

Women with Invisible Wounds: A Qualitative Exploration of Emotional Abuse

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Abstract : For the longest time, Indian households have been hosts to a variety of domestic evils such as intimate partner violence, physical abuse, sexual assaults, and more commonly gender-based violence. The prevalence of such heinous acts against women is often swept under the carpet of patriarchy and leaves women scarred. Many times, these wounds are caused by more insidious and subtle acts of violence. For this study, the choice of term for these acts is Emotional Abuse. The ill effects of emotional abuse on the victim's sense of self and psychological health have been widely established. The current study takes a qualitative approach to explore women's experiences at the brunt of emotional abuse. To this end, six participants (N=6) were identified using purposive and snowball sampling which was followed by a pre-screening form to assess for the presence of emotional abuse. A semi-structured interview guide was employed to investigate the victim's perception of emotional abuse, the manifestation of emotional abuse in a patriarchal society, and the reasons women remain in abusive relationships. Each interview lasted about 50-60 mins and was accompanied by extensive note-making. A preliminary analysis of the interviews was done using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach. Initial findings reveal the emergence of themes such as feelings of loneliness, intergenerational transmission of violence, denial, justifying the partner's behavior, staying because of children, hoping things would change, and faith in God. The study is instrumental in conceptualizing the patterns of emotional abuse keeping in mind the patriarchal context of the Indian society. It has implications for professionals in the mental health field who work with this population so they can better understand their plight. Future research could focus on rebuilding relationships for those partners who decide to sustain such relationships and focus on various coping mechanisms with special emphasis on religious beliefs.

Keywords : emotional abuse, gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, marriage, patriarchy

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