

# Verbal Abuse And Its Harmful Effects

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**A**buse is a complex phenomenon that scars the psyche of the victim, affecting their mental development and rendering them vulnerable, to a broad range of psychiatric and psychological problems in the future. And the effect is similar for children, women and men. Abuse can exist in any form, physical, psychological, sexual or verbal.

## Verbal Abuse

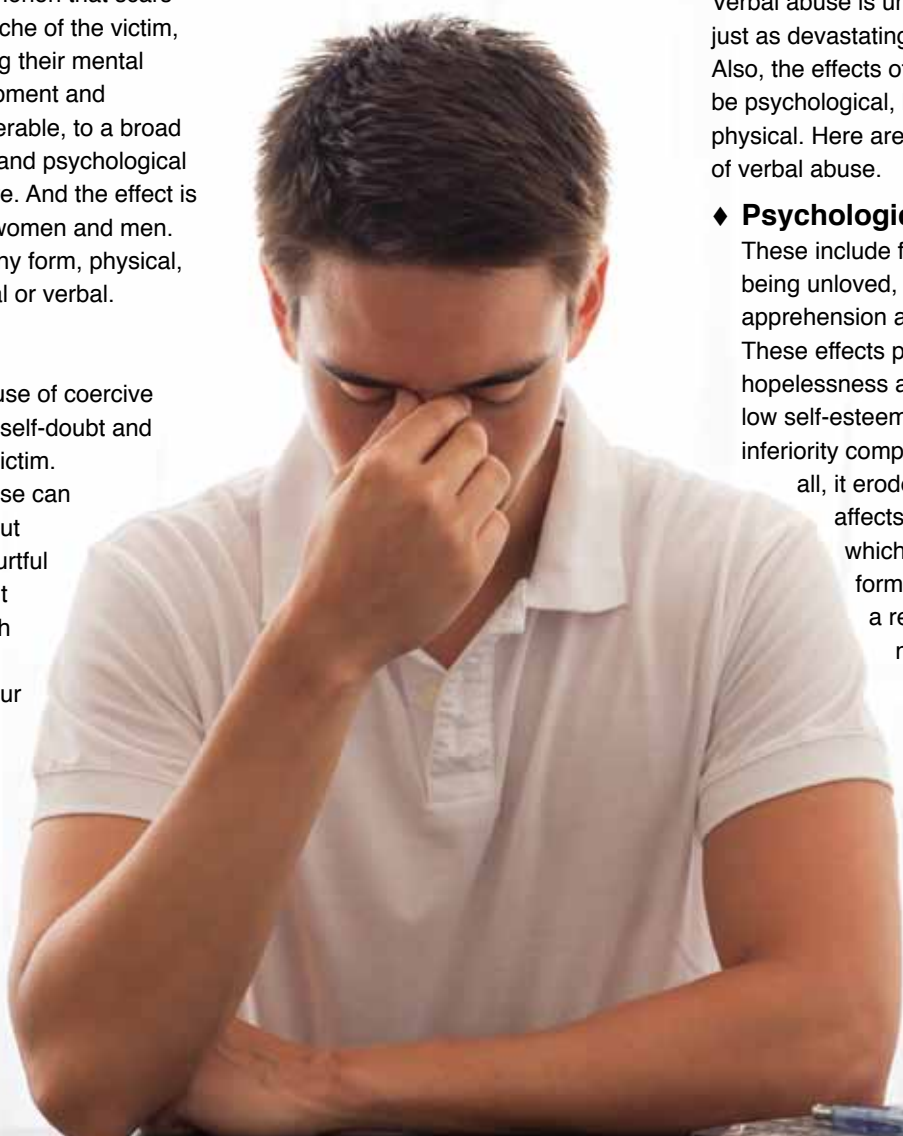
Verbal abuse is the use of coercive language that instils self-doubt and ambivalence in the victim. However, verbal abuse can be perpetrated without uttering mean and hurtful things. This means, it can be displayed with manners, gestures, bullying and behaviour that is intended to mock a person. So, the primary element involved in verbal abuse is the humiliation of the individual, intending to subjugate and manipulate or subject one to emotional pain.

## Effects Of Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse is under-reported, but it is just as devastating as physical abuse. Also, the effects of verbal abuse can be psychological, behavioural and physical. Here are some of the effects of verbal abuse.

### ◆ Psychological Effects

These include feelings of being unloved, unappreciated, apprehension and worthlessness. These effects propagate hopelessness and helplessness, low self-esteem and low confidence, inferiority complex and fear. Above all, it erodes the persona and affects the capacity to trust, which is a core element of forming and maintaining a relationship. This may further increase vulnerability to stress, anxiety and depression.



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◆ **Behavioural Effects**

Represented by sleep disturbance, shakiness, restlessness and irritability. Younger children and adolescents may start thumb-sucking, bed-wetting or display impulsive and immature behaviour. Older adults may compensate feelings of inadequacy with risky behaviour such as (lying, stealing and engaging in promiscuity) and worse, by becoming an abuser themselves. Some report difficulties in completing tasks, following rules and keeping a job as well as trusting people, developing and maintaining healthy relationships.

◆ **Physical Effects**

This may include delayed emotional, social and physical development in young children. Verbal abuse may also affect a child’s language and comprehension skills. Besides, a child’s motor skills may lag behind their peers and some may even engage in self-harm. Older adolescents and adults may develop addiction of drugs and alcohol, develop eating disorders and/or gain or lose excessive amounts of weight etc.

**Deciphering An Abuser’s Mind**

Serial abusers appear to dissociate, as they might be intimidating in one situation or caring and giving in the other. This fluctuant personality may suggest a rooted psychological problem, warranting further understanding of the mind of the abuser.

Studies have suggested such people as being narcissists - consumed by feelings of false self, living in grandiose fantasies and disconnected from reality. Some feel omnipotence and harbour a sense of entitlement and even paranoia. However, like the victim, even the abuser suffers from disturbances in their sense of self-worth.

Also, a pervasive low self-esteem

renders the abuser vulnerable to criticism, disagreement and adversity which could be real or imagined. Therefore, the abuse may be a mere extension of his/her self. Abuse may be partly premeditated and intended to disguise or replicate the abuser’s inner world.

An abuser is known to suffer from a cycle of guilt after an act of abuse, followed by attribution and justification for the behaviour and looking for, or setting situations/reasons to repeat the abuse to discard their denied inner feelings.

between the client (patient) and the therapist aimed at changing the behaviour and feelings from a less to more adaptive state. Additionally, individual and group psychotherapy can help gain an awareness of the said behaviour and reduce its intensity and frequency. Importantly, psychotherapy can facilitate change.

Insight oriented therapy with the perpetrator can enable a better understanding of the acts of abuse and its consequences on the recipient. But the process will require honest introspection of the behaviour, as it can



**Ways To Cope**

Many sufferers will need professional help to completely grasp the situation they are trapped in, as it can be difficult to come to terms with abuse and its impact all by themselves.

Psychological intervention and psychotherapy is the key to remedy the consequences of abuse. It can enable a closure for the victim and rebuild their emotional lives. Besides, it can assist the abuser in getting an insight into his/her inner world, to avoid repetition and further victimization.

Psychotherapy (also known as talk therapy) is the verbal interaction

pave the way for active learning and developing victim empathy.

For the victim, it is all important to help them come to terms with the abuse and the abuser. Venting their inner feelings will enable more efficient communication style and render them less vulnerable and more assertive to stand up to a bully. Psychotherapy sessions can make one more psychologically astute, thereby reducing the risk of maladaptive expressions of their inner world and become an abuser themselves. Looking inwards and developing an insight can help analyze the negative aspects which act as triggers, in affecting the emotional aspect of relationships.