

The Effect of Gender and Age on Intimate Partner Emotional Abuse

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The purpose of the current research was to study the intimate partner emotional abuse as a form of IPV victimization in India and also was to examine how gender and age effects the alleged intimate partner emotional abuse. **Methodology:** Initially a sample of 500 hundred heterosexual males and females were contacted. Sample of total 300 hundred was selected based on the inclusion criteria. The sample was further categorized into 150 hundred males and 150 hundred females. Each of these groups was further divided with 75 in each subgroups of age I (30-35 years), and age II (35-40 years). Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ; Gottman & Gottman, 2009) was used. **Results:** 2 x 2 ANOVA revealed significant main effect of gender ($F(1, 592) = 22.10, p < 0.01$), and non-significant main effect of age. Mean scores on gender revealed that females ($M = 251.23$) were higher than males ($M = 241.86$) on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse. **Conclusion:** The results of present study revealed that females were higher than males on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse but there are increasing numbers of men who are reporting to be victims of perceived intimate partner abuse.

Keywords: Age, Gender, Intimate Partner Emotional Abuse

“While physical abuse is awful and not to be condoned, it is not necessarily the most damaging type of abuse. One can hurt a partner deeply; even drive the person to suicide without ever lifting a finger” (Straus, 1997, p. 210). Karakurt and Silver (2013) acknowledged that intimate partner violence (IPV) is a violation of human rights and it is a health problem in all over the world. Intimate partner emotional abuse as a form of IPV can include verbal abuse, acts, threats of acts, or coercive strategy and most of the times lead the victim to PTSD. The current study examined gender and age differences in individuals who perceived intimate partner emotional abuse.

Perpetrators exert emotional abuse to manage and control, terrorize, and humiliate their victims, and it targets the emotional and psychological well-being of them, and most of the times are a pioneer to physical abuse (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015). Intimate Partner

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Emotional Abuse (IPEA) is frequently more hurtful and long-lasting than physical abuse (Vissing, Straus, Gelles & Harrop, 1991). Abrams and Robinson (2000) stated that verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse could have the similar effects as the physical abuse. According to Engel (2002) intimate partner emotional abuse includes any nonphysical actions or attitude which intended to control, restrain, punish, or isolate another person with the use of disgrace or fear.

There have been many studies on intimate partner emotional abuse against women, whereas investigation on emotional abuse against men is insufficient (Karakurt & Silver, 2013). Karakurt and Silver (2013) acknowledged that indeed males can be the victims of domestic abuse and this subject became a valuable issue of research scholars and social investigators. Females are able to engage in both emotional and physical abuse of their male partners (Okwendi & Nwankwoala, 2014). In past two decades intimate partner emotional abuse against women has decreased due to the fact that the condition of wealth and resources, the role of law performance and more importantly their empowerment through feminism have improved.

Therefore, the possibility of emotional abuse against men may go upward while the possibility of emotional abuse against women may go downwards. As the matter of fact, men do not report such abuse as they think they would not get any response or care from police. Furthermore, the public and society must be aware that men also can be abused and become a victim; in fact they are entitled to have support (Rivara et al., 2009). Although earlier studies (Mechem, Shofer, Reinhard, Hornig, & Datner, 1999; Goldberg & Tomlanovich, 1984; Henning & Feder, 2004; Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007; Muelleman & Burgess 1998; Straus, 2004; Hines & Douglas, 2010) have already stated that men are also victims of domestic abuse, so society needs to be made aware in this matter and should consider the same services to be offered to men as well as women.

O'Leary and Maiuro (2001) stated that this is important to consider that emotional abuse has a separate structure from physical abuse, and qualified of its own theories and prevention tactics. Gender and age are important aspects related to emotional abuse.

The findings from the National Intimate Partner & Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) (2011) acknowledged that about half of Americans experienced emotional abuse in their life span by a partner. Emotional abuse was considered the combination of questions based on both expressive aggression like name calling and coercive control like isolation strategies or coercion of hurt which was reported by 48.4% of women and 48.8% of men. Accordingly, intimate partner emotional abuse emerges to be the most common form of IPV (Black et al., 2011).

Gender and age often act as demographic variables for intimate partner emotional abuse but are not the main areas of focus in researches. Therefore, the current research aims not only to

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investigate emotional abuse, but also to examine how it relates to the gender and age of the victim.

The current study seeks to reveal the effect of gender, and age on emotional abuse. There is a lack of research on the interaction between these two essential constructs in their relationship to emotional abuse. Therefore, in this study, we explore the gender and age in the pathway of intimate partner emotional abuse.

Gender and Emotional Abuse

Majority of studies on intimate partner emotional abuse have concentrated on women and there have been numerous investigations on the effect of intimate partner violence (IPV) on women's wellbeing (Pico-Alfonso et al., 2006). Gelles (1974) declared that the study on men being abused in romantic relationship has existed from the beginning of research in abuse but in general women undergo more physical and psychological injuries than men (Archer, 2000; Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001). Unfortunately, the male victims of abuse such as intimate partner emotional abuse have been seriously ignored in the society, though there are number of cases which were not reported at all (NCFM, 2009).

Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, and McKeown (2000) assessed the IPV prevalence rates of men and women and stated that the both men and women reported almost same perceived emotional abuse (7.4% of women vs. 8.3% of men). In general, emotional abuse within intimate relationships is normal in the most of the countries, and is likely the most common form of relationship abuse. Even though the majority of IPV show violence by men towards women (Krug et al., 2002) but researchers have increasingly documented that the IPV sufferer is not restricted to women and that men can also be victims of abuse (Randle & Graham, 2011).

One of the strong challenges in society are discovery and identification of men as victims of IPV in which men are perceived to be dominant from economical, social, and political view. On the other hand, researchers (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001; Hines, 2007; Holtzworth-Munroe, 2005) have challenged this assumption of dominance of males, and a rising body of exploration has documented the significance and the impact of IPV on male victims.

Feminist perspective defenders have argued that IPV is extremely gendered and should thus be considered as a social problem for women. Many followers of this prototype view sexism and feminine inequality in patriarchal societies as the central cause of IPV (McHugh & Cosgrove, 2004; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Leonard & Senchak, 1996; Pence & Paymar, 2006; Walker, 2009). However, the family violence advocates believed that men and women are equally expected to be both perpetrators and victims of IPV. Gender symmetry is a much-debated construct in the literature and a number of studies have acknowledged the evidence to support this belief (Archer, 2006; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Lyon, 1999; Malloy, McCloskey, Grigsby, &

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Gardner, 2003; Martin, 1997; McHugh, Livingston, & Ford, 2005). A meta-analysis by Williams, Ghandour and Kub (2008) looked at different types of abuse in three categories (adolescents, college students, and adults) of heterosexual relationships, and found that just 11 of the 62 articles examined some form of emotional abuse in which verbal and psychological abuse were included. But based on different methodology and sampling methods in studies, it was not possible to make a certain developmental path, but in all groups, emotional abuse was the most common form of IPV (Williams et al., 2008). Another meta-analytic (Carney & Barner, 2012) reviewed three aspects of IPV: emotional abuse, sexual coercion, and stalking/obsessive behavior. The rates of emotional abuse were high, averaging around 80% (40% of women and 32% of men stated expressive aggression like name calling), and (41% of women and 43% of men stated coercive control like isolation strategies or terrorization of hurt). Regardless of high perpetration rates among genders, a review indicated that women are still unreasonably victimized by IPV and more often sustain serious injuries (Hamberger, 2005). Overall, a better understanding of gender effects on emotional abuse is required.

Age and Emotional Abuse

A few studies have addressed the effect of age on IPV, with the focus mainly on physical abuse and there is lack of research of role of age on intimate partner emotional abuse. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have predicted that high school students experiencing physical or emotional abuse in dating relationships (Karakurt & Silver, 2013). Approximately one in five women and nearly one in seven men who reported rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner initially experienced some form of IPV between 11 and 17 years of age (Black et al., 2011).

Mezey, Post, and Maxwell (2002) investigated different forms of IPV against women during the lifetime, and found that the physical abuse was negatively correlated to age, but nonphysical abuse, such as emotional abuse and controlling behavior, was not. Age was not an important predictor of psychological vulnerability or autonomy-limiting behavior, two non-physical forms of abuse, and a partner's age did not predict a woman's risk of psychological abuse. Therefore, rates of non-physical abuse were similar between younger and older women.

Rivara et al. (2009) also found that women aged 26 to 30 had the highest risk of IPV, and the risk decreased with age, with substantial drop-offs after age 50. Remarkably age-related decline in prevalence of physical and/or sexual IPV began at a younger age than that of nonphysical IPV. Additional research is necessary to understand the effects of age on emotional abuse.

Furthermore, previous researches focusing on intimate relationship, age and gender are mixed and there is lack of research on comparative study especially in these age groups. Thus, the goal of this research is to explore effect of gender and age on perceived emotional abuse in intimate relationships.

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Based on the review of literature the following research questions were raised:

1. Will there be any gender differences on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse?
2. Will there be any age differences on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse?

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

Initially five hundred heterosexual males and females were contacted. Sample of three hundred was selected based on the inclusion criteria. The sample was further categorized into 150 males and 150 females. Each of these groups was further divided with 75 in each subgroups of age I (30-35 years), and age II (35-40 years). For the purpose of this study, the sample was taken from different cities in four regions of Punjab, (India) - Ludhiana, Patiala, Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Chandigarh. The individuals who gave their consent for participating in the research and the ones who matched the inclusion criteria were taken (male and female participants were in either of two age ranges of 30-35 years, or 35-40 years, they were married or were in intimate partner relationship, with a single partner for at least two years, they were from middle socio economic group and belonged to nuclear family structure, they had minimum qualification as graduation, and finally participants who perceived themselves as victims of intimate partner emotional abuse). The ethical standards of research were maintained. The participants were made aware of the purpose of the study. They were guaranteed that the data collected from them will be used merely for research purposes and complete confidentiality will be maintained. Participants were given the standardized questionnaire along with semi schedule questionnaires regarding sex, race, education, age, sexual orientation, and information regarding their mental health. The background variables such as sex, race, education, and age were controlled.

Measures

1. **Demographic information-** Participants were asked basic demographic information, including age, race/ethnicity, personal income and education. The participants were also asked about the current status of their relationship, the length of their relationship with their partners.
2. **Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998)** - The EAQ was developed by Jacobson and Gottman (1998). It has 66 items assessing emotional abuse, each rated on a 4-point frequency scale (Never to Very Often). The internal consistency is .92. The EAQ has been widely used, indicating its external validity (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000).

RESULTS

2 x 2 analysis of variance with 2 groups of gender (males and females), and two categories of age (age I and age II) was conducted. The analysis of variance (Table 1) on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse revealed significant main effects of gender [$F(1, 592) = 22.10, p \leq 0.01$], and non-significant results on main effect of age. 2 x 2 interaction failed to reach the

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significance level (Table 1). t-test analysis (Table 2) revealed significant difference between women and men on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse ($t = 4.70, p \leq 0.01$), and the mean score was found to be higher among females ($M = 251.23$) on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse. However the t-test analysis revealed that there were no significant age differences on intimate partner emotional abuse.

Table 1- ANOVA (2 x 2) Summary table on Intimate Partner Emotional Abuse

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Squares	F
IPEA	Gender	13188.28	1	13188.28	22.10**
	Age I/ AgeII	254.80	1	254.80	0.42
	Gender * Age I/Age II	25.21		25.21	0.04
	Within	676516.26	292	596.71	
	Total	1343957	300		

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2- Mean, standard deviations and t-ratio values for gender and age on emotional abuse

Variable	Female		Male		t-ratio	Age I		Age II		t- ratio
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
IPEA	251.23	23.95	241.86	24.84	4.70**	254.20	26.46	254.89	25.21	0.22

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

IPEA= Intimate Partner Emotional abuse, Age I= Age 30-35, Age II= Age 35-40

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to find the effect of gender and age on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse. The findings of the present study revealed that women were higher than men on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse; hence the first research question was supported. Most of the studies on intimate partner emotional abuse have paid attention to females and there have been many researches on the impact of intimate partner violence (IPV) on women's wellbeing and welfare (Garcia-Linares et al., 2005). O'Leary (1999) stated that researchers have given less attention to psychological abuse than physical abuse in the area of partner abuse. One reason for the relative ignorance of psychological/emotional abuse is that there are problems in deriving a common definition of psychological/emotional abuse that might be helpful to both the mental health and officially authorized professions. Another rationale for the relative ignorance of psychological/emotional abuse has been an unspoken and undeclared assumption that physical abuse exacts a greater psychological outcome on victims than psychological/emotional abuse. At the great extent of physical violence, these assumptions seems acceptable, but as levels of physical abuse are most expected in marriage and long-term

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relationships, psychological/emotional seems to have as greater impact as compared to physical abuse.

Elaborating on the reason for females being higher than males on intimate partner emotional abuse could be explained by feminist point of view (Kurz, 1989). According to the feminist perspective of accessible investigational evidence, heterosexual intimate partner abuse is essentially a problem of men assaulting female partners (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992). Supporters of the feminist perspective have discussed that IPV is extremely gendered and should accordingly be considered as a social concern for the women (McHugh & Cosgrove, 2004). Several followers of this view analyses sexism and female inequality in patriarchal societies as the major cause of IPV (Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Leonard & Senchak, 1996; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Walker, 2009). Hence, feminist perspectives assist to give a fair idea on why women suffer more in intimate partner emotional abuse than men.

The results of present study revealed that females were higher than males on perceived intimate partner emotional abuse but the men are also not far away from being the victims of intimate partner emotional abuse. Men's rate of experiencing emotional abuse in the present study can also be explained by Rivara et al. (2002) which focused on the function of law enforcement for females, along with women's empowerment through feminism, leading to decrease in rates of abuse in the past twenty years. The similarity of attitudes and problems of females with males could be partially understood by the theory of micro-resource conflict in terms of conflict resulting from changing gender roles (Sprey, 1999).

The current study also examined how other individual characteristics, such as age effect on intimate partner emotional abuse. Results of the study indicated no-significant effects of age. There is limited research that can clarify the relationship between age and intimate partner emotional abuse. In a study by Mezey et al. (2002) examining different types of intimate partner violence (physical abuse was negatively associated with age, but nonphysical abuse, such as emotional abuse and controlling behavior, was not). Age was not an important predictor of psychological vulnerability or autonomy-limiting behavior, two non-physical types of abuse, and a partner's age did not predict a risk of psychological abuse. Therefore, rates of non-physical abuse were similar between younger and older women. However, another study done by Rivara et al. (2009) revealed that those aged 26 to 30 years had the highest risk of intimate partner abuse, and the risk decreased with age, with considerable drop-offs after age 50. Interestingly, age-related decline in occurrence of physical and/or sexual IPV began at a younger age than that of nonphysical intimate partner abuse.

No research is comprehensive in itself, hence, the present investigation also had few limitations. This study was entirely quantitative in nature with much reliance on the self-report measures and these types of measures might bring in social desirability factor. There is a chance of biased

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responses on part of the participants. The present study engaged purposive sampling technique due to the nature and design of the study, hence, limiting its generalization. Additionally, only limited age range were selected. Though it was done to guarantee homogeneity, however incorporating wider age group range could have offered better generalization to people belonging to different age groups. The findings of this study may have limited generalizability to upper and lower socioeconomic classes and people of diverse backgrounds. The present study only focused on heterosexual participants. Same sex couples could have different emotional abuse dynamics with different age effects.

The major limitation encountered in the present study was the non-availability of sufficient psychological research and literature in Indian context necessitating dependence upon the research conducted abroad. Similar studies need to be replicated in different parts of India, for different age groups, for homosexual and divorce groups as well. More research is needed to get an insight into the intimate partner emotional abuse. Additional research in this area could provide better understanding of intimate partner violence in the Indian context.

In future research, specifying the developmental course of romantic relationships and identifying the sequence of events and factors that lead to intimate partner emotional abuse is important. This research gives an insight into intimate partner emotional abuse and role of gender and age. Though females perceived more intimate partner emotional abuse than men but one cannot deny prevalence of problems in males. Better understanding and insight can surely help us to ascertain interventions and coping strategies to reduce trauma in such victims. In Indian scenario, public service announcements focus almost exclusively on intimate partner violence against women. Public service announcements need to be de-gendered immediately. There is a need for additional public education regarding abuse against men. There are several web sites on intimate partner violence in favor of women and these are all woman-centered, or use gender-neutral communication. They have a tendency to minimize abuse against men. There are only a handful of sites addressing family violence against men, but none of them obtain any government, foundation or corporate support. In brief, we need to distinguish that intimate partner abuse is a public problem, not just a women's problem.

The evidence suggested that criminal justice and social service agencies are uncertain of how to react to or provide services to female perpetrators or male victims. The present study suggested that there are convincing reasons why research in this area needs to go beyond the argument over who perpetrates more intimate partner abuse and who suffers more as a consequence of intimate partner abuse. For example, Straus (2011) stated that “it is not sufficient for prevention programs to be gender neutral. They need to be explicitly directed to girls and women as well as boys and men. In addition, more than just awareness of female perpetration, the target audience of women and girls also needs to be informed that intimate partner violence by a woman is morally wrong, and is considered as criminal act” (Straus, 2011, p. 285).

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Several strategies could be employed such as the need for increase in training about the diversity of intimate partner abuse victims for members of the domestic abuse service system and all helping professionals who might come into contact with intimate partner abuse victims. Education should contain the general experiences of all intimate partner violence victims, in spite of victim's and perpetrator's gender, and the significant role that frontline staff play in validating those experiences and providing services to all who need support. It is important to screen any, male or female who indicates that she or he is the target of aggressive behaviors of the partner so that they could receive information on getting help for abuse.

The impact of intimate partner emotional abuse is just as harmful as the effects of physical abuse. However, the law recognizes physical and sexual abuse as crimes against the individual but not intimate partner emotional abuse, while it is a universal form of relationship abuse. Despite the fact that, women victims of intimate partner emotional abuse are greater in number, it is clear that women also indulge in intimate partner abuse against their male partners and there is a crucial need to develop, test, and validate assessment tools that can characterize and predict the consequences of intimate partner abuse.

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