



# PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

## WHY IT MATTERS

Psychological abuse is the systematic perpetration of malicious and explicit nonphysical acts against an intimate partner, child, or dependent adult.<sup>1</sup> This can include threatening the physical health of the victim and the victim's loved ones, controlling the victim's freedom, and effectively acting to destabilize or isolate the victim.<sup>2</sup> Psychological abuse frequently occurs prior to or concurrently with physical or sexual abuse.<sup>3</sup> While psychological abuse increases the trauma of physical and sexual abuse, a number of studies have demonstrated that psychological abuse independently causes long-term damage to its victims' mental health.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- 95% of men who physically abuse their intimate partners also psychologically abuse them.<sup>4</sup>
- Psychologically abusive men are more likely to use a weapon against their partners, have prior criminal arrests, abuse substances, and have employment problems.<sup>5</sup>
- An employed woman with an unemployed partner is more than twice as likely to be psychologically abused by her partner.<sup>9</sup>
- Having a physical disability increases a woman's risk of psychological abuse by 83%.<sup>7</sup>
- Women who earn 65% or more of their households' income are more likely to be psychologically abused.<sup>8</sup>

## CHILDREN

- Children who are victims of or exposed to psychological abuse are more likely to be involved—as victims or perpetrators—with psychological abuse as adults.<sup>12</sup>
- Incidents of child physical abuse are more frequent when accompanied by psychological abuse.<sup>13</sup>
- Children who have been psychologically abused are more likely to experience behavior problems during their childhood and develop symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder later.

## THE ELDERLY

Perpetrators of psychological abuse against the elderly often take advantage of their vulnerability in ways that control and/or humiliate the victim, including:<sup>15</sup>

- Denying or creating long waits for food, medication, heat, or basic care.
- Taking the victim's walker, glasses, or dentures.
- Intentionally failing to follow medical, therapy, or safety recommendations.

## WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE?

Examples of psychological abuse include:<sup>10</sup>

- Denying the victim access to money or economic support.
- Harassing the victim at work or school.
- Threatening to injure, permanently disfigure, or kill the victim and/or loved ones.
- Damaging the victim's property.
- Preventing the victim from eating, sleeping, or leaving her place of residence.
- Threatening or physically abusing the family pet.

## THE EFFECTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Individuals who are victims of psychological abuse are more likely to experience:<sup>11</sup>

- Poor physical health
- Difficulty concentrating
- Emotional and/or mental impairment
- Poor work or school performance
- Higher likelihood of illegal drugs and alcohol use
- Suicidal thoughts and/or suicide attempts

## PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE

- The most common psychological effects of physical abuse include depression, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, panic attacks, and anxiety.<sup>16</sup>
- One study shows that factors such as good overall physical health, high self-esteem, and a support network of family and friends can mitigate the psychological impact of physical and sexual abuse.<sup>17</sup>
- Women who have been sexually assaulted are more likely to develop clinical depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>18</sup>
- Victims of sexual assault are more likely to suffer from self-blame, self-defeating attitudes, and an inability to develop coping mechanisms to deal with present and future trauma.<sup>19</sup>

## RESOURCES

### National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health

312-726-7020 ext 10

<http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org>

### National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence

888-RX-ABUSE

[www.endabuse.org/health](http://www.endabuse.org/health)

## IF YOU NEED HELP

*For more information or to get help, please contact the:*

National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE

National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE

## SOURCES

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<sup>2</sup> Follingstad, D.R. & DeHart, D.D. (2000). Defining Psychological Abuse of Husbands Towards Wives: Contexts, Behaviors, and Typologies. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 15(9), 891-920.

<sup>3</sup> Carlson, B.E., et al. (2002). Intimate Partner Abuse and Mental Health: The Role of Social Support and Other Protective Factors. *Violence Against Women Journal*, 8(6), 720-745.

<sup>4</sup> Henning, K. & Klesges, L.M. (2003). Prevalence and Characteristics of Psychological Abuse Reported by Court-Involved Battered Women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 18(8), 857-871.

<sup>5</sup> Henning & Klesges. (2003).

<sup>6</sup> Kaukinen, C. (2004). Status Compatibility, Physical Violence, and Emotional Abuse in Intimate Relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66: 452-471.

<sup>7</sup> Kaukinen. (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Kaukinen. (2004).

<sup>9</sup> Kaukinen. (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Follingstad & DeHart. (2000).

<sup>11</sup> Straight, E.S., et al. (2003). The Impact of Partner Psychological Abuse on Health Behaviors and Health Status in College Women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 18(9), 1035-1054.

<sup>12</sup> Kwong, M.J., et al. (2003). The Intergenerational Transmission of Relationship Violence. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 17(3), 288-301.

<sup>13</sup> Schneider, M.W., et al. (2005). Do Allegations of Emotional Maltreatment Predict Developmental Outcomes Beyond that of Other Forms of Maltreatment? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29, 513-532.

<sup>14</sup> Schneider, et al. (2005).

<sup>15</sup> National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence. (2006). *Family Violence in Later Life: Power and Control Wheel*. <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/SeniorCitizenPCWheelNOSHADING-NCDSV.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Leserman, J., et al. (1998). Selected Symptoms Associated with Physical and Sexual Abuse History Among Female Patients with Gastrointestinal Disorders: The Impact on Subsequent Health Care Visits. *Psychological Medicine*, 28, 417-425.

<sup>17</sup> Carlson, et al. (2002).

<sup>18</sup> Casey, E.A. & Nurius, P.S. (2005). Trauma Exposure and Sexual Revictimization Risk: Comparisons Across Single, Multiple Incident, and Multiple Perpetrator Victimization. *Violence Against Women*, 11(4), 505-530.

<sup>19</sup> Casey & Nurius. (2005).

For more information please see our website at [www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org).



The Public Policy Office of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a national leader in the effort to create and influence Federal legislation that positively affects the lives of domestic violence victims and children. We work closely with advocates at the local, state and national level to identify the issues facing domestic violence victims, their children and the people who serve them and to develop a legislative agenda to address these issues. NCADV welcomes you to join us in our effort to end domestic violence.