



## “Emotional Abuse: A Major Component of Mental and Behavioral Problems in Adults”

Sonam Shukla<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. M. Rathore<sup>2</sup>, Dr. A. L. Ram Verma<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Neharshi Srivastava<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Research Scholar, Amity University, Jaipur

<sup>2</sup>Asst. Professor, Amity University, Jaipur

<sup>3</sup>Retd. Professor Kasturba BHEL, Bhopal

<sup>4</sup>Assistant Professor, Amity University Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

\*Corresponding Author: - Sonam Shukla

\*Research Scholar, Amity University, Jaipur

### KEYWORDS

Emotional Abuse;  
Mental Health;  
University Adults.

### ABSTRACT:

**Background:** Emotional abuse is a method of interpersonal exploitation which integrates altogether non-physical violence and suffering caused by non-verbal and verbal actions (Psychology & Behavioral Health, 2015). Emotional abuse is intentional, manipulative and a method of using power towards the victim. It frequently takes place with the combination of other types of abuse, though abuse can also go on in isolation. As there are different kinds of abuse, emotional abuse frequently affects those who have less power and influence on others (Psychology & Behavioral Health, 2015).

**Objectives/Aims:** The main objective of the research was to study the impact of emotional abuse on mental health among university adults.

**Methods:** A correlational research design in which self-report questionnaires were used to evaluate the significant difference between emotional abuse and mental health. Total sample (N=100) comprising male (n=50) and female (n=50) university adults with age range from 18 to 21 years and up to postgraduate qualification and above. Subject's mean age was 19.5 years. Simple random sampling technique used. Data were collected through two standardized psychological tests: (1) Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) was designed by Jacobson and Gottman (1998), (2) Mental Health Inventory-18 (MHI-18) was developed by Veit and Ware (1983) and Demographic Data Sheet individually from male and female university adults.

**Results:** Data were coded, entered and analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency distribution, Mean, S.D. and t-ratio were calculated to measure the mean difference between the two groups of respondents with respect to their gender. Correlation coefficient was also computed among the variables.

Results revealed the fact that there is a significant difference between the male and female groups towards their emotional abuse and mental health. There were significant relationships between emotional abuse sub-scales and mental health scores between male and female. The discrepancies of results obtained have been discussed in detail by giving probable reasons.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background to the Study:

Emotional abuse is a method of interpersonal exploitation which integrates altogether non- physical violence and suffering caused by non-verbal and verbal actions (Psychology & Behavioral Health, 2015).

Emotional abuse is intentional, manipulative and a method of using power towards the victim. It frequently takes place with the combination of other types of abuse, though abuse can also go on in isolation. As there are different kinds of abuse, emotional abuse frequently affects those who have less power and influence on others (Psychology & Behavioral Health, 2015).

Emotional abuse is often longer lasting than physical abuse because it is a gradual destruction of victims' confidence and sense of self-worth. Victims may be fearful to talk to anyone about the abuse because they have been convinced by their abuser that no one will believe them or they are threatened with severe consequences if they do.

### 1.2. Emotional Abuse:

#### 1.2.1. Abuse:

Abuse is defined as a non ending pattern of behaviors to preserve power and control over an intimate partner, child, adolescent, teen, adult, or elderly individual. These are actions that physically hurt, encourage fear, stop a partner from doing what they wish, or force them to act in ways that they do not want. Abuse includes the use of physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional abuse, and financial loss. Many of these forms of abuse can be concurrent (National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2017). The predictor variable, childhood abuse, was measured by the PPMS (Briere & Runtz, 1988).

#### 1.2.2. Emotional Abuse:

Emotional abuse can be defined as the persistent repetitive patterns of verbal and non-verbal behaviors that harm or are intended to harm the child (Keashty & Harvey, 2005). Emotional abuse mostly exists in conjunction with other forms of maltreatment. For instance, a vast number of children who were abused sexually, neglected physically were also identified to have experienced other forms of abuse (Tricker &

Pocock, 2003).

#### 1.2.3. Causes of Emotional Abuse:

It is difficult to determine the extent to which socio-demographic variables increase risk for emotional abuse and neglect in families (Cawson, 2000). However, a trend was identified by Sedlak (1997) suggesting an increased risk for psychological abuse for children from lower income families, children whose race was described as 'other' and older children.

Certain parental personality factors are also believed to increase the risk of emotional abuse. These include emotional disturbances, aggression, hostility, and lower self-esteem, social anxiety, less engagement in social activities, dysthymic symptoms, lower verbal reasoning and more illness. (Lennik, O. & Cohen, L. 1995).

Emotional abuse has been associated with parents' own histories of maltreatment and experience of less than optimal relationships with care.

### 1.2. The Concept of Mental Health:

The term *mental health* is constituted by two words- *mental* and *health*. *Mental* means mind. It is the cognitive or intellectual power of humans. The word *health* means different things to different people, depending on the situation combination with other words. In specific, it is wellness or goodness or well functioning of a system.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Emotional abuse is related to many negative psychosocial consequences. Research study concluded, confirmed and validates the relationship between emotional abuse and depression in adults (Gross & Keller, 1992), suicidal tendency, anxiety (Bifulco, Moran, Baines, Bunn, & Stanford, 2002), dissociation, consumption of alcohol and drugs among the college students (Jelley, 2003).

Research indicates that childhood maltreatment, particularly physical and emotional abuse, is highly prevalent in China (Cui & Liu, 2020; Ip et al., 2016) because some forms of physical (i.e., physical



punishment) and emotional (i.e., scolding and terrorizing) abuse are considered normal parenting practices in Chinese societies. Depression and problematic behaviors among Chinese adolescents induced by physical and emotional abuse have attracted research interest (Cui & Liu, 2020).

Moreover, few studies have focused on long-standing effects of emotional abuse, psychologists have verified sequel including severe depression (Yamamoto et al., 1999) and personality disorders (Johnson, Smailes, Cohen, Brown, & Bernstein, 2000). Study conducted by Reyome (2010) found emotional abuse to be linked to loneliness and social isolation to a larger extent than any other maltreatment subtype.

According to Follingstad, Coyne, & Gambone (2005) Verbal assault, control, dominance, ridicule, isolation, or the use of intimate knowledge for degradation can be included in emotional abuse. There is a significant positive relationship between emotional and physical abuse in batterer people (Gondolf, Heckert, & Kimmel, 2002), and it is discovered that subsequential physical spousal abuse is predicted with the presence of verbal abuse earlier in the relation (Schumacher & Leonard, 2005).

### 3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

A research study about the most common forms of emotional abuse (e.g., physical, sexual, emotional, and controlling) and their effects is an ongoing necessity to maintain a mental health for societal obligation and responsibility. As a primary focus, this study examined the relationship role of emotional abuse and mental health among university adults.

The result of studying the impact of emotional abuse on mental health among university adults provides scientific information. The research on this field therefore, is demonstrating the experiences of emotional abuse as the major component of many adults who have mental and behavioral problems i.e. poor academic performance, depression, anxiety, alcoholism, substance abuse, delinquency, delayed development, deviant, sexual abuse, domestic violence and criminal violence, just to mention but a few.

### 4. METHODOLOGY

There are usually eight kinds of strategies to try to any research study. These are: Research Design, Participants, Objectives, Hypothesis, Operational Definition, Sampling Method, Measures and Procedures, The use of each in the present study are explained below:

#### 4.1. Research Design:

A correlational research design in which self-report questionnaires were used to evaluate the significant difference between emotional abuse and mental health.

#### 4.2. Participants:

Sample consists of 50 male and 50 female university adults. These constitute the population of the study for the present investigation.

#### 4.3. Sampling Method:

Participants were selected by adopting a simple random sampling technique.

#### 4.4. Measures:

- (1) Socio-Demographic Data-Sheet,
- (2) Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) was designed by Jacobson and Gottman (1998).
- (3) Mental Health Inventory-18 (MHI-18) developed by Veit and Ware (1983)

#### 4.4. Procedure:

The researcher collected data from male and female university adults. The respondents were given proper instructions. After giving instruction related to the tests, a good rapport with students was established by the present researcher. The respondents were instructed to give the answer very carefully.

#### 4.5. Objectives:

- The following objectives are formulated by the investigator for the proposed study:
1. To assess the emotional abuse between types of gender (male and female) respondents.
  2. To assess the emotional abuse between types of family (nuclear and joint) respondents.
  3. To assess the emotional abuse between types of residence (rural and urban) respondents.



## 4.6. HYPOTHESES:

Based upon the review literature, the following null hypotheses are formulated to empirically validate the above objectives:

**H0:1.** There will be no significant difference in emotional abuse between types of gender (male and female) respondents.

**H0:2.** There will be no significant difference in mental health between types of gender (male and female) respondents.

**H0:3.** There will be no significant relationship between emotional abuse and mental health of respondents.

## 4.7. Operational Definitions:

### 4.7.1. Emotional Abuse:

One definition of emotional abuse is: "any act including confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, infantilization, or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth." For the purpose of the present study, emotional abuse means the total score obtained by male and female university students on Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) was developed by Jacobson and Gottman (1998).

### 4.7.2. Mental Health:

Mental health is described by WHO (2005), as: "A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". In the present study the variable of mental health is indicated by the total score obtained by the students on the Mental Health Inventory (MHI) developed by Veit and Ware (1983).

### 4.7.3. University Adults:

University Adults means students enrolled in an academic program of study in a university or institution of higher education leading to undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

## 4.8. Inclusion or Exclusion:

### 4.8.1. Inclusion:

1. Only male and female university adults were included in the study.

2. Only participants in the age group of 19-26 years and above were included. 3. Only students residing in Bhopal area were included. 4. Those who gave consent and were willing to participate were included. 5. Only 100 (50 male and 50 female) university adults were included.

### 4.8.2. Exclusion:

1. Those who are above 35 years were excluded. 2. Those who do not give consent and willing to participate were excluded.

## 4.9. Variables of the Study:

**4.9.1. Independent Variables:** Male and Female adults.

**4.9.2. Dependent Variables:** Emotional Abuse and Mental Health.

## 4.10. Data Analysis Techniques:

Collected data was coded, entered and for testing the hypotheses, for analyzing and interpreting the data and graphical representation of data the researcher used both descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (i.e., paired samples *t* test, independent *t* test by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 22.0 were computed. Finally, *P* values less than 0.01 and 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The tables prepared from the statistical data computer output of the SPSS are presented in this section along with the necessary interpretation. First of all the tables of demographic variables are interpreted, followed by the main psychological variables of the study.

### 5.1 Analysis of Demographic Variables in relation to Respondents scores on Emotional Abuse

#### Questionnaire (EAQ):

Four Socio-Demographic Variables included in the present study to find out the significant difference and relationship between emotional abuse and mental health in male and female university student groups of respondents which are presented in the following Table 5.1.1, and also in Graphs.



**Table 5.1.1 Showing the Frequency distribution and Percentage of Socio-Demographic Variables of Male and Female respondents (N=100):**

Socio-Demographic Variables	Groups No. of Male No. of Female Respondents Respondents
Age	1. Up to 19 yrs. 24 (48) 25 (50) 2. 20-25 yrs. 17 (34) 18 (36) 3. 26 yrs. and above 09 (18) 07 (14)
Type of Family	1.Nuclear 26 (52) 20 (40) 2.Joint 24 (48) 30 (60)
Type of Residence	1.Rural 19 (38) 24 (48) 2.Urban 31 (62)) 26 (52)

\*Figure shown in the parenthesis refers to the marginal percentage.

## 5.2. Comparison of Emotional Abuse between Male and Female respondents:

The requisite information of Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) was collected from 50 male and 50 female adults. The t-test of two independent samples has been applied to assess the significant difference of emotional abuse of male and female respondents. The mean scores on EAQ subscale the male and female Ss, as can be seen from Table 5.2.1. Computed students' 't' statistics revealed that the gender difference with regard to mean of EAQ subscales i.e.

property damage, sexual coercion, isolation endeavors and degradation scores were found to be significant at .001 and .005 levels. The 't' ratios can be seen from Table 5.2.1. Results indicate that mean scores of male and female are differing on all four emotional abuse subscales scores.

**Hypothesis 1** which states that "there will be no significant difference in emotional abuse between types of gender (male and female) respondents", hence, this hypothesis is not proved and rejected.



**Table-5.2.1:** Mean, S.D. and 't' ratio between Male and Female respondents computed on the basis of their Emotional Abuse Subscales Scores of Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) (N =100).

**Emotional Abuse Sub-Scales**

Property Damage Sexual Coercion Isolation Endeavors Degradation

	<u>Male Respondents</u>	<u>Female Respondents</u>	<u>'t'</u>
	<u>(N1=50)</u>	<u>(N2=50)</u>	<u>Value</u>
	<u>M1</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>M2 SD2</u>
	<u>D1</u>		
18.50	5.592	23.36	3.958 5.016**
19.90	5.881	24.68	3.473 4.949**
43.36	8.792	54.10	18.616 3.689**
33.42	8.102	50.48	23.406 4.870**

\*\* Significant at .001 levels.

**5.3. Comparison of the Mental Health status between Male and Female groups of respondents:**

The requisite information of the Mental Health Inventory-18 (MHI-18) was collected from 50 male and 50 female university adults. The t-test of two independent samples has been applied to assess the significant difference in mental health between male and female groups of respondents. The mean scores on MHI-18 between male and female groups of Subjects (Ss), as can be seen from Table 5.3.1. Computed students' 't' statistics revealed that male and female groups of respondents are different with regard to mean MHI-18 factors and overall total mental health inventory scores were found to be significant at .001 level of significance.

The 't' ratios can be seen in Table 5.3.1. Results indicate that mean scores of male and female groups are differing. It means male and female groups of

respondent's scores in relation to mental health are different. Type of gender i.e. male and female play an important role in regards to mental health among male and female university adults.

Table 5.3.1 reflects that comparison between male and females groups scores in evaluating mental health factors and overall total mental health scores 't' values: anxiety 4.114, depression 4.242, behavior control 4.724, positive effect 4.926 and overall mental health scores 5.118 were higher than the statistical table value, and 'P' value was 0.001, which is interpreted that there is statistically significant difference observed between male and female groups of respondents..

**Hypothesis 2** which states that "there will be no significant difference in mental health between types of gender (male and female) respondents", hence this hypothesis is not proved and rejected.



**Table-5.3.1:** Mean, S.D. and 't' ratio between Male and Female respondents computed on the basis of their Mental Health Inventory-18 (N =100).

Mental Health Factors and Overall Total Mental Health	Male Respondents		Female Respondents	
	't'		(N1=50)	
	(N2=50)		Value	
	M1 S D1		M2	
	SD2			
Anxiety	19.24	5.336	23.36	4.654 4.114**
Depression	18.66	4.429	21.62	2.175 4.242**
Behaviour Control	17.00	4.140	20.46	3.112 4.724**
Positive Effects	18.88	6.745	24.68	4.880 4.926**
Overall Mental Health	61.82	24.857	82.52	14.140 5.118**

\* Significant at .001 level.

#### 5.4. Relationship (Correlation Coefficient) between Emotional Abuse Sub-Scales and Overall Mental Health of respondents.

Pearson correlation statistical method has been applied to assess the relationship between Emotional Abuse Sub-Scales and Overall Mental Health of respondents. From Table 5.4.1, the correlation result shows significant correlations: damage of pets and property ( $r=.379$ ), sexual coercion ( $r=.726$ ) and degradation

( $r=.208$ ) and overall mental health is found between Emotional Abuse Sub-Scales and Overall Mental Health of respondents. It means if the mental health status is higher than damage of pets and property, sex coercion, isolation and degradation levels are lower.

**Hypothesis 3** which states that "there will be no significant relationship between emotional abuse and mental health of respondents", hence, this hypothesis is not proved and rejected.

**Table 5.5.1** Relationship (Correlation Coefficient Values) of Emotional Abuse Sub-Scales Scores and Mental Health Overall Total Scores of Respondents (N=100).

Emotional Abuse Sub-Scales and Mental Health	PDA SCO ISO DEG	OMH
Property Damage (PDA)	1	
Sexual Coercion (SCO)	.554** 1	
Isolation (ISO)	.121 -.128 1	
Degradation (DEG)	.247* .142 .771** 1	
Overall Mental Health (OMH)	.379** .726** .000 .208**	1

\* Significant at .005 levels

\*\*Significant at .001 levels.





## CONCLUSIONS:

The main purpose of the present research is to study the impact of emotional abuse on mental health among university adults. The study made emotional abuse and mental health were measured using the psychological tests for male and female university adults as the study sample.

## MAIN FINDINGS:

Following main findings have been drawn by the investigator:

1. There exists a significant difference between the emotional abuse and types of gender (male and female) respondents.
2. There exists a significant difference between the mental health and types of gender (male and female) respondents.
3. There exists a significant relationship between emotional abuse and mental health of respondents.

## Future Suggestions/Implications/Limitations:

In order to manage emotional abuse and enhance mental health status among male and female university adults, they should be empowered to acknowledge their talents, potentialities, abilities, capabilities, and intelligence. There is always scope of refinement and a persistent need for finding solutions to the other research questions or problems.

This research study has some practical implications and educational benefits. The results of the study will help us to know concerning emotional abuse and mental health and find an appropriate educational intervention technique for effective counseling of problems taking essential steps for the management of emotional abuse and enhancement of mental health, and in return increase the quality of educational life among male and female university students.

There are some limitations to the study because of time constraints, and available limited resources of the researcher to conduct the research work. Those limitations, and recommendations based on systematic observation during collection of data and during research study.

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