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Efficacy of Assertive Training for Gaslighting and Mental Health in University Students

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Abstract

Gaslighting, a manipulative tactic, manifests in various forms including physical, psychological, and emotional abuse, often subtly. This literature review explores assertiveness training's impact on gaslighting and mental health. Utilizing databases like Google Scholar, Academia, and PubMed, relevant English-language articles from 2015 to 2023 were analyzed. Demographics such as age, gender, and relationship status were considered. Assertiveness significantly improved mental health, especially among adolescents and young adults up to 25 years old, as most mental health issues initially develop or are first noticed by this age. In conclusion, assertiveness training enhanced mental well-being, social skills, and relationship dynamics while reducing experiences of gaslighting.

Keywords: *gaslighting, psychological abuse, psychological maltreatment, mental health, assertiveness*

Introduction

Gaslighting is a way of dysfunctional, maladaptive communication in which one person tries to destabilize the other individual's sense of reality⁴, attempting to convince them that they are wrong when they are not. It can be a form of emotional and psychological abuse that can affect the mental abilities of the targeted individual. Furthermore, gaslighting rarely occurs in isolation. It often affects the victim's self-confidence and mental health.

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices.⁵ The impact of gaslighting upon one's mental well-being may be noted in people's emotional reactions, perception, thoughts, reasoning abilities and even memory, increasing self-doubt, diminished self-esteem, confusion, anxiety, depression, the urge to retreat, and it can even provoke psychosis.⁶

Similarly, most of the studies on gaslight are based on prejudice and intentions. However, gaslighting is much more than intentions and experiences.⁷ The main characteristic of

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⁴ Clint Graves, and Spencer Leland. "Rethinking the Rhetorical Epistemics of Gaslighting," 48-67.

⁵ Corey Keyes. "The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life," 207-222.

⁶ Erin Hightower. "An exploratory study of personality factors related to psychological abuse and gaslighting." PhD dissertation, William James College, 2017.

⁷ Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus. The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice, 1-9.

gaslighting includes confronting the victim by rejecting the evidence and doubting them.⁸ There are several ways of being dismissed: the language may include words like “prude”, “too sensitive”, “crazy”, and “paranoid”.⁹

A gaslighter tries to manipulate others, especially loved ones. The gaslight individual allows the gaslighter to take control of their sense of reality which causes them to be uncertain, engage in self-doubt and feel a desire to withdraw.¹⁰ Also, gaslighting makes the victim doubt the sources of their evidence.¹¹ Gaslighters are generally those people who are thought to be close to the victim, and the ones having good intentions and are considered to be allies of the individuals being gaslit.¹²

Gaslighting is experienced by individuals in different fields. Correlates of gaslighting include relationships with parents, parental personality, parenting, and psychological adjustment. Working women belonging to different age groups were surveyed regarding receiving any kind of psychological violence. 67% of the working women reported receiving psychological violence.¹³ Women may face discrimination in professional and occupational settings as well. For example, gaslighting is identified as a form of bullying and is also seen as manipulation and brainwashing in the workplace. The goal of the study was to affect the women in the workplace affected by gaslighting causing psychological pressure. The data was collected by a survey questionnaire from working women. The results showed its negative effects on the mental health of women because of being subjected to gaslighting in the workplace.¹⁴ One-third of school nurses report occasional and frequent bullying at work.¹⁵

Gaslighting is also experienced commonly in close relationships. Female victims of intimate partner violence report physical abuse, symptoms of depression, trait anxiety, state anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. This shows the significant interference of intimate partner violence in the daily lives of 92% of participants.¹⁶

Children also experience emotional or psychological abuse. There are several instances reported in which children undergo physical or psychological maltreatment or neglect at an early age. These negative experiences may often develop into pathological personality traits later in life, i.e., developing a risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviours.¹⁷ There is much research regarding child abuse in Pakistan. The rate of physical abuse is the highest i.e., 57% (46% females and 68% males). The second highest form of abuse is emotional abuse with a prevalence of 53% (53% males and 54% females). This is followed by 40% reported neglect. Most frequent reported abuses are from parents (20%), friends (16%) and teachers (14%).¹⁸

Correlates of Gaslighting

This section highlights some factors that influence gaslighting. These include relationships with parents, parental personality, parenting, and psychological adjustment.

⁸ Kirk-Giannini, Cameron Domenico. "Dilemmatic Gaslighting," 745-772.

⁹ Kate Abramson. "Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting," 1-30.

¹⁰ Erin Hightower. "An exploratory study of personality factors related to psychological abuse and gaslighting." PhD diss., William James College, 2017.

¹¹ Eric Beerbohm, and Davis Ryan. "Gaslighting Citizens," 867-879.

¹² Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus. The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice, 1-9.

¹³ Diana Dimitrova. "The Women in Situation of Gaslighting–Risk Identification in the Work Environment," 165-327.

¹⁴ Diana Dimitrova. "The Women in Situation of Gaslighting–Risk Identification in the Work Environment," 165 -327.

¹⁵ Anya Peters, Mazen El-Ghaziri, Brenna Quinn, Shellie Simons, and Rosemary Taylor. "An exploratory study of bullying exposure among school nurses: prevalence and impact," 449-459.

¹⁶ Cirici Amell, Roser, Aloma Riera Soler, Jesus Cobo, and Joan Miquel Soldevilla Alberti. "Psychological Consequences and Daily Life Adjustment for Victims of Intimate Partner Violence," 6-19.

¹⁷ Giorgio Falgares, Daniela Marchetti, Giovanna Manna, Pasquale Musso, Osmano Oasi, Daniel C. Kopala-Sibley, Sandro De Santis, and Maria C. Verrocchio. "Childhood Maltreatment, Pathological Personality Dimensions, And Suicide Risk in Young Adults."

¹⁸ Syed Saleem Abbas and Tahira Jabeen. "Prevalence of child abuse among the university students: a retrospective cross-sectional study in University of the Punjab, Pakistan," 125-134.

Some parental personality traits such as emotional disorders, anger, violence, low self-esteem, social anxiety, decreased participation in social activities, dysthymia symptoms, poor verbal reasoning, and increased sickness are thought to raise the likelihood of emotional maltreatment in children. Psychologically abusive mothers with low marital coping skills have high levels of hostility which results in violent marriages and poor child upbringing, depression, increased stress, and social anxiety in children.¹⁹

Children who experience emotional abuse are more likely to be shorter in stature, weigh less than children of their age, and frequently miss developmental milestones. Emotional abuse also appears to have effects on neurological components, such as hyperactivity, sleep disturbance, anxiety, and issues with learning and memory.^{20 21 22} A significant number of children continue to display signs of dysfunction many years after the abuse has stopped, especially if they continue to be exposed to several risk factors, such as unavailability of social support.²³

Psychologists have tried to understand why individuals may stay in relationships that continue to weigh them down. One theory that explores this phenomenon is the Learned Helplessness Theory.

Learned Helplessness Theory

The learned helplessness theory suggests that self-beliefs regarding personal weakness and inability to escape or support themselves, lead individuals to stay in abusive environments.²⁴ Victims stay in abusive environments or volatile familial situations due to barriers in repeated attempts to escape.²⁵ As a result, individuals may begin to believe that nothing they do will matter and that their actions do not determine the outcome. Hence, they quit trying to take charge or action.

Materials and Methods

To include the maximum number of relevant articles, many search engines and databases were used. These included Google Scholar, Academia, Science Direct, Psych Info, and Pub Med. Longitudinal, cross-sectional, and intervention studies were used. Articles between 1995 to 2023 were included. All articles were in English language and were available in open-access, peer-reviewed journals. To ensure the quality papers abstracts were screened and following that, the full articles were studied comprehensively. Reference-based literature was extracted from these articles.

Results

Gaslighting Risk Factors

Childhood maltreatment may increase the chances of indulging in or experiencing gaslighting. Children who experience abuse at an early age often face abuse later in life as well. This is often

¹⁹ Max Lesnik-Oberstein, Arend Koers, and Leo Cohen. "Parental Hostility and its Sources in Psychologically Abusive Mothers: A Test of The Three-Factor Theory," 33-49.

²⁰ Stephanie Dallam, David Gleaves, Antonio Cepeda-Benito, Joyanna L. Silberg, Helena C. Kraemer, and David Spiegel. "The Effects of Child Sexual Abuse: Comment on Rind, Tromovitch, And Bauserman", 715.

²¹ Danya Glaser. "Child Abuse and Neglect and The Brain—A Review, " 97-116.

²² Bruce Perry. "Bonding and attachment in maltreated children," 1-17.

²³ Dorota Iwaniec. "The Emotionally Abused and Neglected Child: Identification, Assessment and Intervention: A Practice Handbook."

²⁴ Martin Seligman. "Learned helplessness." Annual Review of Medicine 23, no. 1 (1972): 407-412.

²⁵ Christopher Peterson, and Martin Seligman. "Learned Helplessness and Victimization." 103-116.

due to internalizing problems, externalizing problems, and post-traumatic stress symptoms, developed due to the familial problems and violence children face at home.²⁶ Poverty is often determined as a cause of childhood psychological, educational, and medical neglect. Negative parental relationships also influence children adversely, posing as a risk factor for gaslighting. When parents are abusive towards each other, their chances of maltreating the children are greatest.²⁷ When children experience maltreatment early on due to socioeconomic challenges at home, they are more likely to develop psychological and mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, and somatic symptom disorder.²⁸ ²⁹ However, research notes it is not only adverse childhood experiences such as neglect or violence (including sexual abuse), but also personality traits of the abuser and the survivor i.e. in the abuser detachment, disinhibition, and psychoticism, whereas for the survivor antagonism, disinhibition, and psychoticism that determine whether the risk for gaslighting is increased in these individuals.³⁰ Where self-criticism is a mediator, individuals who had undergone parental neglect. Self-criticism also led to an increased risk of suicide in these individuals. Moreover, research also suggests that a family's firstborn child is most likely to inflict harm upon other children, indicating that indulging in psychological abuse may be associated with birth order.³¹

Gaslighting as Psychological Abuse- and where is it Experienced

Parent-Child Relationships

Both emotional abuse and emotional neglect classify as psychological maltreatment.³² Individuals who experience gaslighting and emotional abuse early in life may have gone through them at home or school. Parents may subject children to emotional or psychological abuse. Parental abuse or neglect accounts for psychological abuse, as parents ignore the psychological needs of children. Moreover, the emotional neglect received by children at an early age, from their primary caregivers, is associated with mental health struggles later in life.³³ Individuals who have faced abuse in their early life may become potential abusers later. On the other hand, they may become victims again in situations where there is an unequal distribution of power.³⁴

The impact of emotional abuse and parenting styles on self-esteem and well-being has also been studied. 293 university students from Brazil, aged between 18 to 30 years participated. Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, Responsivity and Demandingness Scale, and Subjective Well-being Scale were included. Parenting styles included Authoritative, Authoritarian, Indulgent, and Negligent. ANOVA was carried out. Results showed that emotional abuse correlated negatively with self-esteem, positive affect, and life satisfaction. There were positive relationships found between emotional abuse and negative affect. Recall of emotionally distressing and abusive events was more common in students if

²⁶ James Phillip Olsen. "The Differential Impact of Physical Abuse, Witnessing Violence, and Psychological Abuse on Children's Internalizing, Externalizing, and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms."

²⁷ Chang, Jen Jen, Adrea D. Theodore, Sandra L. Martin, and Desmond K. Runyan. "Psychological Abuse between Parents: Association's with Child Maltreatment from a Population-Based Sample," 819-829.

²⁸ Hong Wang Fung, Hei Man Chung, and Colin A. Ross. "Demographic and Mental Health Correlates of Childhood Emotional Abuse and Neglect in A Hong Kong Sample," 104-288.

²⁹ Atiqul Haque, Syed Moniruzzaman, Staffan Janson, Fazlur Rahman, Saidur Rahman Mashreky, and Ulla-Britt Eriksson. "Children's Exposure to Psychological Abuse and Neglect: A Population-Based Study in Rural Bangladesh," 257-264.

³⁰ Paola Miano, Martina Bellomare, and Vincenzo Giuseppe Genova. "Personality Correlates of Gaslighting Behaviours in Young Adults," 285-298.

³¹ Alokun Funmilola Bosede. "Birth Order as a Possible Correlate of Child Abuse," 450-455.

³² Adela Mwakanyamale and Yu Yizhen. "Psychological Maltreatment and its Relationship with Self-Esteem and Psychological Stress Among Adolescents in Tanzania: A Community Based, Cross-Sectional Study," 1-9.

³³ Margaret O'Dougherty Wright, Emily Crawford, and Darren Del Castillo. "Childhood Emotional Maltreatment and Later Psychological Distress Among College Students: The Mediating Role of Maladaptive Schemas," 59-68.

³⁴ Evan Stark. "Do Violent Acts Equal Abuse? Resolving the Gender Parity/Asymmetry Dilemma," 201-211.

their parents had been negligent and authoritative, than in other students whose parents had practised more positive ways of parenting.³⁵

Moreover, research has examined the contribution of childhood emotional abuse to relationship violence³⁶. 14 students responded to the questionnaire. Results show that emotional abuse strongly predicts relationship violence. This highlights the need for increased attention to the long-lasting impacts of suffering from parental emotional abuse, which individuals experience years later. Similarly, another research examined the effects of abuse on later psychological and social adjustment as adults. The data was collected from a non-clinical sample of 173 participants. Individuals who reported high abuse but failed to acknowledge themselves as abused were termed as minimizers. The results showed that victims of abuse, both acknowledgers and minimizers reported more psychological and social adjustment problems than the participants who were not abused.³⁷

Importantly, research has that psychological and physical neglect and sexual abuse often contribute to the development of negative personality traits such as suicidal ideation and behaviours during adolescence and adulthood³⁸. Their study showed how abuse in early life, coupled with specific personality traits increased the risk for suicidal ideation. The sample consisted of 306 Italian public university students. Results showed that lack of parental care and psychological abuse experienced as a child were positively correlated with the risk of suicide. This was also mediated by self-criticism as a dysfunctional personality trait in these individuals. It was therefore concluded that dysfunctional parental practices and psychological abuse experienced by children impact them to a great degree. The effects of these negative experiences are witnessed much later in their lives as well and may also take the shape of suicidal ideation and behaviours.

The presence of negative personality traits such as self-criticism is significant in increasing the risk of developing suicidal ideation and behaviours in these individuals³⁹. Therefore, research suggest that an increased clinical awareness of emotional regulation may be beneficial towards adaptability and in adult relationships.⁴⁰

Educational Institutes and Academic Settings

Similarly, children and adolescents may experience psychological or emotional abuse at educational institutions. Such negative experiences may hinder a student's academic performance and their interest and participation in academic and co-curricular activities. It may also lead students to develop mental health issues.⁴¹

Teachers and peers may subject children to emotional abuse, which means that maltreatment in academic settings may be a common occurrence.⁴² Other researchers have studied the association

³⁵ Sally Brodski and Claudio S. Hutz. "The Repercussions of Emotional Abuse and Parenting Styles on Self-Esteem, Subjective Well-Being: A Retrospective Study with University Students in Brazil," 256-276.

³⁶ Sara Berzenski and Tuppett Yates. "The Effect of Childhood Emotional Maltreatment on Later Intimate Relationships," 180-203.

³⁷ Rachna Varia, Richard Abidin, and Patsy Dass. "Perceptions Of Abuse: Effects on Adult Psychological and Social Adjustment," 511-526.

³⁸ Giorgio Falgares, Daniela Marchetti, Giovanna Manna, Pasquale Musso, Osmano Oasi, Daniel C. Kopala-Sibley, Sandro De Santis, and Maria C. Verrocchio. "Childhood Maltreatment, Pathological Personality Dimensions, and Suicide Risk in Young Adults."

³⁹ Giorgio Falgares, Daniela Marchetti, Giovanna Manna, Pasquale Musso, Osmano Oasi, Daniel C. Kopala-Sibley, Sandro De Santis, and Maria C. Verrocchio. "Childhood Maltreatment, Pathological Personality Dimensions, and Suicide Risk in Young Adults."

⁴⁰ Sara Berzenski and Tuppett Yates. "The Effect of Childhood Emotional Maltreatment on Later Intimate Relationships," 180-203.

⁴¹ Wajehe Auranzeb, Nabeela Shakur Abbasi, and Sehrish Kashan. "Unveiling the Impact of Gaslighting on Female Academic Leadership: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study," 1-15.

⁴² Adela Mwakanyamale and Yu Yizhen. "Psychological Maltreatment and Its Relationship with Self-Esteem and Psychological Stress Among Adolescents in Tanzania: a Community Based, Cross-Sectional Study," 1-9.

of verbal abuse with adjustment as well as behavioural and emotional problems in children⁴³. The impact of verbal abuse on a child's behavioural, emotional and academic adjustment was also studied. The data was collected from 399 children, in a longitudinal study, for 7 years (starting from kindergarten to grade 4). Peer nomination (for verbal abuse by teachers and acceptance versus rejection by peer group) and evaluation by teachers (for antisocial behaviour, attention problems and anxiety) were used. Results indicated that children with antisocial behaviour and attention problems are at high risk of verbal abuse by teachers. Also, verbal abuse (by teachers) may lead to academic difficulties and irresponsible behaviour in children.

Furthermore, research has studied experiences of psychological abuse in intimate relationships and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. 191 male and female students responded to The Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised, Trauma Assessment for Adult Self-Report Version (TAA-SRV), and Modified PTSD Symptom Scale Self-Report were used to examine the variables. Linear regression analysis revealed that only physical abuse was associated with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. The difference may be due to the duration of the intimate relationship. This indicates that psychological abuse experienced in longer intimate relationships may be more likely to account for the development of posttraumatic stress disorder. However, it may be possible that the participants in this study had better coping skills, which helped them deal with the psychological abuse experienced.⁴⁴

Intimate Partner Relationships

Moreover, gaslighting and psychological or emotional abuse are often experienced in romantic relationships. The effects of abusive partners on self-esteem, relationship intimacy and stability were studied in women. Data was collected from 82 women in heterosexual relationships. Self-enhancement theory (the concept that people naturally want to think well of themselves and have others think well of them as well) explains the link between psychological abuse and relationship outcomes. Women who are subjected to partner abuse show low relationship stability and intimacy.⁴⁵

Psychological abuse experienced by college students in romantic relationships was studied. Emotional abuse was associated with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.⁴⁶ 191 male and female college students participated in the research. The study used the Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised, Trauma Assessment for Adult Self-Report Version (TAA-SRV), and Modified PTSD Symptom Scale Self-Report to examine the variables. Linear regression analysis was carried out. Results showed that only physical abuse was associated with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, suggesting that this difference may be due to the time duration of the intimate relationship⁴⁷. Perhaps psychological abuse experienced in longer intimate relationships may be more likely to account for the development of posttraumatic stress disorder. It is also possible that the participants of this study had better coping skills, which helped them deal with the psychological abuse experienced.

Furthermore, emotional abuse and intimate partner violence has been studied throughout different relationship durations.⁴⁸ The moderating roles of the longitude of the marriage,

⁴³ Mara Brendgen, Brigitte Wanner, Frank Vitaro, William M. Bukowski, and Richard E. Tremblay. "Verbal Abuse by The Teacher During Childhood and Academic, Behavioral, And Emotional Adjustment in Young Adulthood." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 99, no. 1 (2007).

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Avant, Rachel M. Swopes, Joanne L. Davis, and Jon D. Elhai. "Psychological Abuse and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in College Students," 3080-3097.

⁴⁵ Jennifer Ketz, Ileana Arias, and Steven Beach. "Psychological Abuse, Self-Esteem, and Women's Dating Relationship Outcomes: A Comparison of The Self-Verification and Self-Enhancement Perspectives," 349-357.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Avant, Rachel M. Swopes, Joanne L. Davis, and Jon D. Elhai. "Psychological Abuse and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in College Students," 3080-3097.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Avant, Rachel M. Swopes, Joanne L. Davis, and Jon D. Elhai. "Psychological Abuse and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in College Students," 3080-3097.

⁴⁸ Rula Odeh Alsawalqa, Yara Abdel Rahman Sa'deh, and Maissa N. Alrawashdeh. "Jordanian Men's Experience of Emotional Abuse in Marital Relationships: The Role of Marriage Length and Motivation." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021).

marriage motivation, and age were investigated. An online survey was conducted among a randomized sample of 1003 Jordanian married men, with an average age of 42.51 years and a marital relationship duration ranging from 1 to 53 years. Findings showed that isolation, degradation, property damage, and sexual coercion, were the leading forms of emotional abuse experienced by men in marital relationships. Each form of emotional abuse was more common in rural marriages, as compared to urban marriages. Emotional abuse was experienced, regardless of an arranged or love marriage. However, it was more prevalent in love marriages. A higher level of abuse was experienced by men younger in age, but it declined as partners grew older and with increasing duration of the marriage.

Political or Cultural Gaslighting

Political gaslighting refers to one political group or head lying to spread false information among the masses and manipulate them.⁴⁹ Common ways in which this may be done is when political leaders spread misinformation, imply that opponents are misleading when they criticize and use deflection to turn attention away from their lack of performance.

Another form may be cultural gaslighting, especially in the effects of colonization. It is making efforts to undermine one culture, to increase acceptance of their own culture among the locals. Gaslighting or psychological and emotional abuse may have long-lasting negative impacts on an individual.⁵⁰ It may impede decision-making and productivity which may lead to overthinking, irrationality, lack of resilience and even disliking parts of one's personality. Gaslighting or psychological and emotional abuse are not bound to any certain sector of society but rather is experienced at micro and macro sociological levels, where there is an unequal power distribution.⁵¹

Psychological Abuse and Mental Health

Several researchers have explored the relationship between psychological abuse and mental health or well-being.^{52 53 54 55} It may be contended from past research that psychological or emotional abuse is associated with compromised mental well-being and psychological disorders.

Past research has found that there is an association between emotional abuse experienced as a child and the development of psychological symptoms or disorders. These include post-traumatic stress symptoms, depression, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, somatoform dissociation, dissociative symptoms, and issues with sleep.^{56 57 58 59}

⁴⁹ Paige Sweet "The Sociology of Gaslighting," 851-875.

⁵⁰ Martin Christensen and Anne Evans-Murray. "Gaslighting In Nursing Academia: A New or Established Covert Form of Bullying?" 640-647.

⁵¹ Elena Ruiz. "Cultural Gaslighting," *Hypatia* 35, no. 4 (2020): 687-713.

⁵² Camila Maria Severi Martins, Cristiane Von Werne Baes, Sandra Marcia De Carvalho Tofoli, and Mario Francisco Juruena. "Emotional Abuse in Childhood Is a Differential Factor for The Development of Depression in Adults," 774-782.

⁵³ Sonya Negri. "Aces Are Not Equal: Examining the Relative Impact of Household Dysfunction Versus Childhood Maltreatment on Mental Health in Adolescence." *Social Science & Medicine* 245 (2020).

⁵⁴ Rosana Norman, Munkhtsetseg Byambaa, Rumna De, Alexander Butchart, James Scott, and Theo Vos. "The Long-Term Health Consequences of Child Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, And Neglect: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *PLOS Medicine* 9, No. 11 (2012).

⁵⁵ Corinne Rees. "Understanding Emotional Abuse." *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 95, No. 1 (2010): 59-67.

⁵⁶ Hong Wang Fung, Hei Man Chung, and Colin A. Ross. "Demographic and Mental Health Correlates of Childhood Emotional Abuse and Neglect in a Hong Kong Sample," 104-288.

⁵⁷ Atiqul Haque, Syed Moniruzzaman, Staffan Janson, Fazlur Rahman, Saidur Rahman Mashreky, and Ulla-Britt Eriksson. "Children's Exposure to Psychological Abuse and Neglect: A Population-Based Study in Rural Bangladesh," 257-264.

⁵⁸ Martine Hebert, Rachel Langevin, Elisa Guidi, Anne Claude Bernard-Bonnin, and Claire Allard-Dansereau. "Sleep Problems and Dissociation in Preschool Victims of Sexual Abuse," 507-521.

⁵⁹ James Phillip Olsen. "The Differential Impact of Physical Abuse, Witnessing Violence, and Psychological Abuse on Children's Internalizing, Externalizing, and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms." (2011).

Research also shows that psychological distress is related to psychological maltreatment⁶⁰. A lack of self-esteem is also found in individuals who go through emotional abuse, raising further mental health concerns for them. In extreme cases, suicidal ideation and attempts have also been reported to have resulted from negative childhood experiences.⁶¹ In addition to this, experiencing childhood maltreatment may also predict experiencing violence in relationships and issues with adult adjustment, later.⁶² ⁶³ Along with raising mental health concerns, psychological or emotional abuse is also associated with physical issues.⁶⁴ Physical symptoms caused by psychological maltreatment include headaches, body aches, fatigue, and sleep difficulties.⁶⁵

Assertiveness and Mental Health/ Mental Well-being

The efficacy of assertiveness training has been demonstrated in many settings and situations such as education, business, relationships, and mental health.⁶⁶ It has been widely used in educational settings to help individuals learn skills which boost self-confidence, achieve goals, manage personal feelings, and defend themselves and their rights.⁶⁷ Assertiveness training has also been noted to be beneficial to combat the negative impact of bullying on students.

Assertiveness Training in Educational Institutes

Bullying is classified as an unhealthy behaviour, which not only negatively affects its victims and bullies, but also the school environment. It is also reported that students who lack assertiveness may become bullies, as they become aggressive. An experimental study on 80 Indonesian schoolchildren, aged between 12 to 14 years⁶⁸. The t-tests were carried out to determine pre and post-differences in scores in both experimental and control groups. Results revealed that assertive training increased awareness about assertiveness, and increased assertive behaviour, suggesting that the training was effective.

The impact of assertiveness training on the stress, depression, and anxiety levels of students was studied.⁶⁹ As adolescents are transitioning from childhood to young adulthood, that may be an additional pressure for many of them. Therefore, a quasi-experimental study was conducted. Through random sampling, 126 high school students took part in the study. They were then divided into experimental and control groups, both groups with 63 participants each. Data was collected using a demographic questionnaire, Gambill Richey Assertiveness Scale, and Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21). Additionally, the experimental group's participants also received assertiveness training over 8 weeks (1 session per week). Post-testing of tools was carried out on both groups. The t-tests, repeated measures ANOVA, chi-square test, and the Mann-Whitney test were used for statistical analyses. Results showed that post-intervention, a significant difference was found in assertiveness levels between both groups up

⁶⁰ Adela Mwakanyamale and Yu Yizhen. "Psychological Maltreatment and Its Relationship with Self-Esteem and Psychological Stress Among Adolescents in Tanzania: a Community Based, Cross-Sectional Study," 1-9.

⁶¹ Giorgio Falgares, Daniela Marchetti, Giovanna Manna, Pasquale Musso, Osmano Oasi, Daniel C. Kopala-Sibley, Sandro De Santis, and Maria C. Verrocchio. "Childhood Maltreatment, Pathological Personality Dimensions, and Suicide Risk in Young Adults."

⁶² Sara Berzenski and Tuppert Yates. "The Effect of Childhood Emotional Maltreatment on Later Intimate Relationships, 180-203.

⁶³ Rachna Varia, Richard Abidin, and Patsy Dass. "Perceptions Of Abuse: Effects on Adult Psychological and Social Adjustment," 511-526.

⁶⁴ Sachs-Ericsson, Natalie, Amanda N. Medley, Kathleen Kendall-Tackett, and John Taylor. "Childhood Abuse and Current Health Problems among Older Adults: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy."

⁶⁵ Martin Christensen and Anne Evans-Murray. "Gaslighting In Nursing Academia: A New or Established Covert Form of Bullying?" 640-647.

⁶⁶ Fatma Ayvar, And Sultan Ayaz Alkaya. "The Effectiveness of Assertiveness Training for School-Aged Children on Bullying and Assertiveness Level," 186-190.

⁶⁷ Etodike, Ike, and Chukwura. "Assertiveness Training: Academic Performance and Self Esteem Among College Students in Selected Rural Areas."

⁶⁸ Budi Anna Keliati, Tinneke Aneke Tololiu, N. H. C. Daulima, and Erna Erawati. "Effectiveness Assertive Training of Bullying Prevention Among Adolescents in West Java Indonesia," 128-134.

⁶⁹ Ahmad Ali Eslami, Leili Rabiei, Seyed Mohammad Afzali, Saeed Hamidzadeh, and Reza Masoudi. "The Effectiveness of Assertiveness Training on the Levels of Stress, Anxiety, and Depression of High School Students." *Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journal* 18, No. 1 (2016).

until 2 months. Experimental group participants had lower anxiety levels than the control group participants during the 2 months after the assertiveness training was provided. However, after 2 months following the intervention, differences subsided. It was concluded that such assertiveness programmes are a low-cost and practical way to provide training to help adolescents at an already sensitive time of their lives.

Similarly, a longitudinal study exploring the impact of assertive training on nurses and healthcare professionals, was carried out.⁷⁰ 69 participants with low assertiveness scores on the Assertiveness Scale were included. Participants were placed into experimental or control groups. Participants in the experimental group received eight, two-hour sessions of assertiveness training once a week. Data were collected pre-and post-intervention. Rotter's Internal versus External Control of Reinforcement Scale, Sex Role Inventory, Assertive Scale, Esteem Scale, and Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory were administered. Generalized Estimated Equation (GEE) was used for statistical analysis. Results demonstrated that the experimental group participants' assertiveness and self-esteem levels significantly improved after receiving the assertiveness training.

In addition, Assertiveness training has also been used in undergraduate students of midwifery. It is particularly beneficial for students in this field. These students are often required to work with patients and families who are highly aroused. At the same time, midwifery students need to provide care and look after the needs of the patients.⁷¹ To deal with this, a workshop on assertiveness comprising roleplays, lectures, and facilitated discussions was provided to students of midwifery, which improved self-perceived assertiveness. This showed that as assertiveness is a skill which may be acquired over time, such training programmes and workshops may help develop assertiveness, which is a necessary skill, especially as students enter professional life.

An assertiveness training workshop for undergraduate nursing and midwifery students as well⁷². Assertiveness in nurses and midwives is now believed to be significant for effective communication with patients. A 3-hour long workshop focusing on role plays was conducted for undergraduate nursing and midwifery students. This study highlighted the role of teachers and instructors in planning workshops to encourage the practice of assertiveness in these students.

A causal model focusing on assertiveness, coping with stress, and workplace factors such as burnout⁷³. The study was carried out on nurses. A total number of 645 new female nurses, from 17 different hospitals took part in the study. The Novice Nurse Assertiveness Scale and the Japanese version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory were used to study the variables. Correlation, multiple regression, and covariance structure analysis (for creating the causal model) were used. Results showed that lack of assertiveness, and being unresponsive or aggressive were associated with higher burnout. Workplace satisfaction was associated with lower burnout. This showed that a lack of effective assertiveness related negatively to the nurses' work experience, with a greater likelihood of experiencing burnout.

⁷⁰ Yen-Ru Lin, I-Shin Shiah, Yue-Cune Chang, Tzu-Ju Lai, Kwua-Yun Wang, and Kuei-Ru Chou. "Evaluation of an Assertiveness Training Program on Nursing and Medical Students' Assertiveness, Self-Esteem, and Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction," 656-665.

⁷¹ Jane Warland, Lois McKellar, and Monica Diaz. "'Assertiveness Training for Undergraduate Midwifery Students,'" 752-756.

⁷² Fiona Timmins and Catherine McCabe. "Nurses' and Midwives' Assertive Behaviour in 'The Workplace,'" 38-45.

⁷³ Eiko Suzuki, Yuko Takayama, Chiaki Kinouchi, Chihiro Asakura, Hirotochi Tatsuno, Takae Machida, Hiroe Yanahara, Hiroko Kitajima, And Masae Miwa. "A Causal Model on Assertiveness, Stress Coping, And Workplace Environment: Factors Affecting Novice Nurses' Burnout." *Nursing Open* 8, No. 3 (2021): 1452-1462.

Assertiveness and Relationships

Assertiveness can contribute to improvements in relationships. The effect of assertiveness training on intimate relationships was explored.⁷⁴ In the research, partners' perceptions of trust and intimacy regarding the relationship were examined. Twenty-six participants and their non-participating partners were asked to complete the Interpersonal Relationship Scale (IRS) pre- and post-training. The participants in the experimental group received training following the completion of IRS, while the control group participants received no training. Results showed that post-intervention, experimental group participants and as well as their partners (who did not receive training) had better perceptions regarding levels of trust and intimacy in their relationships. It was therefore contended, that one partner receiving assertiveness training impacted both partners' perceptions about their relationship.

Moreover, a quasi-experimental study design to test the impact of group assertiveness training on the quality of marital relationships of female university students⁷⁵. 80 participants were assigned to control or intervention groups. While the intervention group participants received four sessions of assertiveness-based counselling, the control group received no intervention. The Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory was used to monitor changes in how women perceived the quality of marital relationships. Experimental group participants reported better quality of marital relationships following the intervention. Similarly, the impact of assertiveness training on the assertiveness, well-being, and academic achievement of Iranian female students was investigated⁷⁶. 30 participants were included in the study and were randomly allocated to experimental or control conditions. Assertiveness Questionnaire and Oxford Happiness Questionnaire were used as measurement tools, before and after the intervention. Results showed that experimental group participants scored higher on assertiveness. The experimental group also scored greater on well-being at the follow-up. There was significant improvement in academic achievement of experimental group participants at follow-up. This indicated that the participants may have learnt vital skills which they implemented and that benefited them.

The effects of assertiveness training on assertiveness behaviour, problem-solving ability, and interpersonal relationships of nursing students have been studied⁷⁷. The study was experimental. There were 15 participants in the experimental group and 15 participants in the control group. The experimental group received 8 series of weekly assertiveness training. Each training session was 2 hours long. The control group participants did not receive any training. The Maan-Whitney U test was conducted to assess changes in scores on participants' assertiveness behaviour, problem-solving ability, and interpersonal relationships between the experimental and the control groups, after the assertiveness training. Results showed that participants who received the assertiveness training scored higher on assertiveness behaviour, self-problem solving, and interpersonal relationships. The findings highlight that assertiveness training is effective in bringing positive changes in an individual's assertiveness, as well as interpersonal relations and problem-solving abilities.

⁷⁴ Susan Gordon and Michael Waldo. "The Effects of Assertiveness Training on Couples' Relationships," 73-77.

⁷⁵ Neda Dastyar, Ameneh Safarzadeh Sarasyabi, Mansour Shakiba, and Ali Navidian. "Impact Of Group Assertiveness-Based Sexual Training on The Quality of Marital Relationships Among Female University Students."

⁷⁶ Maryam Pacey, Mehrnaz Shahraray, and Beheshteh Abdi. "Investigating The Impact of Assertiveness Training on Assertiveness, Subjective Well-Being and Academic Achievement of Iranian Female Secondary Students," 1447-1450.

⁷⁷ Ik-Soo Jang and Chung-Nam Kim. "Effects of Assertiveness Training on Assertiveness Behavior, Problem Solving Ability, and Interpersonal Relationships of Nursing College Students," 239-248.

Discussion

This review aimed to identify, assess, and summarize research papers regarding gaslighting as a form of emotional abuse, its impact on mental health, and how assertiveness may help deal with experiences of gaslighting. Results indicate that gaslighting is indeed a form of psychological and emotional abuse, with detrimental effects on an individual's mental health. As shown by the research papers in this review, gaslighting exists in several aspects, such as parent-child relationships, in school and educational institutes, workplaces, and romantic relationships. At any age, experiencing gaslighting may affect an individual's mental well-being negatively. However, when children experience psychological abuse at an early age, the risk of developing mental health issues rises, as they become more vulnerable and may also face emotional maltreatment in their future relationships.

So, it was necessary to explore ways in which the experience of gaslighting may be dealt with. Results show that by and large, assertiveness decreases the risk of experiencing gaslighting. As assertiveness is a skill that may be learned over time, assertiveness training has been noted to be beneficial for improving assertiveness skills. This has been evident in empirical research on assertiveness training, and gaslighting.

Directions for Future Research

The research included in this review explored gaslighting as a form of psychological and emotional abuse, its effect on an individual's mental health and the role of assertiveness training in dealing with gaslighting. Further research should be conducted on potential moderators or mediators of gaslighting and its outcomes. It is evident that assertiveness training has a positive impact in the short term and may last for a few months as well. Future researchers may consider conducting direct observations, as well as longitudinal studies to determine whether the positive impacts of assertiveness training are long-lasting. Ways in which the positive impact may be maximized to benefit in the longer run may also be explored.

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