

Aiya Tawakkol

The Psychological Impact of Verbal Abuse: A Scientific Literature Review

Abstract

Verbal abuse can cause significant harm to one's mental health, negatively impacting executive function, cognitive development, and emotional regulation. Research suggests that exposure to verbal abuse, particularly during childhood and adolescence, can alter neurological pathways related to stress, memory, and impulse control, leading to long-term cognitive and emotional consequences. This article synthesizes findings from six general press articles published between 2010–2018 and 15 peer-reviewed studies from 2010–2020 to examine the psychological, neurological, and relational effects of verbal abuse, particularly among youth. By integrating perspectives from psychology, neuroscience, and social science, this review provides an interdisciplinary analysis of how verbal abuse influences relationship dynamics across different contexts, that is, within families, between intimate partners, and across generations. Preliminary findings indicate that a majority of high school students have either witnessed or experienced verbal abuse within their households, reinforcing its widespread nature.

Studies show chronic exposure to verbal aggression can lead to structural and functional changes in the brain, particularly in the prefrontal cortex and limbic system, which govern decision-making, emotional regulation, and stress responses. As a result, individuals who have experienced verbal abuse are at higher risk for anxiety, depression, impulsivity, and difficulties unemotional processing. This review also explores the link between verbal abuse and the perpetuation of abusive

behaviors, demonstrating that those exposed to verbal aggression in childhood are more likely to engage in or tolerate abusive relationships in adulthood. While this review provides valuable insights into the long-term consequences of verbal abuse, future studies should further explore how economic, social, and cultural factors shape its prevalence and impact, as well as the potential for early intervention strategies to mitigate its neuro-logical and psychological effects.

Keywords: verbal abuse, psychological impact, domestic violence, trauma, mental health

Introduction

Verbal abuse is when a person “repeatedly uses words to demean, frighten, or control someone” (What Is Verbal Abuse?, 2018). Abuse has significant effects on the human brain and is known to cause serious problems in relationships. Yet, it is only in the last 100 years that society has begun to acknowledge and address abusive behavior. Historically, verbal and emotional abusers were often labeled as “stern” or “strict,” especially in parenting and authority roles, implying that their behavior carried an element of discipline rather than harm. At worst, such individuals were described as “difficult,” minimizing the damage their words inflicted.

However, as psychological research has expanded, there is now a deeper understanding of how verbal abuse affects cognitive and emotional development. Studies show that persistent exposure to verbal abuse can significantly impact executive functioning, leading to difficulties in concentration, emotional regulation, and decision-making (Pietrangelo, 2018). This shift in awareness highlights how society has moved from normalizing harsh verbal treatment to recognizing its long-term psychological consequences.

The Psychological and Neurological Effects of Verbal Abuse

Many people tend to overlook the consequences of verbal abuse on the brain. When the brains of victims are scanned, their brain scans show similarities to individuals who have suffered head trauma, suggesting that the abuse causes concentration issues for the victim (Weigel et al., 2013). When “[some] people experience verbal abuse, there are some cases where they have no idea that there’s anything wrong with it,” because it becomes a part of their everyday life (Weigel et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the signs that one has been or is being verbally abused are often overlooked because there is not a physical mark on one’s body. Psychologists and psychiatrists say that most child/teen patients are diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) because of the inability to focus; many times, the victim is conditioned to be on guard and try to stay safe from being yelled at or put down (Weigel et al., 2013). Most verbal abusers are men, and this behavior is often rooted in an emotionally or physically traumatic childhood (Weigel, 2013). Many abusers were told at a young age that showing emotions is a sign of weakness; instead of being nurtured as children, they were often yelled at or ignored.

Verbal Abuse in Romantic Relationships

If a significant other calls their partner names and/or belittles them, then one may be in an abusive relationship (Smith, 2010). There are certain categories of verbal abuse that many experience in their relationship: abusive anger, criticizing, name-calling, threatening, blaming, and other negative ways of belittling another. Conflict styles in verbally abusive relationships are far different from those in healthy relationships. The abuser in an abusive relationship tends to ar-

-gue about trivial conflicts or consistently blame and criticize the other. In contrast, people in a healthy relationship argue over real issues that can be resolved. While arguments in both types of relationships may involve topics about finances and responsibilities, the key difference is that in an abusive relationship there really are no issues, and the victim is often made to feel that the situation is always their fault (Smith, 2010).

An important aspect when looking at verbal abuse in relationships is the current state of the relationship. For instance, rejection, fights with a partner, and break-ups all cause emotional pain, but learning how to deal with these issues is extremely important to maintain a healthy relationship (Ellis, 2010). When one does not strive for a healthy relationship, conflicts tend to arise easily. Name-calling, ridiculing, threats, constant criticism, and controlling are rooted in the low self-esteem of a partner. Regarding the victim, verbal abuse is rooted in the helplessness, guilt, and confusion of a partner who allows another to treat them in such a negative manner.

Relationship Development and the Risk of Abuse

There are five stages of relationship development, and they all contribute to how long the relationship lasts, the likelihood of abuse, the satisfaction of each partner, etc. (*Relationship Stages*, 2020) The first stage is Initiation, which typically involves making a first impression. The second is Experimentation, where the partners get to know each other. Usually, the partners try to act their best and present their best qualities during this stage. The third stage is Intensifying, when the partners are ready to let their guards down and emotionally invest in the other person. The partners open up and share more intense and

personal information with each other. In stage four, the partners' lifestyles overlap. For example, the partners may go everywhere together, watch all the same movies, and plan trips with each other. During the final stage of bonding, the partners formally commit, and the partners' true colors are revealed (Beckmann, 2020).

Differences in Relationship Expectations

In some cases, females and males view a relationship differently (Ellis, 2010). For example, a partner may have certain expectations and become upset when they don't get what they initially planned for, but their partner may view the relationship in other terms with differing intentions. In situations like this, a struggle for power and control occurs, and as conflicts become more prevalent, this may contribute to verbal abuse

Recognizing the Signs of Verbal Abuse

There are cases where abusive relationships ultimately destroy the victim's well-being. Men and women are both victims of verbal abuse, but because verbal abuse is "just words," it is often not recognized; name-calling, cursing, shouting, put-downs, threats, blame, lack of courtesy, low self-esteem, timidity, and fear of failure are 10 prominent signs of abuse (Scheff, 2011). In all cases, name-calling such as calling one 'stupid', a 'dummy', or other demeaning terms to hurt someone should not be considered a normal relationship dynamic; it shows an extreme lack of respect for the other person in the relationship and should be considered abusive (Scheff, 2011).

Oftentimes teenagers no longer go to their parents to be coddled, specifically because their parents "don't always realize how just one negative comment from them can begin a downward spiral for teenagers" (Deery, 2010, para 1). The University of New Hampshire completed a report that revealed how "63% of 3,000 parents surveyed admitted to

using verbal abuse against their children..." and this may cause significant problems in the future for their children (Deery, 2010, para). Some symptoms of abuse include, "self-destructive acts, abnormal/antisocial behavior, negative self-image, and delayed development in younger children" (Deery, 2010). Children who are abused throughout their childhood are just as likely to suffer from for their children (Deery, 2010, para). Some symptoms of abuse include, "self-destructive acts, abnormal/antisocial behavior, negative self-image, and delayed development in younger children" (Deery, 2010). Children who are abused throughout their childhood are just as likely to suffer from mental health issues like depression and anxiety in their adulthood as children who are abused sexually or physically (Deery, 2010). Severe anger and hostility problems are common for victims of abuse.

Specifically in adolescence, abuse can affect the child's long-term "intelligence, memory, recognition, moral development and the ability to feel and understand emotions" (Deery, 2010, para 1). In general, verbal abuse is the least recognized because of how difficult the abuse is to diagnose. Most attention is usually paid to physical and sexual abuse, but verbal abuse has a longer-lasting effect than many people may expect (Schroeder, 2017, p. D2). Commonly among all perpetrators of verbal abuse, the abuser usually has poor communication skills, bad stress management skills, and has not adequately addressed their previous or ongoing trauma or abuse. Background information about verbal abuse can all be found in general audience press articles. Peer-reviewed articles were used to determine what scholars found regarding verbal abuse.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted to examine the effects of verbal abuse on teenage and adult

relationships, specifically regarding the impact of abuse on executive functioning. Introductory material was found in the following general press sources: *Charleston Gazette (WV)*, *New York Examiner*, *Fort Lauderdale Examiner*, *Evansville Courier and Press (IN)*, *Anaheim Examiner*, *The Hamilton Spectator (On-tario, Canada)*. Searches for information were conducted in the following databases: *NewsBank*, *EBSCO*, and *Gale Academic OneFile*. Search terms for General Press articles include: for General Press articles include: “Verbal abuse,” “Verbal Abuse Effects,” “Verbal Abuse in Relationships,” “Childhood Abuse,” “Teen Relationships,” “Symptoms of Abuse,” and “Teen Dating Abuse.” Dates of access to introductory materials were: 2/10/2024 and 2/15/2024.

Peer-reviewed journals were used for the main body of the literature review. The 15 journals consulted include peer-reviewed studies published between 07/01/2010 and 02/01/2023. All studies were found in: *Ebsco Discovery Service* and *Gale Academic Onefile* databases. Dates of access to peer-reviewed articles were between 3/4/2023 and 3/25/2023. Despite being accessed a year later than the peer-reviewed articles, introductory materials remain essential for providing contextual background, clarifying key concepts, and bridging the gap between academic research and public discourse. These sources help frame the discussion, ensuring that complex empirical findings are more accessible and positioned within a broader societal framework.

Results

The article organizes its findings into nine interconnected categories that illustrate the cyclical and pervasive nature of abuse. The cycle of abuse serves as the foundation, demonstrating how abusive behaviors, particularly verbal and physical aggression, are learned and repeated across generations. The Abuse Effects on Mental Health cate-

gory expands on this by revealing the psychological toll of abuse, linking it to mood disorders, anxiety, and self-harm. These long-term effects influence Abuse in Adult Romantic Relationships, where individuals exposed to abuse in childhood often struggle with conflict and emotional regulation in their own relationships. As abuse escalates, it can lead to severe physical harm, such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), highlighting the dangerous consequences of intimate partner violence. The Types of Relationship Abuses category broadens the discussion to include child-to-parent and parent-to-child abuse, reinforcing the idea that abuse manifests in different relational contexts. Similarly, the Impact on Motherhood and Child’s Experiences with Abuse category emphasizes how maternal abuse affects parenting abilities and child development, perpetuating the cycle of violence. Teenagers’ Experiences with Domestic Abuse extend this discussion by showing how adolescents navigate abusive relationships, often mirroring the behaviors they have witnessed. The Perspective of Victims and Perpetrators of Abuse offers insight into the sociological and psychological factors that drive abusive behaviors, including power imbalances and learned aggression. Lastly, Childhood Emotional Abuse ties back to the root of many abusive patterns, highlighting how emotional maltreatment in early life disrupts attachment and shapes future relationships. These categories are relevant because they collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of abuse as a systemic issue rather than an isolated event. By demonstrating the link between childhood abuse, mental health, and adult relationship dynamics, the article underscores the long-term and far-reaching effects of verbal and physical mistreatment. The inclusion of studies on traumatic brain injury and psychological distress strengthens the argument that abuse has both immediate and lasting consequences on one’s well-being. Additionally, by addressing different relationship

dynamics—such as parent-child abuse, intimate partner violence, and adolescent experiences—the article highlights the various ways in which abuse is perpetuated, further reinforcing the need for intervention and prevention efforts. The structured categorization ensures that the complexity of abuse is thoroughly examined, making it clear that abuse is not merely an individual problem but a widespread societal issue that requires a multifaceted response.

Cycle of Abuse

Research regarding a reciprocal cycle in violent behaviors in adolescents for both verbal and physical behaviors was conducted by Bartle-Haring et al. (2015). Over two years with an assessment every six months, 161 adolescents were investigated. They all met the criteria for substance/alcohol abuse or abnormal dependence on their caregivers. Adolescent-to-parent violence is more common than most people would expect, and the researchers found that, “between 9% and 14% of parents are physically assaulted by an adolescent child more than once before the child reaches the age of 18, and 50–80% of these adolescents are male” (Bartle-Haring et al., 2015, para 1).

Liu et al. suggests that abuse towards a parent is an adapted behavior developed by the child to cope with their environment. The researchers found a reciprocal relationship between abuse involving children and their parents. For example, if a parent frequently belittles or harshly criticizes their child, the child may internalize this behavior and, over time, respond with verbal aggression toward the parent, mirroring the same abusive communication pattern, so when a parent or caregiver is verbally abusive toward their child, the child is more likely to reciprocate the abuse toward their parents or caregivers. Similarly, Liu et al. (2018) examined a different cycle of abuse,

focusing on the impact of interparental intimate partner violence. Their research suggests that children who witness their parents verbally abusing each other are more likely to replicate this behavior in their own adult romantic relationships. Additionally, children of parents who experience abuse are at a higher risk to encounter abuse in their own adult relationships. The researchers concluded that when parents who experience verbal abuse have their child witness the abuse, the child is likely to experience similar encounters in their relationship.

Prevalence Of Verbal Abuse And Its Effect On Mental Health

Not only does abuse continue in cycles, it harms the mental health of both abusers and victims. Statistically, 600 United States adult patients who averaged about 40 years old were researched by Robert M. Post, who found that domestic abuse, a pattern of behavior used to gain or maintain control, is likely to cause an earlier age of onset of bipolar disorder (Post et al., 2015). Twenty-four percent of patients in the study experienced verbal abuse. The study established that bipolar disorder often involves a history of abuse (physical or sexual), in which research was conducted to explore a possible connection between mental illness and verbal abuse as well. Verbal abuse, like other forms of abuse (physical or sexual), is strongly linked to the earlier onset of mental health disorders, particularly bipolar disorder. The study indicates that individuals who have experienced verbal abuse are more likely to develop mental health issues at an earlier age, highlighting the significant impact of verbal abuse on one's mental well-being. This connection between verbal abuse and mental illness underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing verbal abuse as a serious factor in mental health development. Post et al. found that the age of onset for bipolar disorder was younger

for the increased number of types of abuse experienced. A trend found in their research was that without abuse, one is less likely to have specific illnesses. Without abuse, one is 34% likely to have anxiety disorder, but with abuse one is 52% likely to have anxiety (Post et al., 2015). Problems like drug abuse, alcohol abuse, depression, mania, and mood episode frequency are all likely to increase in severity due to verbal abuse (2015).

Not only does verbal abuse continue in cycles, but it also has profound effects on the mental health of both victims and abusers. Mossige et al. (2016) found a strong relationship between verbal abuse and self-harm in children, reinforcing the notion that verbal mistreatment has long-term psychological consequences. Their study, which surveyed youth in Norway, categorized different types of abuse—verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual—while also distinguishing between abuse victims and witnesses of abuse, as well as perpetrators, including parents and peers.

The findings revealed that verbal abuse is alarmingly prevalent: 30% of surveyed students reported experiencing verbal abuse from their peers, while 11.7% experienced it from their parents. Additionally, 35.1% of respondents had witnessed parental abuse within the past year (Mossige et al., 2016). These statistics highlight that verbal abuse is a widespread issue affecting children and adolescents in both familial and social settings. More importantly, the study uncovered a clear link between exposure to verbal and physical abuse and an increased risk of suicide and self-harm. Children and adolescents who endure verbal abuse—whether directly from caregivers, peers, or as witnesses to abusive behavior—are significantly more likely to develop depressive symptoms, engage in self-harm, and have suicidal tendencies. This aligns with broader

research showing that verbal abuse, despite being non-physical, has lasting effects on emotional regulation, self-esteem, and overall mental well-being.

The study emphasizes that verbal abuse is not just a precursor to other forms of mistreatment but a direct and severe contributor to mental health issues. Verbal aggression from parents or peers can create a hostile psychological environment, leading to chronic stress, emotional dysregulation, and feelings of worthlessness. The data suggest that addressing verbal abuse in early childhood and adolescence is crucial in reducing the risk of self-harm, suicide, and other long-term mental health disorders. This highlights the urgent need for interventions, parental education, and school-based prevention programs to combat the psychological damage caused by verbal mistreatment.

Abuse in Adult Romantic Relationships

Researchers Karakurt and Silver (2013) examined how gender and age influence emotional abuse in relationships. Their study included 250 respondents, with an average age of 27, including both men and women. The findings indicated that younger men reported higher levels of emotional abuse, which decreased with age, while older women experienced less emotional abuse than older men, and younger women faced higher rates of isolation. The study sample consisted of community members and college students, and participants responded to 66 items assessing various forms of abuse, including isolation, degradation, sexual abuse, and property damage. While numerous factors contribute to domestic abuse, the researchers found that evidence for isolation as a consistent form of abuse was inconclusive. Given that verbal abuse often manifests as degradation, manipulation, and isolation, it plays a

critical role in emotional abuse dynamics. These findings reinforce the study's broader discussion on how patterns of abuse differ based on gender and age. Halpern-Meekin et al. (2013) took a different route and looked into young adults' relationships and their developmental perspective. They used the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study to test how "relationship churning", the volatility of a relationship, is associated with other serious conflicts, specifically verbal abuse. Couples who broke up without reconciling exhibited similar levels of conflict as those in stable relationships. On the other hand, churners that were often involved in an on-and-off relationship were two times as likely to report experiences of verbal abuse in their relationship.

The study looks into conflict and the differences between intimate partner violence and family conflict. Estimates range from 25% to more than 50% of men and women reporting aggressive behavior toward their partners (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013). Abuse within relationships is often a result of partners poorly managing conflict. In some cases, couples are unable to find the cause for their negative behaviors. For instance, their behavior may stem from traumatic experiences from their youth. Approximately 40% of unmarried young adults experienced an unstable churning relationship and 40% experienced physical violence; five in 10 experienced verbal abuse in their present or most recent relationship (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013)

Traumatic Brain Injury and the Escalation of Abuse

While verbal abuse is often perceived as a less severe form of mistreatment compared to physical violence, research suggests that it can act as a precursor to more intense physical conflict, including domestic violence severe enough to cause traumatic brain injury (TBI). Emotional and psych-

ological abuse, including verbal aggression, can escalate over time, reinforcing patterns of intimate partner violence (IPV) that may lead to physical assault. Studies indicate that individuals who experience persistent verbal abuse are more likely to become trapped in abusive relationships, where the risk of physical violence increases as emotional control and manipulation deepen. A study conducted by Larry Y. Liu and researchers examined over 12 million medical records from 1999 to 2017, to explore the relationship between IPV and TBI, particularly in women. The study revealed that approximately 25% of women experience severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime, including being slammed, hit, or beaten (Liu et al., 2020). Victims of IPV frequently suffer from mental health disorders, substance use issues, and chronic pain, conditions that are also commonly linked to prolonged exposure to verbal abuse. The study also found that IPV survivors often experience TBI due to repeated blows to the head or violent shaking, which can lead to cognitive impairments, emotional dysregulation, and long-term behavioral challenges. While TBI is primarily a result of physical violence, the role of verbal abuse in enabling or escalating violent relationships should not be overlooked. Verbal abuse may normalize mistreatment, lower self-esteem, and make it harder for victims to leave abusive situations, ultimately increasing their vulnerability to physical harm. Therefore, addressing verbal abuse is a critical step in preventing the progression of IPV and reducing the risk of severe physical consequences like TBI.

Types of Relationship Abuses

Ibabe and researchers conducted a study specifically focused on child-to-parent violence (2010). By examining the psychological and family characteristics of adolescents who physically or

verbally abuse their parents, the researchers investigated the gender differences between perpetrators and victims of aggression. Ibabe and Jaureguizar explain that violence against parents, which is understood as a means to gain power and control, may cause the parent physical, financial, or psychological harm (2010). Research indicates that juveniles who abuse their parents may also show increased violent behavior; abuse toward parents frequently begins with verbally abusive episodes and progresses over time, escalating to emotional and physical abuse (Ibabe and Jaureguizar, 2010). The majority of aggressors were found to be male, aged between 10 and 18, and were generally a part of one-parent families.

An explanation for child-to-parent violence would be the trauma or hardship that comes with custody conflicts, financial difficulties, or little to no social support. A specific profile of adolescents who abused their parents was shown to have lower self-esteem and empathy and had more problems regarding discipline at their school (Ibabe, 2010).

While Ibabe and researchers examined child-to-parent abuse, a study conducted by Beckmann et al. focused on parent-to-child violence. Specifically, Beckmann examined how childhood exposure to parent-to-child physical violence affected family relationships. The study investigated whether childhood exposure to parental physical violence is related to adolescents' recent physical adolescent-to-parental violence (APV) (Beckmann, 2020).

According to Beckmann (2020), about 5.3 % of adolescents (131) had exercised some form of physical violence towards their parents at some time during the last year.

Impact on Motherhood and Child's Experiences with Abuse

Domestic abuse, like verbal abuse, impacts the mother in a relationship. Cort and Cline (2017) researched the correlation between abuse on the mother and its impacts on the family. Domestic abuse negatively impacts women and children, which affects a child's social, emotional and behavioral development and a woman's emotional well-being, parenting capacity, and ability to respond to their child (Cort and Cline, 2017). For the mother, the caregiver's role is often compromised, whether it be through high levels of stress, inconsistent parenting, or a lack of resourcefulness to effectively respond to the emotional needs of her child. Repeated traumatic experiences can affect the development of the attachment relationships between a mother and her children. For instance, the abuse may form a barrier between the mother and the child (2017). In essence, the effects of abuse are varied, and many mothers who have experienced abuse have also used inconsistent parenting styles. Some adult victims cope significantly better even after being abused.

Like Cort and Cline (2017), Blair et al. (2015) also researched the impact of abuse on the mother role, but their findings indicate that children who witness the abuse of their mothers are at risk for serious behavioral problems (2015). Roughly "4.8 million women are assaulted by their partner each year in the United States" (CDC, 2021), and in many cases, their children witness the abuse. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that one out of 15 children have witnessed partner violence in the past year, and 25% of children will witness violence within their lifetime. This equates to about "8.2 million children witnessing abuse each year and 18.8 million children witnessing partner violence at least once in their lifetime" (Blair et al.

2015, para 2).

Both genders are exposed to abuse in their homes, but 92% of abusive perpetrators are male. Children who witness partner violence “show more signs of internalizing: withdrawal, anxiety, depression, and externalizing: aggression, attention disorders, rule-breaking behaviors” (2015, para 3). Unlike other studies conducted, this study examined the effects of abuse on women and their children over seven years.

In the sample of 300 children, male children tended to externalize more than female children after witnessing violence in their homes. The researchers describe a boy’s response to conflict as a “*warrior* who may react to threats by taking action, whereas girls may be *worriers* who respond to conflict by internalizing their feelings” (2015, para 18).

Teenagers' Experiences with Domestic Abuse

Many researchers have studied how children and adults respond to abuse, but Fox et al. (2014) discussed how teenagers are impacted by verbal and domestic abuse. Research was conducted on 1,143 pupils, aged 13–14 years old, who completed a questionnaire about their experiences with domestic abuse. Overall, 45% of respondents who were in a dating relationship reported that they have been victimized, 25% perpetrated abuse, and 34% of the sample reported that they witnessed abuse in their family. The study claims that there is a “relationship between victimization and perpetration with the vast majority of perpetrators, 92%, also reporting experiencing abuse from a boyfriend or girlfriend” (2014, para 1). In conclusion, the researchers have found high rates of domestic abuse among younger teenagers, and they suggest that it is now time to introduce domestic abuse prevention education.

Perspective of Victim and Perpetrators of Abuse

An interesting idea that Brown et al. (2010) explain is the reason for abuse in families. The study suggests that domestic violence is an early conception of “men’s role as the head of the family and women’s relative subordination, and the sociological and psychological perspectives of each person in a relationship” (Brown et al. 2010). First, Brown and his colleagues identified the following reasons for domestic abuse, which are:

“socio-political factors related to male entitlement and power, social learning factors promoting differential socialization of males and females as well as traditional expectations for relationships, systemic factors that contribute to the escalation and maintenance of violent patterns of interaction between partners, and psychodynamic factors that link childhood attachment experiences with adult romantic-relationships” (2010).

Their method of research consisted of having 66 men who attended men’s domestic abuse groups in Australia completing a questionnaire. The study suggests that interventions are needed to assist perpetrators of abuse to work through their trauma. An example of this is “the possibility of using his own victim experiences to enhance and empathize for their current family members who have experienced their violence” (Brown et al., 2010).

While Brown et al. studied possible reasonings for abuse, Boira and Marcuello researched violent behavior within an abusive relationship from the male abuser’s perspective. Eight participants were interviewed in-depth to describe and analyze their perceptions of violence. The analysis found that relationship violence

“begins in the early stages of the relationship, is long term, rarely includes serious physical aggression, is dominated by a growing hostility and isolation, is characterized by a lack of awareness and responsibility for the violent behavior, and includes intentional and strategic use of violent behavior...” (Boira and Marcuello, 2013, para 1).

Childhood Emotional Abuse

Riggs et al. researched the contributions of early emotional abuse, adult attachment, and depression, and their impacts on different aspects of romantic relationship functioning (2010). The study examined college students who were in dating relationships. They completed a survey measuring childhood emotional maltreatment, adult attachment style, psychological distress, and romantic relationships (2010). In general, emotional abuse is known as the core component of all forms of child abuse, which is violating a child’s physical or sexual boundaries, or degrading, frightening, or exploiting the child (2010). These are all “more detrimental to a child’s self-esteem than physical abuse because they ‘constitute a direct threat to a child’s developing self-worth’” (Riggs and Kamin-ski, 2010, para 4). The research states that when emotionally abused children grow up, they are likely to have high levels of attachment anxiety or the complete opposite and completely stray from attachment figures. When one is “psychologically abused by a partner, this could be associated with mental health problems, such as drinking, depression, and post-traumatic stress” (2010, para 12). The study highlights how early emotional abuse influences attachment styles in adulthood, with many victims developing attachment anxiety (fear of abandonment and excessive need for reassurance) or avoidance (withdrawing from relationships to prevent vulnerability). These attachment issues can make individuals more susceptible to

verbal abuse in romantic relationships as they may either tolerate mistreatment due to fear of abandonment or struggle with emotional regulation, potentially engaging in abusive communication themselves. Additionally, the study connects psychological abuse in adult relationships to mental health problems such as depression, substance abuse, and PTSD—all of which are also linked to verbal abuse. This reinforces the idea that childhood experiences of verbal and emotional abuse can create patterns that persist into adulthood, affecting the way individuals communicate, manage conflict, and respond to mistreatment in their relationships. Which in most cases is not commonly studied, and Bartle-Haring et al. included both the parent and adolescent reports of verbal and physical abuse. Bartle-Haring et al. uses the Conflict Tactics Scale, a well-known survey used for data collection. Other studies like Beckmann (2020) and Fox et al. (2014) also use a questionnaire. Fox et al. (2014) studied young teenagers’ experiences with domestic abuse, and the questionnaire asked questions like “has your significant other ever pushed, slapped or grabbed you, threatened to physically hurt you, etc.” Even though the questions were straightforward and difficult to dissimulate, some people may take issue with the fact that surveys are being used for qualitative purposes, and the results may be inaccurate. In an article by Anouar El Haji, Haji writes that survey research is only effective if and only if people honestly report their beliefs and preferences (2020). For example, there are many ways one may answer a question depending on how one sees oneself. Haji (2020) explains that respondents might try to show off or try to present themselves as wealthier, happier, smarter, etc., and some may like to answer in ways to please another person. Similarly, some people may be disengaged and answer without much effort, and one may try to adapt their answers due to an incentive. With this, the information that was

collected may be unreliable as the study's findings may be compromised due to potential biases in self-reported survey data. If respondents provided answers that were influenced by social desirability, disengagement, or a desire to project a certain image, the data collected may not accurately reflect their true experiences with domestic abuse.

Karakurt and Silver not only had a survey, but they debriefed each participant after each person responded about the study objectives. This is a critical step-up because the researchers received information and then were able to go into the specifics with their respondents through personal dialogue. Their research question revolved around gender roles and age in an intimate relationship, as well as the impact that gender and age have on intimate partner abuse.

Researchers should follow up with respondents so that more data can be obtained and collected qualitatively. In the Appendix, Study #5, #12, and #13 all used interviews as a means of data collection—Karakurt and Silver (2013), Blair et al. (2015), and Boira and Marcuello (2013).

There are many effective ways that the researchers collected data and implemented them into their results. An interesting method is Ibabe and Jaureguizar's approach to researching child-to-parent abuse; they examined judicial proceedings of 103 cases of child-to-parent abuse. Some people may take issue with the examination of cases because there is a limitation of the child's perspective. In other words, the case may include very limited information about what the child was experiencing that led to the child ultimately abusing their parent(s). There may have been many factors that played into the reason the child is abusing their parents. Ibabe and Jaureguizar (2010) examined the psychosocial profiles of juveniles who abused their parents, but just looking

at judicial proceedings leaves little room for deeper evaluation of other factors—like the social and economic life of the juvenile. For example, the child may be exposed to abuse at home or at school, or the child may be experiencing chronic stress. All of these possible factors contribute to the limitations of Ibabe and Jaureguizar's study but are not mentioned to a great extent.

While researchers conducted informational studies, there are many encouraging directions that their research could continue. Specific trends in global, social, economic, and political affiliations may affect abuse. Many of the studies that were examined included students in high school and college, and others included older men and women. In a social sense, someone's occupation may be a factor for trends in abuse. Social workers who work to aid people cope with problems in their everyday lives, experience high levels of exhaustion, and verbal abuse. From facing traumatic experiences like a "nine-year-old child self-harming and trying to hang themselves and a very aggressive father making threats," these workers' occupation contributes to their stress and they ultimately face heavy amounts of abuse (Cooper, 2017). Further research may consider how occupational differences may affect the cycle of abuse.

Economic and financial crises such as the Great Recession, which is considered the "most severe financial crisis since the Great Depression," wreaked havoc on the general public; it took about 10 years for the chaos to settle down, and millions of jobs and billions of dollars of income were wiped away (*5 of the World's Most Devastating Financial Crises*, n.d.). Even to a personal extent, many Americans experience financial crises in their homes and cannot escape poverty. Researchers may consider how economic and financial crises, whether they are global or personal, affect the home lives of Americans. Home life is important in

jobs and billions of dollars of income were wiped away (*5 of the World's Most Devastating Financial Crises*, n.d.). Even to a personal extent, many Americans experience financial crises in their homes and cannot escape poverty. Researchers may consider how economic and financial crises, whether they are global or personal, affect the home lives of Americans. Home life is important in regards to verbal abuse, because most Americans spend a significant amount of their time at home (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). In essence, it would be important for researchers to include findings about how the economic life of an American may affect their home life, which ultimately impacts the cycle of abuse.

The researchers used effective methods for their research, but in some cases, clear omissions were not included. Surveys are a common method of collecting data, but many times, respondents may answer inaccurately. Studies that used interviews or surveys not only debriefed about the topic of abuse but received personal insight from the respondents. Ideas for further directions in research include looking into different factors that play a role in households that may contribute to the prevalence of abuse like occupation and financial problems.

Conclusion

Verbal abuse, as well as domestic abuse, negatively impacts the lives of victims. Verbal abuse is often overlooked because of the inability to see physical scars as one would see from a physically abusive situation. In many cases, a verbal abuser belittles, criticizes, and threatens their victim, which is shown in changes in the victims' behavior like anxiety, chronic stress, decreased self-esteem, etc. (Smith, 2010). Many people who experience verbal abuse have no idea that there is anything wrong because it becomes a part of their everyday

life; most child and teen patients are often diagnosed with ADD, and the victim is conditioned to be on guard from being put down (Weigel, 2013). Abuse is never justified, and healthy relationships are not dominated by one person over the other; for example, name-calling, cursing, shouting, etc. affect relationships in different ways (Scheff, 2011). In teens, abuse causes psychological problems directed to intelligence, memory, recognition, and moral development (Deery, 2010). The abuser may have poor communication skills, bad stress management skills, and hasn't adequately addressed their trauma or abuse, etc. and they may be going through something traumatic (Schroeder, 2017, p. D2).

A scientific literature review was conducted to examine the effects of verbal abuse on teenage and adult relationships, specifically the cycle of verbal abusers becoming verbal abuse perpetrators. The sources used were: *Ebsco Discovery Service and Gale Academic Onefile databases*.

Research consistently highlights the cyclical nature of abuse and its lasting psychological impact. Studies indicate a strong correlation between reciprocity in violent behaviors among adolescents and experiences of verbal or physical abuse in childhood (Bartle-Haring et al., 2015). Similarly, parent-to-child abuse has been found to have a direct positive correlation with child-to-parent abuse, suggesting that violence within families is often bidirectional (Beckmann, 2020). The quality of parental relationships and exposure to abusive behaviors also have prolonged effects on children as they enter adolescence, shaping their future interactions and emotional responses (W. Liu et al., 2018). The mental health consequences of abuse are profound and far-reaching. Domestic abuse has been linked to an earlier onset of bipolar disorder (Post et al., 2015), while verbal abuse, violence, and sexual abuse significantly

increase suicidal ideation and self-harm (Mossige et al., 2016).

Victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) show brain scan similarities to those with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), illustrating the neurological damage associated with prolonged abuse (L. Y. Liu et al., 2020). Additionally, abused women often experience stress and trauma that impact their mothering behaviors, potentially affecting their children's emotional stability and development (Cort and Cline, 2017). Abuse also manifests in romantic relationships, particularly among young women, who experience high rates of isolation in verbally abusive relationships (Kara-kurt and Silver, 2013). In dating relationships, churners—couples in on-again, off-again relationships—were significantly more likely to report verbal abuse (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013). Additionally, girls are more likely than boys to be pressured or forced into sexual acts, highlighting gendered vulnerabilities in abusive dynamics (Fox et al., 2014). In many cases, perpetrators of partner abuse are often fathers or boyfriends of the victim's mother (Blair et al., 2015), and some abusers develop their violent tendencies as a response to their own childhood abuse (Brown et al., 2010). The long-term impact of abuse extends to attachment and personality development. Victims of abuse often struggle to develop positive attachment relationships and may exhibit inconsistent attachment behaviors (Riggs and Kaminski, 2010). Additionally, offenders of abuse do not always show interest in personality traits associated with change or self-improvement, suggesting a deeper psychological entrenchment in abusive behaviors (Boira and Marcuello, 2013). Together, these findings emphasize the far-reaching effects of abuse, reinforcing its cyclical nature and the need for early intervention, psychological support, and systemic efforts to break the patterns of violence. Many studies used a questionnaire or online sur-

vey to conduct their research, and this was found to be faulty because of the unreliability of surveys. However, studies that followed up with their respondents were very effective and showed elevated quality in their findings.

Other studies used interviews that were semi-structured and gave insight into the lives of each respondent and the original study's research question. Some studies used both interviews and surveys which were extremely effective for data regarding the personal lives of respondents. Researchers should examine all factors that may cause or affect abuse in households, like social, economic, and global trends.

References:

- 5 of the World's Most Devastating Financial Crises.* (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved May 21, 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/story/5-of-the-worlds-most-devastating-financial-crises>
- American Time Use Survey-2019 Results.* (n.d.). Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/atus_06252020.pdf
- Bartle-Haring, S., Slesnick, N., & Carmona, J. (2015). Reciprocity in adolescent and caregiver violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 30(2), 149–160. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-014-9659-5>
- Beckmann, L. (2020). Family Relationships as Risks and Buffers in the Link between Parent-to-Child Physical Violence and Adolescent-to-Parent Physical Violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 35(2), 131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00048-0>
- Blair, F., McFarlane, J., Nava, A., Gilroy, H., & Maddoux, J. (2015). Child Witness to Domestic Abuse: Baseline Data Analysis for a Seven-Year Prospective Study. *Pediatric Nursing*, 41(1), 23–29.

- Boira, S., & Marcuello, C. (2013). Male Abuser: Type of Violence and Perception of the Relationship with the Victim. *Psychological Reports*, 112(1), 210–238.
<https://doi.org/10.2466/21.02.16.PR0.112.1.210-238>
- Brown, J., James, K., & Taylor, A. (2010). Caught in the rejection–abuse cycle: Are we really treating perpetrators of domestic abuse effectively? *Journal of Family Therapy*, 32(3), 280–307.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6427.2010.00494.x>
- CDC. (2021, May 21). *CDC Works 24/7*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
<https://www.cdc.gov/index.html>
- Cooper J. (2017, March 23). Social workers face more emotional distress and verbal abuse each day. *Community Care*.
<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2017/03/23/social-workers-face-emotional-distress-verbal-abuse-day/>
- Cort, L., & Cline, T. (2017). Exploring the Impact of Domestic Abuse on the Mother Role: How Can Educational Psychologists Contribute to This Area? *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 33(2), 167–179
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2017.1279127>
- Deery, S. (2010, May 6). *Verbal Abuse has lifelong effects*. <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news%2F12F8DB71A7124DD8>
- Ellis, R. (2010, January 3). *Part Three-Teen Dating Abuse*. New York Examiner. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&t=continent%3A%20N%C2%A0orth%2BAmerica%21North%2BAmerica/language%3AEnglish%21English&sort=YMD%20_date%3AA&fld-base-0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-0=Verbal%20Abuse%20%20A%20N%C2%A0D%20relationships&fld-nav-1=YMD_date&val-nav-1=2010%20-%202029&docref=n%20e%20w%20s/134244EA757800E8D%20relationships&fld-nav-1=YMD_date&val-nav1=2010%20-%202029&docref=news/134244EA757800E
- Fox, C. L., Corr, M.-L., Gadd, D., & Butler, I. (2014). Young teenagers' experiences of domestic abuse. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(4), 510–526.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.780125>
- Halpern-Meekin, S., Manning, W. D., Giordano, P. C., & Longmore, M. A. (2013). Relationship Churning, Physical Violence, and Verbal Abuse in Young Adult Relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75(1), 2–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.01029.x>
- Ibabe, I., & Jaureguizar, J. (2010). Child-to-parent violence: Profile of abusive adolescents and their families. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(4), 616–624.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2010.04.034>
- Karakurt, G., & Silver, K. E. (2013). Emotional abuse in intimate relationships: The role of gender and age. *Violence and Victims*, 28(5), 804–821.
<http://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-12-00041>
- Liu, L. Y., Bush, W. S., Koyuturk, M., & Karakurt, G. (2020). Interplay between traumatic brain injury and intimate partner violence: Data driven analysis utilizing electronic health records. *BMC Women's Health*, 20(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-020-01104-4>

Liu, W., Mumford, E. A., & Taylor, B. G. (2018). The Relationship Between Parents' Intimate Partner Victimization and Youths' Adolescent Relationship Abuse. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 47(2), 321–333. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0733-1>.

Mossige, S., Huang, L., Straiton, M., & Roen, K. (2016). Suicidal ideation and self-harm among youths in Norway: Associations with verbal, physical and sexual abuse. *Child & Family Social Work*, 21(2), 166. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12126>

Post, R. M., Altshuler, L. L., Kupka, R., McElroy, S. L., Frye, M. A., Rowe, M., Leverich, G. S., Grunze, H., Suppes, T., Keck, P. E., & Nolen, W. A. (2015). Verbal abuse, like physical and sexual abuse, in childhood is associated with an earlier onset and more difficult course of bipolar disorder. *Bipolar Disorders*, 17(3), 323–330. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bdi.12268>

Relationship Stages: Timeline of the 5 Big Ones. (2020, January 16). Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/relationship-stages>

Riggs, S. A., & Kaminski, P. (2010). Childhood Emotional Abuse, Adult Attachment, and Depression as Predictors of Relational Adjustment and Psychological Aggression. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 19(1), 75–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926770903475976>

Scheff, S. (2011, May 12). *Teen Dating: 10 Signs of verbal abuse in Relationships*. Fort Lauderdale Examiner. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/user/login?destination=document-view%3Fp%3DAWNB%26t%3D%26sort%3D_rank_%2520%253AD%26fld-base-0%3Dalltext%26maxresults%3D20%26val-base-0%3DVerbal%2520abuse%2520in%2520rtionships%26fld-nav-1%3DYMD_date%26val-nav-1%3D2010%2520-%25202029%26docref%3Dnews/1373392C83801670.

Schroeder, J. (2017, December 3). *Abuse of the loudest kind leaves no marks*. Evansville Courier & Press (IN). <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news%2F1688F4DBBA3A9DC0>

Smith, S. (2010, January 23). *What is verbal abuse?* Anaheim Examiner. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&t=&sort=_rank%20_%3AD&fld-base-0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-0=Verbal%20abuse%20&fld-nav-1=YMD_date&val-nav1=2010%20%202029&docref=news/1342466B4AA49818

Weigel J. (2013, February 4). *Are you a victim of verbal abuse?* Hamilton Spectator, The (Ontario, Canada). https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&t=&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-0=Verbal%20abuse%20&fld-nav-1=YMD_date&val-nav-1=2010%20-%202029&docref=news/1443F9ADAFD76408

Pietrangelo, Ann. *What Is Verbal Abuse? 22 Examples, Patterns to Watch For, What to*. (2018, June 28). Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/what-is-verbal-abuse>