

THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse is a constellation of attitudes and behaviours that aim to maintain power and control in the relationship of one partner over the other. It involves systemic devaluation of the partner, ongoing distortion of reality, lack of empathy and reciprocity in the relationship, and ongoing attempts to stifle the autonomy of the other. This causes profound and long-lasting effects on a person's emotional, mental, and physical well-being. These impacts often accumulate over time and become deeply entrenched, affecting various aspects of life.

Emotional

Depression and/or Emotionally Numb: Ongoing abuse often leads to depression or a sense of emotional numbness. Survivors may feel emotionally detached, unable to feel joy or connect with their emotions.

Anxiety: The constant unpredictability of an abusive relationship fuels anxiety. Survivors often feel on edge, constantly fearing the next outburst or manipulation.

A Chronic Feeling of Walking on Eggshells: Survivors feel like they must constantly be cautious, avoiding conflict or upsetting their partner to maintain peace.

Inadequacy: Feelings of inadequacy emerge as the abuser frequently undermines the survivor's personality or abilities, leading them to believe they are not good enough.

Unlovable: The emotional abuse erodes an individual's sense of self-worth, making them feel undeserving of love or care.

Worthlessness: Constant criticism and devaluation lead to a pervasive belief that a person has no value or worth.

Loss of Motivation and/or Joy: Survivors may lose interest in things they once enjoyed, struggling to find joy or purpose in life.

Humiliation: The public and private degradation that occurs in abusive relationships leads to profound feelings of humiliation.

Guilt and Shame: Partners often carry guilt for staying or for being unable to "fix" their abuser's behaviour. Shame is also internalized, often due to being constantly blamed for the abuse.

Powerlessness: The sense of having no control over one's life and decisions is a hallmark of coercive control. This leads to an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness.

Mental/Psychological

Loss of Confidence: Continuous emotional manipulation erodes self-esteem, leaving survivors uncertain of their abilities and decisions.

Self-Blame: Victims of emotional abuse often internalise blame for the abuse, leading them to feel responsible for their partner's actions or behaviours.

Chronic Self-Doubt: Constant criticism and gaslighting from the abuser lead to chronic self-doubt, leaving survivors questioning their judgment and perceptions.

Loss of Trust in Own Judgment: Survivors begin to doubt their own reality and ability to make sound decisions due to the prolonged psychological manipulation and invalidation.

Rumination and Confusion: Survivors often become trapped in a cycle of rumination, endlessly replaying situations in their mind, trying to make sense of the abuse and their partner's behaviour.

Loss of Sense of Self: Over time, the survivor's identity becomes distorted as they are forced to abandon their values, beliefs, and needs to appease the abuser.

Embarrassment: Feeling publicly humiliated, especially when the abuse is secretive, leads to profound embarrassment about one's situation.

Feeling Unseen and Unheard: Coercive control often involves silencing the survivor, making them feel invisible and as though their voice and needs do not matter.

Chronically Invalidated: The abuser's constant denials, dismissals, and undermining make the survivor feel as though their experiences and emotions are never valid or worthy of acknowledgment.

Feeling Trapped: Over time, survivors may feel mentally and emotionally trapped in the relationship, unable to escape due to fear, dependency, or manipulation.

Physical Impact

Fatigue/Exhaustion: The constant state of vigilance and anxiety leaves survivors physically drained, leading to chronic fatigue and exhaustion.

Headaches: Chronic stress and tension from the abuse often manifest physically, with headaches being a common symptom.

Difficulty Concentrating/Fogginess: Psychological stress impairs cognitive function, leading to difficulties in focusing, making decisions, or processing thoughts clearly.

Gastro-Intestinal and Gynaecological Issues: The long-term effects of stress can lead to digestive problems, including stomach pain, nausea, and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), as well as various gynaecological issues.

Sleep Difficulties: Anxiety, hypervigilance, and trauma-related stress disrupt sleep patterns, leading to insomnia or fragmented sleep.

Poorer General Health: An aspect of the coercive control and/or financial abuse may be prevention of access to timely healthcare. This has an overall impact on the partner's general health.

Neurological Hyperarousal: Chronic stress and trauma can cause the nervous system to remain in a heightened state of alertness, leading to irritability, insomnia, and physical tension.

Lowered Immunity/Chronic Conditions Exacerbated: The long-term stress can suppress the immune system, making survivors more vulnerable to illness and exacerbating existing chronic health conditions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

EMOTIONAL ABUSE IS A LARGE-SCALE PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUE THAT INFLICTS SIGNIFICANT HARM TO A PERSON

- The negative impact is expectable—not pathological or a sign of personal deficits. It's a normal reaction to abuse.
- Emotional abuse causes cumulative mental, neurological, and physiological depletion over time. The longer the abuse goes on for, the bigger its impact.
- The resulting exhaustion and psychological erosion preserve the status quo and undermine a person's capacity to resist or seek change.
- In order to maintain the relationship, a person is required to sacrifice personal needs, beliefs, and perspectives.
- This ongoing sacrifice fosters a profound abandonment of the self. Emotional abuse is akin to identity theft.
- Recovery is possible and begins truly once a sense of safety and distance from the abuser are established.