." (AP)

Misuse of personal details

Partner taking advantage of the intimate information the participant has given at any point of time for their benefit, or to use it against the participant. "if you've been with me for 5 years, knowing the kind of thing and then going to the police station and make a false accusation and having me beat up..." (AK)

Effect on the participant

The focal point of this theme is how the abusive behavior of the partner and the relationship brought about changes in the participant to varying degrees. The psychologically abusive behaviors displayed by the partner might evoke and magnify the unhealthy coping mechanism in the participant. In addition to the unhealthy coping mechanisms, the participants'

work, family, friends, or academic aspects which are the impact areas are to be taken into consideration in conjunction with the effect they have on the individual.

Coping mechanisms

Due to the abusive behavior shown by the partner to the participant, the participant employs certain strategies to deal with the traumatic event to manage the stressful events. The participant reports that as being helpful in dealing with the stressful situation. However, these coping strategies can have negative effects as the issue at hand would remain the same if they aren't addressed. An excerpt of which was stated by the participant "Eventually I couldn't do that anymore, Like my brain started getting anxious and worried. One more thing that really screwed with my brain" (AP)

Distraction

This is used to take their focus off from the issue by indulging in a different unrelated activity. As stated by the participant "Keeping up with my hobbies was a big part of it. So, I would go out on drives and I do something, I talk to them. Recently I started painting. So, once I do that, my brain is clear, better than all the confusion" (TM)

Denial

This strategy is used when the individual is not ready to accept and speak about the issue. They may also pretend that everything is fine, thereby avoiding expressing their emotions or being vocal about the issue and trying to protect themselves from the issue. This is demonstrated by the statement the participant made which is – "I'm fine.. I mean I'm fine as wine. I don't give a shit... it wasn't that important to me, that's why. It's done and dusted. That's what I think". (AK)

Avoidance

"so we don't stick to our ground and you know. So we bring it on to the question. Sometimes we just walk away from scenarios right". (TM). As reported by the participant, avoidance entails walking away from situations to avoid addressing them.

Impact Areas

The ramifications of abusive relationships proliferate to other aspects of an individual's life can have adverse consequences. The areas of impact are interpersonal and intrapersonal which often overlap with each other. "so what triggered me was the whole point of...I took care of her way more than my capability, whatever you know... which in turn made me, which had like repercussions in my grades and my social" (AP)

Intrapersonal

Intrapersonal issues refer to the interactions between relationships that influence the individual. Here, the participants' issues regarding medical or academics and the extent to which it caused them distress were reported.

"So I went cuckoo crazy And aaa... that is when I had a breakdown and I had to be That is what put me in a hospital right after that. I couldn't deal with whatever was happening, was hospitalized" (AP)

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"It takes a toll on your personal life as well...if you're studying or something. Like what is happening in life. So all of these started coming up, so I realized I needed to be stopped" (TM).

Interpersonal

Interpersonal issues refer to the associations, affiliations interactions between people and how it influence the relationship between them. Here, the abusive relationship is impacting the participant's relationship with others in a negative manner and to domains including work, social, and legal aspects.

"I was falsely accused of rape, I mean.. Yeah. I was there.. I was falsely accused of cheating on her, which I never really did".

"Like I like.. Aaaa it kind of wrecked my life, to be honest. Because I couldn't go work in the corporate sector anymore because you know. I was done with those people."

Social Support

Social support refers to having family and friends around in the time of crisis, who also act as a cushion during those times and help the individuals to cope better. That being said, the influence of interpersonal impact could accentuate the role in the presence or absence of social support. The importance and functions of social support are encapsulated by the participant as follows.

"No one really said, hey, it's okay. It's all going to be okay no one has put their arms around me and said 'Hey it's okay, I know how hard it must've been, or whatever the scenario is, trust me, it's okay" (SS).

Absent

The absence of social support could lead to feeling isolated, and bottling up emotions could lead to considerable stress in the participant to cope with such stressful situations, which might lead them to follow unhealthy coping strategies as mentioned above. This would further have repercussions on their relationships in interpersonal and intrapersonal areas of impact. "And once everything's broken you don't have anywhere to turn around to. The only thing you can do is face your problem. So that became disastrous". (TM)

Present

Social support is present in terms of family or friends assisting the participant through the process of the abusive relationship. This gives the participant confidence to rely upon during difficult times. As the participant mentions- "But then I had a friend with me and who was like quite wise. So he was like 'hey, it's over, it's gone. It's a thing in the past. And then I was like yeah, right". (AP)

Shift in Perception

Perception refers to the organization and interpretation of information to be represented and understood in the given environment or situation. Perception in the context of the study was brought up during the process of coding, which was then utilized to determine the shift in how the participants changed their outlook toward self and towards the relationship. The negative consequences of the abusive relationship were reflected and manifested in various ways. "From that incident, it took me 6 months to.... I don't know till date I can't trust a person completely. Like I still find it very hard." This statement by the participant indicates to change or shift regarding how they view themselves and how they view the relationship.

Self

The shift in perception of self was directed at the participants' change in outlook towards themselves, questioning the intentions of being in the relationship and realizing of not being able to recognize the partner's abusive behavior at one point, but seems clear now. The participant reports "What I felt was right at that time. But now it's quite stupid because I was young and I didn't know what I was talking about." (AP)

Self-doubt

It refers to the participants questioning themselves, and facing difficulties in decision-making due to their experiences during the abusive relationship, which accentuates the issues the participants face as an individual. Here, the participant indicates as such- "But it (the abortion incident) really made me lose my stability. Like I had like a year of (aghhh, sighs), you know a really messed up thing where I couldn't you know 'think straight'. I had to be on medication myself Because of constant.. I don't know how... I know how it's because of all the trauma but then again... I couldn't get." (AP)

Negative emotional states

The participants' emotional states were severely affected due to the abusive nature of the relationship. "Am I glad that she left me, hell yeah. I felt like somebody was sucking my soul, giving my happiness to, I was emotionally drained two years ago". (AK). This statement captures the essence of the extent of impact the abusive nature of the relationship had on the participant, which was found to be a recurrence across participants, except for one.

Forming boundaries

The shift in importance of boundaries and the ill effects it has on the participants were focused on. The participant stated, "one thing good about the relationship is I figured out where my lines lie. Like where.. You know what is the maximum I can take as individual". (AP)

Relationship

The shift in the perception of relationship refers to the outlook towards relationship along the lines of not recognizing the red flags in the relationship and viewing them in an entirely different light currently, due to the abusive behaviour experienced at the hands of the partner. "I mean, when you love a person, it's different, everything about them seems attractive to you. If you just look at them like without those sunglasses, which is love you got going on... then... I think you see shit real". (AK)

Trust issues

This is concerning the trust issues that emerged due to the relationship, which plays a role in determining current relationships outside the context of abuse as well. "deep inside my brain is like tells me not to trust a person 100%. Like the

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innocence in me dead you know.. Like back in my mind it's like 'hey, be cautious' because. Whatever". (AP)

Inconsistency

The inconsistency in the relationship brought out a change in how the participant viewed the relationship, as well as the outlook or the expectations of the relationship changing accordingly, due to the nature of the relationship. As stated by the participant "In those 6 months of dating, we had like 8-9 break-ups. Her defense mechanism used to be a break up". (SS) however, it is important to note that one of the participants had a stable relationship from the beginning.

Unsure future

The relationship being inconsistent could lead to unsureness in the future of the relationship, which could create confusion, indecisiveness, and frustration in the participant. "For the past 2 days we are talking, we are in good terms. I don't know when that will get over, probably tonight only, I'm not sure" (SS).

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to explore the psychological abuse and psychosocial components of abuse among men in dating relationships. As this is a qualitative study, the sample consisted of five participants within the age range of 20-30 years. A phenomenological research method was used. This section aims to discuss the themes that emerged during the analysis which was presented using the thematic network model by Attride-Stirling, 2016 [18].

The current study emphasizes the presence of psychological abuse among men to be vastly more prevalent than the other areas of abuse. The findings look at how the themes that emerged during the analysis had both consequences of the abusive behavior of the partner and its effect on the participant.

Extent of psychological abuse

There is an extant body of knowledge regarding IPV, particularly focusing on physical violence in women. While psychological abuse is less focused on, even more so in the context of men being the victims of it, there are studies suggesting the prevalence of female perpetration of IPV [19,2]. A study conducted by Ahmadabadi et al. reported that men experience higher physical and psychological abuse and harassment in their current intimate relationships [20]. The current study revealed that psychological abuse among men is substantially higher, impacting all spheres of life, compared to the presence of physical abuse. Upto 77.6% off men have reported psychologically abused by their partner by trying to control them, making threats of reporting them to the police and so on [9]. A systematic review study conducted in 2023 reported a prevalence of psychological IPV to be higher in men than in women, which is in line with the findings of the current study [21].

From the analysis of the themes, seven types of psychological abuse emerged. Manipulation, controlling, insulting, or taunting was behavior displayed by the partner, which was repeated across most of the participants which was supported

by a qualitative study that found the men indicated power and control were the motivation for the effect of their abuse [22] . Findings, as observed in the current study, showed there was extensive use of coercive control which is defined as "a strategic course of oppressive conduct that is typically characterized by frequent, but low-level physical abuse and sexual coercion in combination with tactics to intimidate, degrade, isolate, and control victims" [23] . While majority of early literature uses the term 'coercive control' has been predominantly used in the context of domestic abuse, as being central to male IPV.

Furthermore, studies using feminist-based research have found men to be predominantly the perpetrators of IPV, while researchers also suggest that violence perpetrated by women is far likely to be considered as less wrong than compared to when perpetrated by men as they are said to be 'gender incongruent' compared to the traditional, established norms and gender roles [24] . However, recent studies report that motivations for IPV including coercive control is similar to men and women, but was not considered as perpetrated by women until recently due to the nature of the taboo attached to perpetration of violence by women [24-25]. The findings of the current study support this claim of women indulging in coercive behaviors in the relationship, affecting the participant in more than one area of their life.

The effect of the abuse on the participant

In the current study, the most evident and repeated theme by the participants was the intense impact the abusive relationship had on their lives, which was not just limited to the relationship with the partner. Four out of the five participants mentioned the importance of social support and the difficulties they faced due to the lack of it on multiple junctures. This could be due to the stigma associated to victimhood which prevents them from seeking help which in turn reinforces feelings of helplessness and isolation [4], having a negative impact on the overall mental health of men [5] .

In the context of IPV and psychological abuse, social support is reported to have a reduced impact of abuse on mental health. A systematic review conducted in 2020 has reported social support to be a crucial factor that acts as a buffer and improves health conditions while the lack of it is linked to poor health outcomes for people experiencing violence [26]. The findings of the current study are in line with the above- mentioned research on the experiences the participants have had in this aspect.

The presence of social support assisted the participants in going through the stressful aspects of the relationship. A 2024 report on male experience of IPV, the interviews with the participants echoed the findings of the current study- the social support received by the survivors of IPV plays a huge role in their overall well-being- and not having the social support led to maladaptive coping strategies such as consumption of alcohol, isolation, unhealthy eating patterns etc [7].

In the current study the participants' coping mechanisms were probed, during which majority of the participants reported resorting to denial, distraction or avoidance which fall under the broad category avoidance coping which are linked greater psychological distress. The reason for denial or avoidance could

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be due to the expectations of gender roles. In conjunction with this findings, a study by Bates opines that this contributes to the stereotypes and public perceptions which prevent them from seeking help as opposed to women [27].

The absence of social support as mentioned by the participants was difficult to manage and they felt isolated. They had to take more time to understand the nature of the abusive relationship, without support from friends or family, impacting health by increasing psychological stress in the long run. A study conducted by Kneavel reported that women showed higher levels of stress, but had a larger support network as well and the quality of the support group was found to be higher. They did however mention that men and women may manifest stress in different ways in relationships [28]. The current study found the effect of the presence or the absence of social support in the participants, which is in line with evidence for social support being positively associated with various indicators of Quality of life, and negatively indicated with increased stress and loneliness and loneliness in itself is considered as a stressful experience [29].

The absence of social support along the avoidance-coping style due to the abusive nature of the relationship aggravated the adverse impact on the participants' intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. The quality of relationships the participants had with their friends or family was reduced. Few participants reported having felt isolated during the relationship as they did not have anyone to turn to, during the time of difficulty. As discussed previously, the absence or lack of social support for men leading to avoidant coping strategies had its effect on their relationship with others as well as with themselves. While there is limited understanding of the long-term impact of IPV, the current study found that the predicament faced by the participants is not just limited to the relationship, but has a negative impact on all aspects of life along the lines of academics, occupation, strains in friendships and other relationships which has taken a toll on their mental health.

The consequences of the abuse

In the current study, findings indicate that most of the participants mentioned having impacts on at least one of the areas of life. This impact further led to the shift in perception of how they view themselves as well as their relationships. The participants reported that the change in their outlook toward the relationship and understanding of the abusive nature of the relationship after being exposed to such behavior affected them adversely. The consequences of having experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) have resulted in them seeking psychiatric treatment, being fearful and intimidated, feeling suicidal [27]; lower self- esteem, self-doubt, increasing stress related to work and relationships [28]; impaired decision-making skills, isolation from friends and withdrawn from recreational activities [22].

The aforementioned finding strengthens the discussion on the existence of psychological abuse among men. Manipulation and control are the prominent abusive behavior that was identified during the analysis. The existing literature largely focuses on the victimization of women, the recent research however is on the experiences of men, the importance of psychological abuse and its impact on men are less researched. The significance of social support has an immense role to play in the overall well-being of the individual. Furthermore, the negative effects of the abuse were highlighted.

CONCLUSION

The current study reinforces the importance of understanding psychological abuse among men in dating relationships, while attempting to gain insight into the experiences of men in abusive relationships where women were the perpetrators. The existing literature has shown a dearth of knowledge pertaining to the area of male intimate partner abuse, especially in psychological abuse.

The study conducted a semi-structured interview of five participants and identified various forms of psychological abuse used against men. Further, the study focused on the impact the nature of an abusive relationship had on the individual, and the adverse mental health states that we aggravated due to the partner's abusive behavior. The presence or absence of social support further determined the coping styles and the recovery from the stressful/traumatic relationship and the likelihood of having mental health issues.

Findings

Forms of Psychological Abuse

Participants reported manipulation, humiliation, and controlling behaviors as common tactics.

Impact on Mental Health

Abusive relationships were associated with heightened stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms.

Role of Social Support

The presence of supportive networks significantly influenced recovery and resilience, while lack of support exacerbated mental health challenges.

Implications

The study contributes to the limited body of research on male psychological abuse, reinforcing its prevalence and consequences. Findings underscore the importance of social support and early recognition of abusive behaviors, suggesting potential areas for intervention and awareness programs.

LIMITATIONS

The research focused solely on men's experiences, excluding partner dynamics. The small sample size and qualitative design limit generalizability. Recruitment challenges reflect the stigma and underreporting associated with male victimization.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should:

- Examine gender differences in social support systems.
- Develop interventions for early detection of psychological abuse.

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- Investigate long-term effects and relational dynamics to provide a comprehensive understanding of male IPV experiences.

DECLARATIONS

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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