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# **The Impact of Gender Discrimination on Women's Identity, and the Nature of Gender-based and Psychological Violence**

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## **Abstract:**

Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at individuals because of their gender identity. One significant form of this is psychological violence, which involves emotional abuse leading to fear, distress, and various mental health issues. In patriarchal systems, psychological abuse against women is particularly prevalent. Patriarchy upholds rigid gender roles, often depicting women as naturally suited for domestic life, confined to the responsibilities of home and family. Problems arise when these stereotypes are imposed on women, limiting their freedom and suppressing their individuality. Not all women are meant to live lives restricted to household duties; many aspire to careers, independence, and self-expression beyond the traditional roles assigned to them. Virginia Woolf's fictional character Judith Shakespeare symbolizes the lost potential of women denied equal opportunities. Working women face dual layers of subjugation—at home and in professional settings—where they often encounter control and discrimination. In many cultures, women are still viewed as lesser than men. They may face verbal and emotional abuse for not bearing children, for having daughters instead of sons, or because their families cannot afford dowry. This research is analytical in nature and draws upon both primary and



secondary sources. The primary goal is to explore the emotional suffering and humiliation women endure due to psychological abuse, analyzing its forms, root causes, and potential solutions. Emotional violence is just as damaging as physical assault or sexual violence. When women suffer emotionally, it also affects their children, showing how a misogynistic mindset can obstruct the healthy development of future generations.

*Keywords:* psychological abuse , women, discrimination

## **Introduction:**

Women are at the center of human society as life-givers, nurturers, educators, and leaders. They shape families, influence communities, and drive progress. Their contributions in social, economic, and cultural spheres are essential for balance and growth. Empowering women uplifts entire societies and ensures a more just, inclusive future. Women are adult members of the female sex. Biologically, most women have two X chromosomes and reproductive organs such as ovaries and a uterus. However, not all individuals who identify as women have the ability to conceive or possess every female biological trait. Beyond biological definitions, the concept of ‘woman’<sup>1</sup> also includes cultural, social, and personal elements. Gender identity refers to an individual's internal understanding of themselves as male, female, both, or neither. This identity may align—or not—with the sex assigned at birth. For instance, someone assigned female at birth might identify as a woman, while others may identify as transgender or ‘non-binary’<sup>2</sup>. Recognizing and respecting each person's chosen gender identity is vital.

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to any form of ‘violence’<sup>3</sup> that is primarily inflicted on individuals based on their gender or perceived gender. It is rooted in unequal power dynamics between genders and is a violation of human rights. GBV is predominantly perpetrated against women and girls, but it can also affect men, transgender individuals, and non-conforming people.

Psychological violence, often called emotional or mental abuse, involves behaviors intended to dominate, belittle, or emotionally injure someone. Unlike physical abuse, this type of violence targets a person’s mental health and is often subtle and hard to recognize. It may occur in relationships, among friends, or even in workplaces.

Psychological violence, a key aspect of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)<sup>4</sup>, poses a serious threat to mental health worldwide, including in developed nations like the USA and Europe. This



form of abuse occurs frequently, often repeatedly, and can cause deep emotional harm. Addressing it is vital for fostering relationships rooted in empathy, respect, and equality.

This study focuses on psychological abuse targeting women, particularly within patriarchal systems. ‘Patriarchy’<sup>5</sup> perpetuates gender stereotypes, which in turn fuel gender-based violence. Emotional abuse is as damaging as physical assault or sexual violence. When women suffer, their children are affected too. Misogynistic societal norms not only harm women but also hinder the well-being and progress of future generations.

### **Methodology:**

This research work is a qualitative analysis of the topic, “Women and Psychological Violence- A study of gender-based violence”, based on primary and secondary data. The study involves examining and interpreting subjective data, such as observation, interviews available on YouTube, scholarly writings taken from the internet, and printed texts, to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and meanings associated with psychological violence against women.

### **Research design:**

The researcher articulates the specific aspects of psychological violence with the purpose to explore. The target population here is the patriarchal society. This research work is a qualitative analysis of the themes –women and psychological violence. The research is conducted based on the objectives and sums up the findings. The researcher also suggests some possible ways of solving the problem.

### **Objectives:**

The fundamental goals of the research study encompass the following:

- To study the nature of women
- To study the forms of psychological violence and its causes
- To signify the effects of psychological violence against women
- To find out feasible solutions

### **Research Gap:**

While significant progress has been made in understanding various forms of violence against women, there are still several research gaps to consider. Many existing measures focus on



physical violence but neglect other forms of violence. Examining the intersectionality of various identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation) and how they intersect with psychological violence is vital. Investigating the long-term effects of psychological violence on women's mental health, well-being and overall life outcomes is necessary. Exploring protective factors and resilience among women who have experienced psychological violence is important. Examining the characteristics and motivations of perpetrators of psychological violence against women can help identify risk factors. Investigating the barriers and facilitators that influence women's help-seeking behaviors when experiencing psychological violence is necessary. Understanding the factors that influence whether and how women seek support from formal and informal sources can inform the development of accessible and effective support services.

### **Limitations:**

1. This study does not conduct a practical survey like interviewing female victims in their natural environment.
2. Opinions may vary across different cultures and societies

### **Forms of Psychological Violence and its Causes:**

Psychological violence is detectable in various multiple forms of emotional 'abuse'<sup>6</sup> and 'impulsive aggressiveness'<sup>7</sup>, such as:

1. Verbal abuse: Consistently using harsh, belittling, insulting, or derogatory language towards someone, often undermining their self-esteem and causing emotional pain.
2. Gas lighting<sup>8</sup>: Manipulating someone into questioning their perception of reality, making them doubt their memories, judgment, and sanity. This tactic aims to gain power and control over the person by distorting their sense of reality.
3. Manipulation: Employing deceptive tactics, emotional blackmail, guilt-tripping, or other means to control and influence someone's thoughts, emotions, and actions for personal gain.
4. Isolation: Cutting off social connections, restricting access to support systems, or preventing someone from manipulating relationships with friends, family, or other sources of emotional support, feeling powerless and reliant on the individual inflicting harm is a prevalent sentiment among those who find themselves in abusive circumstances.



5. Threats and intimidation: Using threats of harm, violence, or other forms of punishment to create fear and compliance. This can include threats of physical harm, damage to property, or harm to loved ones.

6 Humiliation and degradation: Engaging in behaviors that demean, ridicule, or embarrass someone, often in front of others, to undermine their self-confidence and self-worth.

7. Control and surveillance: Exerting excessive control over a person's actions, decisions, and movements. This can involve constant monitoring, stalking, or invading privacy to instill fear and dependence.

The reasons behind someone's aggressive nature are found as biological, psychological, and environmental. It's important to note that each individual is unique, and the specific reasons may vary depending on their personal experiences, personality traits, and underlying psychological factors. However, here are some common factors that can contribute to emotional abuse and impulsive aggression:

1. Anger and frustration: Impulsive aggression can arise from unresolved anger and frustration. When individuals are unable to effectively manage their emotions, they may resort to aggressive behaviors as a way to release their pent-up feelings.

2. Past traumas: People who have experienced traumatic events in their past, such as abuse or neglect, may exhibit impulsive aggression as a defense mechanism. Their past experiences may have left them feeling threatened or powerless, leading them to adopt aggressive behaviors as a means of self-protection.

3. Low self-esteem and insecurity: Individuals with low self-esteem and feelings of insecurity may resort to aggression as a way to establish dominance or control over others. By putting others down or belittling them, they may attempt to elevate their self-worth or mask their insecurities.

4. Learned behavior: Sometimes, aggressive behavior can be learned from one's environment, such as witnessing aggression in the family or imitating aggressive behavior displayed by others. If someone grows up in an environment where aggression is normalized or rewarded, they may adopt similar behaviors as they mature.



5. Mental health issues: Certain mental health conditions, such as borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, or intermittent explosive disorder, can be associated with aggressive behavior. These conditions may cause individuals to struggle with regulating their emotions and impulse control, leading to outbursts of aggression.

6. Substance abuse: Substance abuse can significantly affect an individual's behavior and increase the likelihood of aggression. Drugs or alcohol can impair judgment, increase irritability, and lower inhibitions, making individuals more prone to engaging in aggressive acts.

It's important to remember that impulsive aggression or emotional abuse is not justified or acceptable, regardless of the underlying reasons. If you or someone you know is experiencing or perpetrating impulsive aggression or emotional abuse, it is crucial to seek help from mental health professionals who can provide support and guidance in managing and addressing these behaviors

### **Women and Psychological Violence:**

The social concept of women is both structural and ideal. A woman is called a woman based on her bodily and mental aspects. Society uses the virtues of ideal womanhood and expects that a woman should possess those virtues. The Greek philosopher Aristotle describes women as opposed to men in nature. According to him, women are inferior to men, their suitable qualities are silence and obedience, and they should work in private confinement (Allen, 2002:8). Again Sigmund Freud says that a female's inferiority occurs from 'envy for the penis' (Freud, 1957: 124). Thus, the male-centric world has ascertained 'female inferiority' from different perspectives

Historically, prostitution is a social stigma for women. A man's polygamy is accepted in certain social and religious contexts. Again, virginity is a social concept that is rooted in social and cultural beliefs surrounding sexuality, morality, and personal values. In many societies, virginity has traditionally been associated with purity, honor, and virtue, particularly for women. The idea of virginity has often been tied to notions of marriage, fidelity, and the control of women's sexuality.

Millions of women across the globe are sexually abused by their intimate partners. Uneducated women and women who live in poverty are vulnerable to sexual violence, whereas self-dependent and educated women can raise their voices against any kind of violence. The psychological impact of rape on a woman is horrific. She is likely to experience post-traumatic



stress disorder, depression, anxiety and panic disorders, trust and intimacy issues, and shame and guilt.

Our mental and bodily activities are essentially related. Thoughts, memories, feelings, and emotions influence bodily activities. Similarly, the condition of the mind also depends on the body's potential. Life constitutes body and mind inseparably. A man or a woman is both a physical and psychological structure. Therefore, the effect of physical abuse or sexual violence on the victim's psychology is undeniable and may remain permanently

He or she is a psycho-physical organism and his or her behavior has both bodily and mental aspects. These two aspects change together and influence each other. It is a matter of common experience that it is difficult to do any mental work, even to concentrate attention, when we are physically exhausted: and bodily activities appear irksome when we are mentally tired. (Bhatia, 1993: 47).

Irrespective of gender, any human being can be subjected to psychological violence. But the root of violence against women lies in patriarchal stereotypes. Patriarchy dominates women by suppressing their complaints of rape and by using their bodies as objects for entertaining males.

The patriarchal eyes convince us that –

- A woman is incomplete without a man
- Her body structure is defective and fragile
- Women are included in the category of other
- A woman should be womanly in her clothes, movements, smile, behavior, and activities.

There is an inherent disregard for women in patriarchy, a total humiliation of a female as an individual. Many women live in fear of this humiliation and her effort is to adjust in such circumstances to avoid disgraceful behavior.

A few years ago, a well-known woman writer refused to have her portrait appear in a series of photographs devoted especially to women writers. She wanted to be included in the men's category; but to get this privilege, she used her husband's influence. Women who assert they are men still claim masculine consideration and respect. I also remember a young Trotskyite standing on a platform during a stormy meeting, about to come to blows despite her obvious fragility. She was denying her feminine frailty, But it was for the love



of a militant man she wanted to be equal to. The defiant position that American women occupy proves they are haunted by the feeling of their femininity. (Beauvoir, 2015: 5)

Meghan Markle, Duchess of Sussex, spouse of Duke Prince Harry and a former actress delivered a speech at the UN. In her speech, she spoke about an incident that happened at a very young age. She was an 11 years old girl and was watching a TV show in elementary school. She suddenly saw an advertisement for a dishwashing liquid with a tagline, “Women all over America are fighting greasy pots and pans.” To her utter shock, two boys from her class said, “ Yeah, that’s where women belong in the kitchen.” A saddened and angry Meghan told everything to her father who encouraged her to do something as a protest against this incident. She wrote letters to the first lady Hillary Clinton, to Linda Ellerbee who hosted a kids’ news program, to Gloria Alfred, the powerhouse attorney, and the soap manufacturer. Her effort didn’t go in vain. She was encouraged back with letters from all of them to whom she wrote. It was not enough. After a month, the soap manufacturer changed the tagline and it was rewritten as “People all over America are fighting greasy pots and pans.”

Embracing a different culture in her husband’s house often requires reevaluating a woman’s own identity. She may find herself questioning her cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors, which can lead to a sense of identity conflict. This process involves reconciling her original cultural background with the new cultural context, and it may take time to find a balance and establish a coherent sense of self.

Psychological violence against women in the workplace is very common. Such harassment can come from the authority of an institution, from co-workers, and also from subordinates. Several ways of abusing a woman in her workplace are teasing, imitating the way she talks, making her feel inefficient to perform her duties, isolating her, not allowing her to take part in important meetings, ignoring her maternal affairs and preventing her from raising her voice against injustice.

Now in many countries, women’s human rights have become legal concerns. French law doesn’t include obedience as one of the women’s duties. India is giving importance to the empowerment of women and girls. In most countries, women have all kinds of political rights and without a male companion, they can live alone. But still, the law has failed to protect a lonely girl or woman from the possibility of being raped or psychologically harassed. For that, society’s perspective towards women must be changed.





Economic discrimination against women in the workplace, often referred to as the gender pay gap or gender wage gap, is a significant issue that persists in many societies. While progress has been made over the years, women continue to face various forms of economic discrimination in their professions.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas, a female icon in the global entertainment world, in an interview, reveals her experiences as an actress. In her twenty years of acting career, she was paid equally to her male co-actors for her performance in Citadel for the first time and she added that the same should happen in the case of other female actors.

### **Summary of Findings:**

The study finds that-

- Any kind of violence, physical or psychological, has adverse impact on a person's mental health.
- Rape is a severe kind of psychological violence
- Psychological violence against women is systematic in patriarchy. Making a woman feel inferior, treating her as an object, convincing her that her suitable dominion is the kitchen, and economic discriminations are dehumanizing experiences for a self-conscious woman.
- A woman's cultural adaptation<sup>9</sup> in married life means transforming herself into 'other' in a real sense, having her inherited culture at stake.
- Negligence of maternal needs is both physical and psychological harm done to a woman.
- There are some other common abuses she can face at home, working place, or anywhere else such as teasing, humiliation, calling names, etc.

### **Recommendations:**

The discussion leads to the suggestions as follows:

- Addressing gender-based violence requires a multi-faceted approach involving legal measures, public awareness campaigns, education, and support services. Governments, civil society organizations, and communities must work together to



challenge societal norms, promote gender equality, and ensure survivors have access to justice, healthcare, counseling, and safe spaces.

- Addressing sensitive issues such as rape requires a cautious and empathic approach, and both individuals and local organizations need to extend support to survivors of sexual violence in this case also.
- Discussions on prostitution need sensitivity, empathy, and a willingness to consider various perspectives. Addressing the underlying social, economic, and systematic factors that contribute to the existence of prostitution is essential to tackle the issues surrounding it effectively.
- Cultural adaptation can be a stressful experience. The woman may encounter challenges such as language barriers, differences in social norms, and unfamiliar customs. These stressors can lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and homesickness. She needs to have a support system in place, including her husband, family, friends, or cultural communities, to help her cope with these challenges.
- It is important to note that economic discrimination against women is a complex issue influenced by a variety of factors. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes policy changes, workplace initiatives, and societal attitudes to promote gender equality and create fair economic opportunities for all individuals.
- Both law and education together can reinforce women's equal status by demolishing the patriarchal concept of women as the second sex.
- It also requires an individual's effort and strong willpower to prepare himself or herself to deal with verbal and emotional abuse adequately.

## **Conclusion:**

This research offers an in-depth exploration of the psychological harm inflicted upon women and emphasizes the urgent need for empathy and respect toward them for the betterment of both families and society as a whole. While acknowledging that psychological abuse can affect both men and women, the study specifically focuses on the emotional and mental toll experienced by women, who are often more vulnerable due to systemic and societal imbalances. The findings highlight the importance of addressing this issue not only from a moral standpoint but also as a

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crucial step toward social well-being and harmony. The research calls for practical, actionable solutions to mitigate the problem and protect victims from long-term mental damage. Furthermore, it lays a strong foundation for continued exploration and discourse on the topic, encouraging policymakers, educators, and communities to engage in open conversations and develop strategies to foster a safer, more respectful environment for all individuals, especially women.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Now , that's not necessarily as discriminatory as it sounds. You see, when Old English was first being spoken in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, there were two distinct words for men and women: “wer” meant “adult male,” and “wif” meant “adult female.” There was a third word , “man,” which simply meant “person” or “human being.”(The History of The Word ‘Woman, by Samantha Enslen, <https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/articles/the-history-of-the-word-woman/>)

<sup>2</sup>“Non-binary means existing or identifying outside the sex/gender binary, neither man nor woman, or being partially or a combination of these things,” explains [Lee Phillips](#), psychotherapist and certified sex and couples counselor. Being non-binary is an umbrella term for a gender identity. “Gender identity is an identifier someone uses to communicate how they understand their personal gender, navigate within or outside our societal gender systems, and/or desire to be perceived by others,” adds Phillips.( What Does Non-Binary Mean? Everything You Need to Know About the Non-Binary Gender, by Brittany Leitner, <https://www.oprahdaily.com/life/relationships-love/a40924072/non-binary-guide/>)

<sup>3</sup>Tracing back to Latin as violentia, related to the adjective violentus , distinguishing the violent behavior of an individual, from vis, force or vigor, with roots in the Indo-European \*weie-, in allusion to wanting to take something with tenacity . It is the forced imposition of one person upon another, regardless of the form, context, or relationship; the entities of the state and the justice system have an obligation to protect us from. (Etymology of Violence, by Benjamin Vechi, <https://etymology.net/violence/>)

<sup>4</sup>Intimate Partner Violence ( IPV) is a global health problem characterized as any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm. (The psychological subtype of intimate partner violence and its effect on mental health: protocol for a systematic



review and meta-analysis, by S. Dokkedahl, R. N. Kok, S. Murphy, T. R. Kriatensen, D. Bech-Hansen & Ask Elklit,

<https://systematicreviewsjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13643-019-1118-1>)

<sup>5</sup> “Patriarchy literally means ‘rule of the [fathers](#)’ and comes from the [Old Testament](#)—all [power](#) was given to male elders. Today, its meaning is more [general](#): male domination of all the major [institutions](#) of [society](#) including [government](#), religion, [education](#), the [economy](#), the military and the [media](#)” (Kaufman and Kimmel 2011:112). (Patriarchy, Open Education Sociology Dictionary, <https://sociologydictionary.org/patriarchy/>)

<sup>6</sup> Emotional abuse can be any harmful behavior that may negatively affect your emotional state. (Are You Experiencing Emotional Abuse and Not Aware of It?, by Hope Gillete, <https://psychcentral.com/lib/emotional-abuse-signs>)

<sup>7</sup> Impulsive aggression is a feature observed in patients with ADHD, obsessive-compulsive disorder, disruptive mood dysregulation disorder, and bipolar disorder. Here, learn how to recognize and treat the symptoms of this maladaptive aggressive behavior. (A Clinician’s Guide to Impulsive Aggression, by Bright H. Amann, M.D. [https://www.additudemag.com/impulsive-aggression-clinicians-guide/#:~:text=Impulsive%20Aggression%20\(IA\)%20is%20characterized,of%20emotion%20for%20the%20situation](https://www.additudemag.com/impulsive-aggression-clinicians-guide/#:~:text=Impulsive%20Aggression%20(IA)%20is%20characterized,of%20emotion%20for%20the%20situation) )

<sup>8</sup> Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation that hinges on creating self-doubt. “I think of gaslighting as trying to associate someone with the label ‘crazy,’” says Paige Sweet, Ph.D., an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Michigan who studies gaslighting in relationships and in the workplace. “It’s making someone seem or feel unstable, irrational and not credible, making them feel like what they’re seeing or experiencing isn’t real, that they’re making it up, that no one else will believe them.”

Gaslighting involves an imbalance of power between the abuser and the person they’re gaslighting. Abusers often exploit stereotypes or vulnerabilities related to gender, sexuality, race, nationality and/or class.

“The most distinctive feature of gas lighting is that it’s not enough for the gaslighter simply to control his victim or have things go his way: It’s essential to him that the victim herself actually

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come to agree with him,” writes Andrew D. Spear, an associate professor of philosophy at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan, in a 2019 paper on gaslighting in *Inquiry*. (What Is Gaslighting? Meaning And Examples, by Marissa Conrad, <https://www.forbes.com/health/mind/what-is-gaslighting/#:~:text=What%20are%20gaslighting%20behaviors%3F,to%20the%20American%20Psychological%20Association>)

<sup>9</sup>Cultural adaptation is a new concept that defines the ability of people and societies to overcome and adapt to changes in the natural and social environment through slight changes to their usual way of life. (Cultural Adaptation, by Deborah Lilly Evie, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/cultural-adaptation-definition-theory-stages-examples.html#:~:text=Cultural%20adaptation%20is%20a%20new,the%20habitat%20is%20also%20changing> )

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