

HOW WOMEN CAN BE IMPACTED BY CONTROLLING AND ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR

Abuse takes an enormous toll on the person who is victimized. The following effects do not always occur with all women who have been abused in a relationship. And they certainly can arise from other sources as well. However, all of these effects have the **potential** to occur if disrespect, control, and abuse are present in a relationship.

- **Fear about:**

- ...speaking up for or asserting herself with her partner and others
- ...making mistakes
- ...losing her economic security (e.g. losing her home, her lifestyle)
- ...being left alone
- ...the “unknown:”
 - ... if she left the relationship, what her life and her future be like?
- ...what others think of her
 - ...e.g. about her staying with someone who is disrespectful and abusive with her
- ...the children being abused and learning to be abusers or victims themselves
- ...losing her ability to work or her job
- ...becoming emotionally unstable or “going crazy”
- ...being physically injured or killed
- ...her partner hurting or killing himself or others she loves

- **Depression**

- ...low self-esteem/insecurity/self-doubt/negativity/lack of self-confidence/feelings of worthlessness/loss of personal power

- **Fatigue/lethargy/lack of energy, “spirit,” and enthusiasm for life**

- **Anxiety/panic attacks**

- ...experiencing an overwhelming sense of apprehension and dread and feeling “unsafe” much of the time
- ...becoming fearful about doing normal day-to-day activities (e.g. driving, shopping, leaving the house at all)

- **Shame and feelings of defectiveness/inadequacy/incompetence**

- ...about being abused and disrespected by a partner who says he loves her, which can lead to many of the other effects listed here

- **Guilt**

- ...about her feeling responsible for her partner and his “problems,” including his abuse toward her
- ...about not being able to “change” him through what she says and does
- ...about the negative and damaging impact of the abuse on the children

- **Disappointment**

- ...about the loss of dreams and hopes for the relationship with her partner and for her own life
 - ...e.g. loss of the ability to accomplish life and career goals

- **Frustration/anger/irritability/defensiveness/“rebelliousness”/being “edgy” and “reactive”**

- ...about being told who to be, what to feel, what to think, and what to do

- **Appearing or acting “hysterical”/“out of control”/“irrational” herself**

- ...e.g. frequent “crying spells,” yelling and screaming herself

- **Being disrespectful and abusive herself**

- ...toward her partner, her children, or others

- **Trying to hurt or even kill herself or her partner**

- **Over-dependency on her partner**
...feeling “stuck”/”trapped”/powerless/ helpless/ hopeless
- **“Paranoia” and “paranoid” thinking**
...starting to make negative assumptions and interpretations about her partner's statements and behaviors due to their history together
...i.e. the negative interpretations have often been a reality for her in the past
- **Loss of emotional closeness, love, trust, and respect for her partner**
...abuse always destroys safety, trust, and intimacy in a relationship
- **Lack of interest in physical affection or sex with her partner**
...abuse always creates emotional distance and estrangement in a relationship
- **Having affairs (emotional and/or sexual)**
...i.e. looking elsewhere to find more respectful, nurturing, and meaningful companionship and connection
- **Isolation/loneliness/feeling “disconnected” from others**
...withdrawal from friends and family, often encouraged, promoted, or even expected by her partner
- **Loss of respect for herself**
...she often asks herself questions like “*Why do I stay in an abusive relationship?*” and “*What’s wrong with me that I put up with this kind of treatment from my partner?*”
- **“Death of the spirit:” having difficulty being spontaneous/playful and having fun**
...abuse always stifles spontaneity, playfulness, happiness, and joy
- **Set-backs and regression related to positive things she has been trying to do in her life** (e.g. losing weight/eating in a more healthy way; getting a new job; going back to school) and in handling compulsive behaviors (alcohol use, shopping)
...e.g. eating too much and gaining weight, abusing alcohol or drugs to “dull” her emotional pain, spending money/shopping to try to feel better about herself
- **Poor physical health/frequent illnesses**
...due to the ongoing stress in her life
- **Dishonesty/lying/withholding information from her partner**
...i.e. to try to avoid her partner’s explosive and punishing reactions to what she says
- **Feeling controlled and continually “monitored”**
...i.e. not being able to be who she really is and to “be her own person”
- **Passivity/indecisiveness/confusion/indifference**
...having difficulty making decisions, offering opinions, or talking about her thoughts, feelings, and desires
...fearing that they may differ from her partner’s ideas and beliefs which could lead to an escalation or abusive incident
- **Being passive-aggressive/sarcastic/manipulative/”sneaky”**
...since it is not safe to ask directly for what she wants or needs
- **A desire to leave the relationship, “escape,” move as far away as possible, and “get away from it all”**