Research Paper

Impact of Gaslighting on Mental Health among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Gaslighting, a form of psychological manipulation has gained attention for its detrimental effects on mental health. This study aims to examine impact of gaslighting on mental health among young adults. Prior research has consistently highlighted how gaslighting affects relationships including intimate partnerships, family dynamics and workplace interactions. A sample of 154 participants was used in the study, comprising young adults aged between 18 and 35 years. The sample included 87 females and 66 males, reflecting a wide demographic range. The assessment tools included are Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ), State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STATE), and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. After administering these tools, a comprehensive statistical analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between gaslight, anxiety levels and self-esteem The findings reveal that young adults 'that experiences of the controlling and manipulation behavior increases so do levels of anxiety and decrease in self-esteem. This research highlights the need for further investigation into the moderating effects of manipulation and influence of dominant people in our day-to-day life. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing and addressing gaslighting behavior to promote better mental outcomes and even criminal behavior among young adults.

Gaslighting is a type of abusive psychological and emotional manipulation that has become more common in recent years. Gaslighting: A Covert Psychological Mistreatment. It is a psychology term used to describe the emotional and psychological abuse that people perform to other people and groups in an effort to obtain control and authority over them. Because there are no outward signs or physical scars left by these abuses, they go unreported. Such assaults can be carried out in a variety of ways—from unconscious to malicious, covert to intentional—but they always leave their victims with permanent, hateful scars.

The practice of gaslighting, in which a person ignores the reality that other people are going through, is more dangerous than before. Victims of gas lighters may perceive flaws in everything their victims do and attribute their own weaknesses to them. Though various attempts from various aspects, there isn't a straight theory that focuses on gaslighting. Individual focus approach **psychological theory** is a more conventional viewpoint. It sees

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gaslighting as a kind of manipulation when a person (the "gas lighter") manipulates another person by emotionally abusing them, distorting their reality, and denying their existence. This hypothesis concentrates on the victim's psychological effects, such as disorientation, uncertainty about oneself, and a diminished sense of reality.

Theory of sociology (power relations) According to this hypothesis, gaslighting has its roots in social injustices, specifically gender inequality, and goes beyond simple individual manipulation. It conducts the victims' view of reality by taking advantage of the ones that are prevalent within our societies and stereotypes.

The Mind's Knot Theory According to this hypothesis, a victim of gaslighting may develop a complex network of detrimental and beliefs. The emotional knots that form as a result of the gas lighter's constant manipulation and denial could have long-term psychological effects. It is crucial to seek assistance and coping strategies from a mental health professional if gaslighting is resulting in ongoing self-doubt, anxiety, depression, or a decline in self-worth. Whether this is happening in personal or professional relationships, you can improve your well-being by seeking advice from therapists, counsellors, or support services. If you find it difficult to deal with the effects of gaslighting on your own, asking for help is a proactive start toward taking back control, strengthening resilience, and enhancing overall mental and emotional wellbeing.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This 1938 play gave rise to the term "gaslighting," which has become widely recognized in the discourse surrounding emotional abuse. Research on this dishonest tactic has expanded in the last few years. Spouses who experience emotional abuse, such gaslighting, are led to question their own reality. It's a common tactic in domestic violence. According to **Williamson (2019)**, gaslighting and gender stereotypes are directly linked to relationships of intimidation, which are a high-risk environment for domestic violence. American Sociological Review assessed this work. He continued by saying that gender stereotypes can support gaslighting. For instance, someone could mislead their relationship by spreading misconceptions about women being forgetful and men being emotionless. Since romantic relationships need a great deal of intimacy and trust, they can provide as fertile ground for gaslighting.

The relationship between emotional intelligence (EI), workplace gaslighting, and employee happiness is examined in the study by **Jain S. (2023)**. It implies that having a higher level of emotional intelligence may help protect workers' wellbeing from the damaging impacts of gaslighting. People with emotional intelligence are better at identifying their own emotions. This can help people recognize examples of gaslighting, such as being told they misinterpreted a simple order. Those with a high level of social awareness are sensitive to other people's emotions. This allows people to notice subliminal cues that may hint to gaslighting, such as when a coworker minimizes their contributions or takes credit for their efforts. Those with high emotional intelligence excel at building relationships. This can help folks create boundaries to protect their own well-being and navigate difficult interactions with gas lighters.

 Lyke et al. (2020) research suggests a substantial correlation between gaslighting experience and various mental health, and discovered a link between gaslighting and anxiety disorders. Victims of gaslighting begin to doubt their own memory, identity, and degree of sanity. Because they are unable to trust their own judgment as a result of this constant

probing, the individual may become increasingly worried. People who use gas lighters often try to dictate the plot and the situation.

The victim may feel completely out of control and powerless to stop the gaslighting behavior, which can cause them to experience acute anxiety. Those who feel tricked may become afraid and nervous. The victim could become hypervigilant, constantly on the lookout for the next clever plan. This could lead to ongoing anxiety and difficulty relaxing. There are increased opportunities for gaslighting in the digital era. An investigation into gaslighting practices in online romantic relationships was conducted by **Patel et al. (2022).** This study emphasizes how important awareness and interaction techniques are in this context of evaluation.

While traditionally exploring the romantic relationships, gaslighting can occur in various setting. **Baines et al., (2023)** examine gaslighting within friendships among young women, suggesting a need for broader understanding of gaslighting dynamics. It examined a relation between dominating behavior particularly with gender.

METHODOLOGY

Aim: To understand how gaslighting experiences impact the mental health in young adults by affecting their overall negative effect.

Variables
- **Independent:** Gaslighting
- **Dependent:** Mental Health- Anxiety levels and Self-esteem

Objectives
- To examine the correlation between gaslighting experiences and mental health outcomes in sample of young adults.
- To measure the anxiety levels among the individuals being in a manipulative or controlling surroundings.
- To explore the relationship between self-esteem and anxiety levels.

Hypothesis
- Individuals subjected to prolonged gaslighting will exhibit higher levels of anxiety and decreased self-esteem to those not exposed to gaslighting.
- There is a significant correlation between gaslighting experiences and anxiety levels
- There is a significant correlation between gaslighting and self- esteem
- Gaslighting experiences also moderates the relationship between self-esteem and anxiety levels.

Sample
Simple random sampling technique was used to collect sample of 154 participants was used in the study, comprising young adults aged between 18 and 35 years. The sample included 87 females and 66 males, reflecting a wide demographic range.

Procedure
An investigation of the effects of gaslighting on young adults' mental health was conducted using a quantitative study approach. In order to investigate the connection between gaslighting experiences and mental health consequences, this design places a high priority

on the gathering and interpretation of numerical data. This guarantees that quantitative methods rely on standardized surveys or questionnaires. This research ensures consistency in data collection across all participants, which adds credibility to statistical analysis and comparisons. In this study, 154 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 are participating. The sample consisted of 87 women and 66 males, reflecting a varied demographic. This enables the study population's general patterns and trends to be identified. Owing to its simple random sampling methodology, the study could be able to extrapolate its results to a more extensive cohort of young adults. The numerical information obtained from the questionnaire was analysed using statistical methods to determine any correlations between the assessments of mental health and the experiences of gaslighting. The strength was measured during the study process. Furthermore, there may be certain limitations.

Furthermore, there may be certain limitations. While quantitative research generally provides strong evidence, it may not accurately capture the nuances and complexity of particular gaslighting scenarios. Therefore, a quantitative method offers a trustworthy means of investigating the frequency and potential impacts of gaslighting on the mental health of young adults through the analysis of large-scale data.

Instruments
In this study, data on self-esteem, experiences with gaslighting, and current anxiety levels were gathered using three self-report questionnaires. One instrument used to gauge the incidence and prevalence of gaslighting occurrences is the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ). It most likely makes several statements that are similar to other gaslighting tactics (e.g., downplaying events, casting doubt on someone's sanity). The frequency with which each participant has engaged in these behaviors is rated. Higher scores imply a higher incidence of gaslighting incidents. A thorough and comprehensive assessment of the literature on gaslighting and in-depth focus groups with victims of domestic abuse served as the foundation for the development of the scale. The fourteen self-reporting elements in the final version of the scale measured the victim's feelings, beliefs, and behaviors as a result of gaslighting. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), is used to score each item. Total ratings varied from 14 to 70, indicating higher degrees of gaslighting victimization in the individual.

With r= 0.955 and 0.871, respectively, the alpha reliability indicates a highly substantial correlation between the main scale and its subscales. The scale exhibits strong reliability, as indicated by the current Cronbach's alpha reliability of $\alpha = 0.934$. The term "peer-disagreement" refers to the peer's disagreement about each act of the victim, holding them accountable for everything, while "loss of self-trust" refers to the individual's declining confidence in their own ability to make decisions, judgments, etc. measuring the content validity. The STATE evaluation, or State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, this multi-dimensional measure distinguishes between trait anxiety, or a general inclination toward anxiety, and state anxiety, which are transient emotions of concern. The particular version you use will probably concentrate on the state anxiety section, assessing participants' anxiety levels at the moment of filling out the questionnaire. Higher scores suggest higher levels of anxiousness right now.

A validated self-report assessment tool consisting of 20 items, the STAI distinguishes between state and trait anxiety. In 1964, Robert E. Lushene, Richard L. Gorsuch, and Charles D. Spielberger created the first STAI form. The STAI has undergone numerous

validity and reliability tests, which have yielded sufficient data to support the measure's suitability for use in clinical and research contexts when examining anxiety. There were multiple STAI items (items 1, 2, 5, 8, 11, 15, 16, 19, 20) with inverted codes. Test-retest intervals ranging from one hour to 104 days were used to evaluate the stability of the STAI scales on both male and female samples of high school and college students. The dependability coefficients' magnitudes diminished in proportion to the duration of the interval. The range of coefficients for the Trait-anxiety scale was.65 to.86, while the State-anxiety scale had a range of.16 to.62. The State-anxiety scale's low degree of stability is predicted because responses to its items are assumed to represent the influence of any transient situational conditions that may have existed at the time of testing. The RSES, or Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: A person's total sense of positive self-regard and self-worth are measured by this well-researched and validated scale. Through the use of a Likert-scale, participants assess statements that represent their levels of competence, acceptance of themselves, and contentment with life. Higher scores signify a healthy sense of self-worth, it's a 10-item survey that gauges one's overall sense of worth by accounting for both positive and negative self-perceptions. It is thought that the scale is one-dimensional. A 4-point Likert scale, spanning from strongly agree to strongly disagree, is used for all item responses. Scores for items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are inverted. Award 1 point for "Strongly Disagree. "There are four points: two for disagree, three for agree, and four for strongly agree. totals for each of the ten items. Maintain a continuous scale for scores. Higher self-esteem is indicated by higher scores. Happiness and self-worth are closely related. We are convinced that having a high sense of self-worth does contribute to happiness, even though the research hasn't proven a direct correlation between the two. Depression is more likely to be caused by low self-esteem than by high one in specific situations. While some studies lend credence to the buffer hypothesis—which holds that stress can be lessened by high self-esteem—other studies reach the opposite conclusion, suggesting that low self-esteem has detrimental effects that are more noticeable during happy times. Despite stress or other conditions, some people discover that having a high sense of self-worth produces positive outcomes. The purpose of these three questionnaires is to help the study team get a complete picture of young adults' experiences with gaslighting, anxiety, and self-esteem. This combination enables you to look at possible relationships between these factors and examine the possible effects of gaslighting on mental health.

RESULTS

The correlational method data obtained along the data mean values are included in the current study's results. The correlation matrix-like data looks to be the outcome of correlation coefficients between the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire, STATE, and Rosenberg self-esteem are displayed in Table 2.

Table No. 1 Correlation between three instruments

		VGQ	**STATE**	**ESTEEM**
VGQ	Pearson Correlation	1	.489**	-.399**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	153	153	153
STATE	Pearson Correlation	.489**	1	-.628**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	153	153	153
ESTEEM	Pearson Correlation	-.399**	-.628**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	153	153	153

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table No. 2 Correlation between sub scales of VGQ and State and self esteem

		prearrangement	Lossofselftrust	ESTEEM	STATE
prearrangement	Pearson Correlation	1	.558**	-.415**	.484**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	153	153	153	153
lossofselftrust	Pearson Correlation	.558**	1	-.329**	.416**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	153	153	153	153
ESTEEM	Pearson Correlation	-.415**	-.329**	1	-.628**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	153	153	153	153
STATE	Pearson Correlation	.484**	.416**	-.628**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	153	153	153	153

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation coefficients between the four variables—peer management, self-esteem, loss of self-trust, and STATE assessment—are displayed in TABLE 3. Strong links between the variables are indicated by the statistically significant correlations at the 0.01 (2-tailed) level.

Table 3 Group Statistics between the subscales of VGQ

	GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
prearrangement	Male	87	14.78	3.731	.400
	female	66	13.14	3.043	.375
lossofselftrust	Male	87	28.48	6.879	.738
	female	66	24.26	6.599	.812

TABLE3 displays the t-test for independent samples. The results of an independent samples t-test comparing male and female self-esteem and peer management scores (assuming gender is the independent variable) are displayed in the table you provided. t-test: In this test, the means of the self-esteem and peer management scores for men and women are compared. The results demonstrate statistically significant differences for loss of self-trust (t = 3.829, Sig. = 0.000) and peer management (t = 2.920, Sig. = 0.004) if variances are taken as equal. Variances that are unequal: The results for both are still significant if the variances are unequal, as indicated by Levene's test for peer management (t = - similar value to equal variance, Sig. = 0.003; loss of self-trust: t = similar value to equal variance.

With the exception of one missing value, it displays the distribution of scores among the 153 participants. The number of participants who received each score on the peer management assessment is displayed in this column. The percentage of participants who received each score is displayed in this column. As an illustration, 1 person (0.6%) obtained a score of 6. Missing values are not included in this column, which is comparable to percent. Thus, it shows the proportion of participants with valid scores among the 153. The overall percentage of participants who received a score of at least a particular value is displayed in this column. For instance, 3.3% of respondents had a score of 6 or 7. The scores vary from 6 to 24, as shown in the table, with the most common values being 13, 14, and 15 (20, 17, and 18 participants, respectively). This indicates that most participants fell into a moderate range when it came to their peer management ratings.

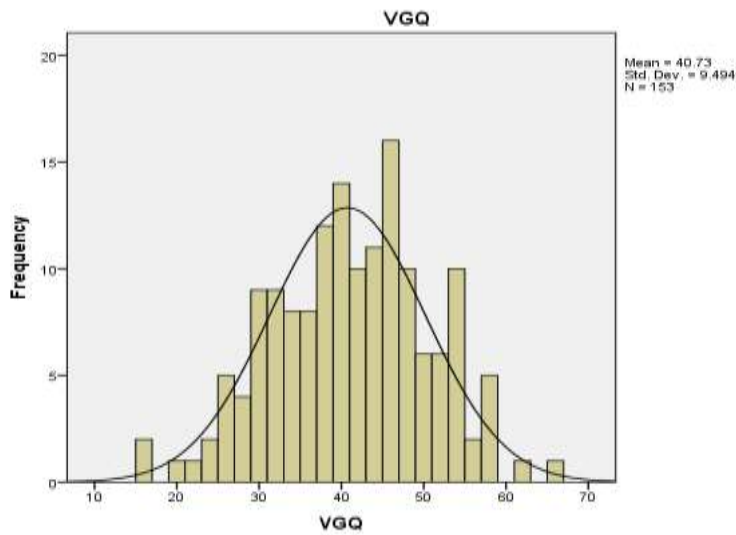*Figure 1: Histogram for Victim Gaslighting*
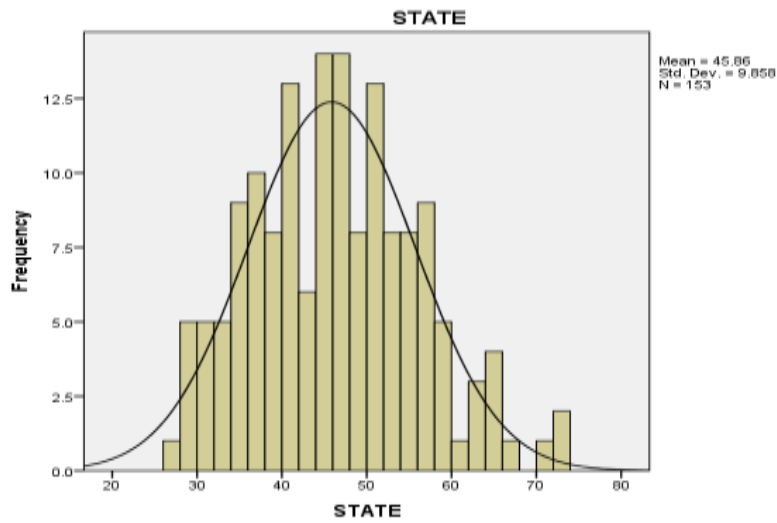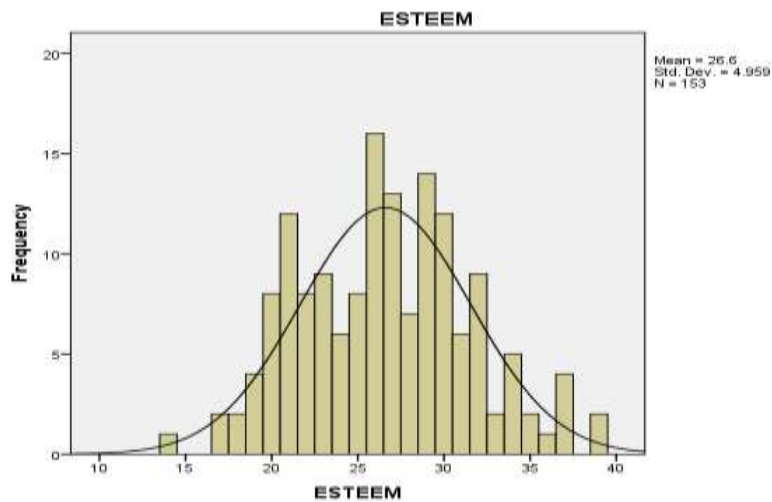

Figure 2: Histogram for State Anxiety

Figure 3: Histogram of Self-esteem

DISCUSSION

Gaslighting is a very serious issue and requires attention especially in a patriarchal country, given that TABLE 1 shows a positive, statistically significant correlation coefficient of 0.489 between higher scores on the VGQ and the STATE assessment, it is clear that gaslighting is a serious problem that needs to be addressed, particularly in patriarchal nations. With a negative and statistically significant correlation coefficient of -0.399, greater VGQ scores are linked to lower levels of self-esteem. Higher scores on the STATE evaluation are linked to lower self-esteem, according to the statistically significant negative correlation of -0.628.

To put it another way, the table indicates that people who have been gaslighted (those with higher VGQ scores) typically have lower self-esteem and higher levels of psychological distress (those with higher STATE scores). This supports the theory that emotional abuse, such as gaslighting, can damage a person's mental health and sense of self-worth. It is found that correlation between the variables is not caused by a true relationship, but rather by chance. Since all of the correlations in this instance are significant at the 0.01 level, the likelihood that they occurred by accident is quite remote. Peer management and a decline in self-trust have a high and positive association Accordingly, there is a correlation between higher levels of self-trust loss and larger levels of difficulties managing peers. It has a negative and significant association coefficient This implies that those who report having a harder time controlling their peers also typically have lower self-esteem. This suggests that higher scores on the STATE evaluation, which denotes greater psychological distress, are also typically reported by individuals who report having more trouble controlling their friends. There is proof that the self-esteem and peer management ratings of males and girls differ statistically significantly. It is not possible to conclude with certainty from this table alone which gender scores higher or which way the difference is oriented. The mean difference is what we need to examine (positive numbers indicate that one gender does better). It's critical to take the Levene test results into account because the variances for peer management may not be comparable, it may be less accurate to assess the precise size of the mean difference using the given confidence interval. It is crucial to remember that a connection does not indicate a cause. It is not always the case that one variable drives the other just because two variables have a correlation. Both of the variables may be changing because of a third variable. These results offer preliminary proof that exposure to gaslighting may be associated with elevated levels of anxiety and lowered self-esteem. The validity of the results is strengthened by the use of a well-established and trustworthy scale, which statistically significant suggests possible correlations between the variables.

Implications of the Study

Gaslighting by love partners, friends, or even family members can seriously damage a young adult's self-esteem and confidence in their own judgment. This can be especially harmful when identity formation is at its most critical. In young people, the persistent doubting of reality and self-doubt brought on by gaslighting can exacerbate anxiety and despair. Young adults who have experienced gaslighting may find it difficult to establish and preserve healthy relationships because they may find it difficult to trust people or may have a skewed self-image.

Academic difficulties, societal pressures, and even mental health issues are already challenges that young adults must deal with. Their chances of thriving are further hampered by the additional layer of complexity created by gaslighting.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to measure the severity of victim gaslighting experiences affecting their anxiety levels and self -esteem. This study effectively examined the relationship between victims' experiences of gaslighting and the negative impacts these incidents have on their anxiety and sense of self. The found correlation emphasizes how critical it is to acknowledge the pervasiveness of gaslighting in a variety of settings. This information can be applied in clinical contexts to create victim interventions, in criminal justice settings to better understand manipulative activities, and in research settings to investigate the origins and effects of gaslighting. Future studies can investigate possible treatments to help victims and lessen the harmful effects of gaslighting, as well as go further into the underlying causative mechanisms at work.

Limitations

Since the study cannot be extrapolated to a larger population with this sample, a larger sample size may be thought to provide greater value to the research. Stronger evidence can be obtained from a longitudinal study, which can effectively help comprehend the dynamics between the variables over time. In order to perform a comparison study and comprehend how culture affects the relationship between the variables, participants might be selected from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

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from the bottom of my heart. First of all, I want to express my gratitude to the HOI, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University, Noida, for allowing me to participate in this program and for providing the funding I needed to do my research. Additionally, I want to express my gratitude to all of my instructors during the past two years, who helped me learn and encouraged me to pursue my interest. I also want to express my gratitude to my guide for all of her help, patience, and counsel during my studies. I must express my gratitude to each and every participant for voluntarily choosing to take part in this study; without them, I could not have collected enough information to finish this investigation. In conclusion, I would want to thank my family and friends. I could never have met the standards without their amazing understanding, encouragement, and support. Thank you very much.

Conflict of Interest
The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.