

Abuse In “Healthy” Relationships

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Abstract

Abuse is found all over the world. There is a question as to how someone could do this to another person and how the victim could stay for as long as they do. Many studies do not cover what is going on psychologically between both the abused and the abuser, although there is much going on. There are also long-term side effects that the victim ends up having to live with. These long-term effects include mental and physical changes.

Key terms: Abuse, Side effects, Physical, Mental, Violence

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Domestic abuse and the taboo around it screams at me to remain unseen, hidden, and invisible...Can you hear me? Will you bear witness?”(Hussin, 2023).

When you go on social media, there are so many happy families and often, those families that are huge in the media come out years later with allegations of abuse. This happens all the time. There are many cases of this, most notably *Jon and Kate Plus 8*. Due to this, many questions arose about why it is hidden. Why do people wait? What makes people want to abuse others or make them stay in relationships? What are the long-term side effects, mentally and physically, to those who suffered abuse?

During the course of this paper, it will cover an abusive relationship from beginning to end. The paper will contain the psychology behind the abuser to the end of the long-term side effects those who are abused get. We will dive deep into what goes on in the mind of both the abused and abuser and look at the consequences of this abuse as well as look at current situations where this happened. We will focus not only on the intimate partner violence (IPV) that is so commonly talked about but also on childhood abuse and child maltreatment. This includes obvious abuse present in the home and the less noticeable abuse like neglect, and parental dissatisfaction.

Although this research has many broad questions and paths to follow, we will choose a very specific one. How does an outwardly happy family end up having abuse in it? These families are the ones you see on TV shows, performing, or taking vacations and you think “I wish I could have their life”. However, years later, one of the children or multiple of the children came out and talked about the abuse they had endured during the time when the world saw this

perfect happy family. This exact example is one we will explore with the *Jon and Kate Plus 8* show that was very popular during the late 2000s early 2010s.

Background

One domestic violence victim says “domestic abuse and the taboo around it screams at me to remain unseen, hidden, and invisible” (Hussein, 2023) as they sit in court and recount their trauma. Often, this is how those who have experienced domestic violence feel. Domestic violence is a topic that many people know about, but because it is so stigmatized that it is often not talked about. This leaves those who are victims voiceless with nowhere to turn to. Domestic violence affects more people on average than we realize. NCADV says that “On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused...During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men” (NCADV, 2023). When you really think about those numbers, it is shocking. In reality, we all know someone, or we are someone who has been affected by domestic violence in some way. These people often do not know where to turn to. Often they want more anonymous sources and turn to hotlines, “On a typical day, there are more than 20,000 phone calls placed to domestic violence hotlines nationwide” (NCADV, 2023).

What's even worse is when a child is involved. This child isn't always directly the one being abused, but even if they aren't, it still affects them. This paper will focus on if the child was also reviewing abuse. Children are important in this topic of abuse as children are often the ones being abused, or viewing the abuse. In NCADV it say “1 in 15 children are exposed to intimate partner violence each year, and 90% of these children are eyewitnesses to this violence” (NCADV, 2023)

Calcano, Engelke, Holl-Etten, Renneberg, and Winter discussed how the recent COVID-19 pandemic had influenced parental abuse. The study shows that with the increased

parental stress due to the financial and emotional strain of COVID-19, there is an increased risk for child maltreatment. Child maltreatment, although seen more often, is still just as bad as the physical and sexual abuse that happens to some children. The COVID-19 pandemic has not made this any easier on these victims and has brought previous statistics up. The pandemic increased everyone's stress, from financial constraints to the worry of getting sick or a loved one getting sick. Having to quarantine led to more mental health issues as well as worsened the preexisting ones. This was worse for parents as well. This “increased parental stress, poorer mental health, and an increase in the occurrence of child maltreatment have been reported in earlier phases of the COVID-19 pandemic” (Calvano et al., 2023).

In life right now, there are many good examples of abuse. One of the most notable is a TLC special,

happens, the parents tend to only like the children for how much money they are able to bring in for their family.

“Selling children and their privacy is child abuse” (Royal, 2015). Although not every show that features children causes abuse, in this case, it did. Not only did these children get featured in a reality television show where everything they did from the time they woke up to the time they went to bed was documented, so every mistake was broadcast to the general population. When it's put like that, “One is forced to wonder whether any laws exist to protect minors whose personal lives are laid bare as their own parents thrust them into the paparazzi spotlight” (Royal, 2015).

This television family's fame came to an end during its fifth and final season in April 2009. This is when the media starts reporting about affairs held by both Kate and Jon. Their television fame finally came to a finish on “June 22, 2009 during the fifth and final season of the show, legal proceedings began to end their 10-year-marriage.” (Moody, 2011). However, this family is still seen in the news quite often.

During the divorce, the children were awarded to Kate; however, in the coming years, after the children were allowed to choose whom they wanted to live with, more custody battles eventually came to be. During the most recent custody battle of Collin, one of the twins' allegations of abuse against Kate came out. He has accused his mother of cruel and unusual punishments, including but not limited to being zip-tied to chairs, sleeping in closets, and finally getting sent away to a mental facility. Collin only has ADHD and has no reason to have been in a mental facility, and he lived there until Jon got him out and fought for custody. Kate never showed up to the custody battle for Collin.

This family lived in the limelight for so long that this accusation of abuse and adultery shocked the world. However, this is the same with many of the cases of abuse seen today. On the outside, people see a perfect family, couple, or friendship, but they do not see the other side. Behind closed doors, abuse is happening, and it is not until someone usually steps up about it that it ever gets seen.

Overview of Study

Through this literature review, we will look at several articles and books that show the psychology of abusers, the psychology of the abused, and the long-term effects on the abused. In the literature review, we will take time to fully understand what each article means in relation to each other, what it means for us today, and how we can go forward to create a better future.

Significance

This paper will help in understanding the psychology of why someone would abuse another person and the effects on the abused. As both a lover of psychology and a nursing student, this was important for me to understand as these clients often come into the hospitals. There is such a high prevalence of abuse that understanding it is the best way to help prevent and treat disorders and diseases that may arise from abuse.

Definitions

Abuse- Treat with cruelty or violence, reflects seriousness of injury (Oxford dictionary, 2023)

Domestic violence - violent or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner (Oxford dictionary, 2023)

Intimate partner violence(IPV) - Physical, sexual, or psychological abuse of a person by their partner or spouse (Oxford dictionary, 2023)

Chapter 2: Methodologies

For this thesis, research articles were identified, systematically analyzed and synthesized to gain a better understanding of the psychology of the abuser, psychology of the abused, and the effects of the abuse on the abused. This literature for the review was identified by searching Gale, Google Scholar, PsychInfo, and having books recommended by my advisor, in addition to pre-recorded lectures provided by my advisor. Inclusion criteria included: articles published in the English language, articles that were after 1990, and only full text articles. Exclusion criteria included articles in other languages, articles before 1990, and articles that were not full text; full text as determined by the terms of Anna Maria College's library subscriptions. Search terms included "effects," "abuse," "families," "long-term effects," "family abuse," "mental," "physical," "cycle of abuse," "children," "Jon and Kate plus 8". (See Appendix Figure 1; Methods Chart).

Each article was read, critiqued, and evaluated by the author for its relevance to the topic of this paper and its application to abuse in family dynamics. Additionally, all of the articles were arranged by the author to identify consistent and inconsistent findings as well as gaps in the research.

The literature search yielded 25,225 results. After exclusion criteria was added, 25,003 articles were eliminated, and --22 remained. Of the remaining 22 articles, only 20 articles were fully relevant to my topic. With those 20, including the 1 recommended source from my thesis advisor, bringing us to a total of 21 sources. These 21 sources were included in the literature review.

Chapter 3: Findings

Abuse comes in many forms and has a huge impact not only on the victim but also society as a whole. What is not as well known about the abuse that happens is the side effects that last into adulthood and the psychology behind both the abused and the abuser.

Psychology of the Abusers

Abusers are all around us all the time. A good number of the population is abused, which means it is likely you know both a victim of abuse and someone who is an abuser. Bancroft's book *Why Does He Do That?* studies the inside mind of the abuser. Bancroft is a psychologist who runs a self-help group for abusers to identify their actions and help fix them; however, many of his clients are not there by choice. He has been in the field for years and wrote a book on what he has seen during his work:

One of the obstacles to recognizing chronic mistreatment in relationships is that most abusive men simply don't seem like abusers. They have many good qualities, including times of kindness, warmth, and humor, especially in the early period of the relationship. He may have a successful work life and have no problems with drugs or alcohol. He may simply not fit anyone's image of a cruel or intimidating person.(Bancroft, 2008, pg 8).

Due to the fake image we perceive of abusers, it is harder for people to spot an abusive situation when it arises, and frequently they are overlooked as the abuser is seen to be, in our minds, incapable of doing something so terrible to another person. However, “The better we understand abusers, the more we can create homes and relationships that are havens of love and safety”(Bancroft, 2008, pg 20).

Most abusive men end up having this two-faced sort of behavior. One that is obvious to the community and a more hidden one that comes out in his private life. Abusers come from everywhere, and no specific event creates an abuser. Bancroft explains this when he writes:

Abusive men come in every personality, arise from good childhoods and bad ones, are macho men or gentle, 'liberated'. No psychological test can distinguish an abusive man from a respectful one. Abusiveness is not a product of a man's emotional injuries or of deficits in his skills. In reality, abuse springs from men's early cultural training, his male role models and his peer influences. In other words, abuse is a problem of values, not of psychology. When someone challenges an abuser's attitudes and beliefs he tends to reveal the contemptuous and insulting personality that normally stays hidden, reserved for his private attacks on his partner.(Bancroft, 2008, pg 74)

He creates this two-faced personality to be able to get away with the abuse. He doesn't want to get caught doing what other people think is wrong, even if he doesn't agree. He wants the world to make him seem like he is in the right and the victim is the crazy one that deserves the actions they are receiving. Bancroft explains that Abusers never do anything that they consider morally unacceptable. The reason they are able to abuse without regret is that “abusers core problem is that he has a distorted sense of right and wrong” (Bancroft, 2008, pg 35). In their mind hitting someone because they are not getting their way is totally acceptable, but doing the same to their mom is usually immoral, and they would never think of doing something like that. In general, abusers have one goal and will do anything he has to reach that goal. The main thing to remember about abusers when they abuse is “Abuse is not the goal, but control is, and he finds himself using abuse to gain the control he feels he has a right to” (Bancroft, 2008, pg 112). Although the abuse is not always physical, the goal is to control the person and situation,

continuously in the family home. In these homes, perhaps violent and abusive patterns of behavior between family members have been normalized and occur more frequently when dealing with friction in relationships. This is consistent with what we know from the existing literature, which confirms that where there is IPV, children are often themselves victims of abuse (Skafida et al 2022).

This makes it so that almost everyone in the house becomes a victim. Even witnessing abuse can create life-long effects.

Frankel talks about the chronic childhood emotional abandonment some children face. He not only breaks down the side effects of abuse but talks about the psychology of the abuser and what goes through their mind. The abuse is okay because it was the child's fault, and they did not do anything wrong. Despite all the abuse that people will put others through, abusers will typically deny that they ever did it. Or they will downplay how bad it really was. They may admit to hitting a person once or twice but will say otherwise their relationship is fine, whereas the victim will tell a completely different story where their relationship hasn't been good for a long period of time. This is especially true for parents who "often denied or refused to acknowledge what they had done, blaming the child for what they did to him," (Frankel, 2023). This is a defense tactic to be able to get away with the abuse.

Psychology of the Abused

Although breaking down the psychological thought process of any person is hard, understanding the psychological thought process of an abuse victim is even harder as they come with their own set of challenges, both mental and physical. It's hard to understand how a victim may react. Children who were abused often "may become hypervigilant toward hostile cues, mask their feelings to avoid upsetting caregivers and learn that it is safer to be self-reliant. This

may contribute to distrust of others and avoidance in close relationships for individuals with histories of physical abuse” (Papalia, Widom, 2023). This makes it hard for therapists to understand how to best help them. Palmer, Brown, Rea-Grant, and Loughlin did a study about the survivors of abuse and the professional help they seek later in life. Most victims find it hard to open up after the abuse incidents, especially if they are still in the abusive environment:

Research indicates that service providers often find it stressful to treat survivors because of their resistance to change, their ways of relating to helpers, and the nature of the work.

Victims who live with post traumatic stress disorder, from things like closing doors, to belt buckles, to just going in for a hug, can make them have a flashback to the abuse they have endured. They all have their 'safe' place, which is just someplace or something that makes them feel okay. They also have places or times where it may be the scariest for them; oftentimes this is the time of day or place the abuse mostly happened:

I write to you at night time, the scariest time for me. I am physically "safe", but any loud noises make me jump, I cannot stand anyone walking behind me, surprises of any kind make me uneasy, I sleep with the light on and a cricket bat under my bed. I live every day with the aftershocks and subsequent PTSD. (Hussein,2023).

Although he, as a survivor, has been able to document his experience with how unjust the courts are and how the abuse has affected his life, he shares his struggles and his successes even as his court case progresses. Hussein states "But I know that my voice is being found by speaking of this as a survivor, though I hesitate and stumble, meeting blocks, triggers, and resistance on the way. I sit here overwhelmed with fear and rage." (Hussein, 2023) In conclusion he writes about the effects the whole court had on his mental state after the concurrent years of intimate partner violence, "There is silence. My body shakes. I cannot sleep. Body frozen. Too scared to move.

significantly more mental and physical effects than previously thought. Xiao writes “Childhood

post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation, and aggression” (Xiao et al. 2021), as well as “internalizing behavior problems at earlier ages and with externalizing behavior problems at later ages” (Yoon, Maguire-Jack, Ploss, Benavidez, Chang, 2023). Although there are ways to help people who develop mental disorders from abuse, oftentimes many do not seek the help they need, as abuse is often not talked about.

Some children develop mental disorders where others develop personality disorders, “Many survivors fit the diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, and professionals who work with this group have noted their distrust of authority figures” (Palmer et al. 2001). One of the major symptoms of borderline personality is dissociation. It is more prevalent in those who have experienced abuse, as dissociation is identified to be a psychological process that is associated with trauma. Not only that, but it is usually a stress-related symptom that is usually self-reported by individuals. Dissociation was described by Lassri, Bregman, Soffer-Dudek, and Sharhar in their study to find an association between childhood sexual assault and dissociation. This study shows that dissociation has been “described as a disruption and/or discontinuity of typically integrated aspects of psychological functioning and mental processing, including consciousness, memory, identity, as well as cognition and affect” (Lassri et al. 2023).

Briere and Runtz write about more common types of abuse. They show the links between having a history of childhood abuse with the long-term side effects that follow into adulthood. One of the more prevalent types of abuse, sexual, has been linked to a “variety of late problems and symptoms, including depression, interpersonal difficulties, sexual problems and suicidality... Long-term effects of physical abuse are more sparse, but appear to stress psychological symptoms, sexual problems, and aggression and criminality.” (Briere, Runtz, 1990).

Guiney, Caspi, Ambler, Belsky, Broadbent, Cheyne, Dickson, Hancox, Harrington, Ramrakha, Righarts, Thomson, Moffitt, and Poulton did a five-decade study on the idea that those whom were sexually abused would have problems at all aspects of life. These reached out past the prominent domains of life and went far into the idea that it can even affect small things such as conversations. As well as these side effects, more were prevented from being connected to those who experienced this type of abuse. This includes them being

more likely than their peers to experience internalizing, externalizing, and thought disorders, suicide attempts, health risk behaviors, systemic inflammation, poor oral health, sexually transmitted diseases, high conflict relationships, benefit use, financial difficulties, antisocial behavior and cumulative problems across multiple domains in adulthood (Guiney et al. 2022).

For those who have been exposed to sexual abuse, the prevalence for nearly every problem. These effects went across many domains of life, including mental, interpersonal, and antisocial effects. Although several sources have already mentioned mental effects, some less known are interpersonal and antisocial domains of life. With interpersonal relationships, victims of abuse tend to have high-conflict relationships. In the antisocial domain, victims of abuse tend to have a higher risk of delinquency and criminal difficulties.

One of the most common ways to understand psychological difficulties is through the self-concept clarity scale, which was used in many of the studies to understand how aware a person is of temporal stability, consistency, and clarity of self-beliefs. The scale is a 12-item scale to understand a person's own view on attitudes, values, goals, body concepts, personal worth, and abilities: "Low self-concept clarity has been linked to diverse psychological difficulties, including depression, anxiety, autism, schizophrenia, and post-traumatic stress

disorder...suicidal behavior, depression, loneliness, perceived stress, and life distress” (Lassrin et al. 2023). This is not a definite way to diagnose someone, but it is nice to understand how the test can be used as a tool.

Long term effects-psychical health

Afifi, MacMillan, Boyle, Cheung, Tailieu, Turner, and Sarreen wrote about the connection between childhood abuse and physical health as adults. This study shows a strong association between abuse and physical health effects. Just as seen with mental side effects, abuse will leave anyone with long-term physical side effects. It is no secret that “child abuse is recognized as having adverse life-long consequences” (Afifi et al. 2016). Children are still developing, and when they are at this age and get neglected and abused, it leads to their development being stunted and delayed. This creates long-term adverse side effects. The biopsychosocial pathway suggests that “psychosocial stress such as child abuse results in an overactivity of neural pathways of fear and pain, which through cognitive, behavioral, and neurobiological changes contributes to the development of anxiety disorders and chronic pain” (Afifi et al. 2016), as well as many more physical and emotional diseases. It was also found that the more times a person is abused, the odds of them developing some kind of physical and mental condition also increase. Walsh, Jamieson, MacMillan, and Boyle also talked about the connection between childhood cancer and pain. In their study, they found that there was a strong connection between a “history of child physical and sexual abuse and chronic pain among woman” (Walsh et al.2007).

Not nearly as many studies are done on the physical side effect side of abuse as on the emotional and mental health side, meaning that “while many studies have reported associations between a history of child maltreatment and mental disorders, less is known about the

associations with physical health” (Afifi et al.2016). This is because it is harder to determine whether the abuse or other environmental or social factors that could be causing the health effects. However, that can also be argued that if you can't be sure on the physical side, the validity of the mental side may not be as strong as it seems. Through many studies and tests, they have been able to conclude with high validity the effects of abuse on the physical body. Some of these were things such as “experiencing any type of child abuse was associated with increased odds of arthritis, back problems, high blood pressure, migraine headaches, chronic bronchitis/emphysema/COPD, cancer, stroke, bowel disease, and chronic fatigue syndrome”(Afifi et al. 2016) as well as most people who experienced the abuse would rate their health as less than excellent more often as opposed to those who did not experience abuse.

Even though all types of abuse were associated with “an increased likelihood of having a physical condition, with odds ranging from 1.4 for being slapped in the face, head or ears or hit or spanked for something hard to 2.0 for sexual abuse” (Afifi et al. 2016), it is still often overlooked. Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is associated with more risks than any of the other types of abuse, “childhood sexual abuse (CSA), a powerful and widespread traumatic stressor, has been associated with potentially negative short and long-term implications pertaining to different domains of development, as well as physical and psychological wellbeing” (Lassri et al. 2023). Many of these studies, although still happening, have produced some results that are helping influence how to care for children who have experienced CSA. There are many concerns when it comes to someone who has experienced CSA these are including but not limited to the following: “CSA was significantly associated with higher risk of the following problems across the assessed domains: physical- health risk behaviors, high systemic inflammation, low lung function, poor oral health... Sexual-sexually transmitted diseases”(Guiney et al. 2022).

Abuse is not often seen as something that can affect someone physically unless it's physical injury; however, when the body is put under stress for a long period of time, the body becomes in this hyperaware state of fight or flight response that it does not shut off and relax how the body is made to do. Due to that, it takes a physical toll on the organs in the body. It creates a multitude of different disorders and diseases the person could potentially grow up with

Chapter 4: Discussion

Abuse is constantly around us, whether we may realize it or not. Everyone knows both an abuser and a victim, whether they tell you or not. There are unjust laws that protect the abusers and unjust laws that do not help victims. The long-term side effects of abuse are unequivocally something that must not be ignored. The side effects may not affect one person as hard as it affects another person, but it still shows the need for better laws against abuse:

Beyond the context of IPV, there is a growing call for children to be afforded the same protections in law as adults in relation to physical assaults in the context of smacking, also commonly referred to as parental chastisement or spanking in different jurisdictions (Skafida et al 2022).

A good amount of the population is getting abused constantly around the world. These effects create a new generation of people with long-term side effects from something they could not help.

Abuse causes life-long side effects that people live with when it is not something that should have been there in the first place. This leads to some people learning from past abuse and stopping sTabuse bee= to be people learn

Limitations

This paper provided essential information; however, there are still a massive amount of

Appendix

Figure 1: Methods Chart



Methods chart

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