

## **NATURE OF SOCIAL REACTIONS TO DISCLOSURES OF INTIMATE PARTNER PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE OF WOMEN**

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Psychological abuse has been shown to exert a more detrimental impact on the victim's emotional functioning when compared to physical abuse. If social support is available, however, it directly and positively improves the abused women's psychological well-being. The lack of support has shown to contribute to the perpetuation of abuse and poor mental health outcomes. This study examines a relatively neglected area of research; on social reactions to disclosures of *psychological abuse* and, is extended up to studying those factors that are potentially associated with social reactions. Case study design was chosen as the focus of the study was on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Fifteen case studies, chosen through the purposive sampling, were conducted using informal in-depth interview as the major mode of data collection. The participants were subjected to many forms of psychological abuse as well as physical abuse, psychological abuse being the most frequent and severe form. Findings indicate that, initially, the participants have received both positive (*e.g.* listening, asking questions, offering to intervene, and providing feedback) and negative reactions (*e.g.* not believing the victim, and taking the incidents of abuse very lightly) from family, neighbors and friends as initial reactions to their disclosures of psychological abuse. However, with time the provision of social support has changed, negative reactions becoming more frequent than positive ones. Majority of women reported that support providers have responded in a variety of hurtful ways, ranging from getting distant, telling the victim to put up with the situation, asking the victim to solve their personal family problems by themselves to outright victim blaming. This could be because as the abuse might have become chronic, abused women over time have depleted the emotional and material resources of providers, support providers felt uncomfortable discussing this sensitive topic, or thought that it is not right to intervene in family matters. In addition to abuser imposed isolation, some have been reluctant to help as they were subjected to threats, and harassment from the abusive partner. These dangers appear to cause network members to move away from survivors or even to blame them. Majority of the women in the study were unhappy and dissatisfied with quality of informal support they received. *These* negative reactions appear to make women depressed, to self blame themselves, to stay entrapped leading to a lesser quality of life. However, social reactions to disclosures of physical *abuse appear to be quite different from* reactions to *psychological* abuse. Whereas moving away from getting involved, and advising to tolerate the abuse were frequent forms of social reactions for *psychologically abusive incidents*, efforts to help and direct intervention (*i.e.*, coming forward for rescue, calling 119) was common in case of physical abuse. More the obvious physical threat, more willing the supporters seem to have become in helping the victim get out of danger, intervening in the conflict even risking the safety of their lives. Despite the fact that *psychological abuse* is a highly damaging form of victimization, it seems that social support network members consider it less damaging *than physical abuse* as it is less apparent to those outside the relationship, and *its cost to the outside world is less obvious. They seem to offer support depending on the degree of perceived physical threat to the abused woman's life. The available data, however, provides a strong need for support from informal supporters to combat psychological abuse.*