

Psychological abuse is the first warning: Run, get out

Written by Dee Louis-Scott, Special to the NNPA from the Pasadena/St. Gabriel Valley Journal News
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Psychological abuse can be as damaging to the psyche as physical abuse can be to the body, yet little is written about this common problem, which is typically the precursor to physical abuse. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), 95 percent of men who physically abuse their intimate partners also psychologically abuse them.

Psychological abuse consists of impairing the mental life and impeding mental development. It creates distorted beliefs, taught by the abuser, about the world. Those beliefs become ingrained in the victim's mind and can interfere with the flexibility that needed to constantly assess the environment and respond appropriately. Knowing the signs of psychological abuse may save women from the physical abuse that so often follows.

I experienced psychological abuse through the eyes of a child — part of the stories I share in "Believe in the Magic: Let the Tenacity of Mattie Fisher Inspire You," (www.mattiefisher.com), the story of my mother's remarkable journey.

I watched as my father systematically and maliciously attempted to drive my mother crazy. He would constantly move car keys and other items from the places she normally kept them. He would then pretend to find them in odd places, like the refrigerator. After playing the hero for a month or so, my father would start insulting my mom with degrading remarks.

After months of psychological warfare, with her mental state sufficiently weakened, my father would begin the physical abuse. For the rest of her life, my mother was inconsolable and shaky whenever something went missing.

Signs of psychological abuse include:

Your partner uses finances to control you.

He often threatens to leave.

She seeks to intimidate using looks, gestures or actions.

He smashes things.

Your partner seeks to control you by minimizing, denying and blaming

He makes light of the abuse and does not take your concerns about it seriously.

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You are continually criticized, called names and/or shouted at.
She emotionally degrades you in private, but acts charming in public.
He humiliates you in private or public.
They withhold approval, appreciation or affection as punishment.
Effects of psychological abuse on the victim, from the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness:

- A distrust of his or her own spontaneity
- A loss of enthusiasm
- An uncertainty about how she is coming across
- A concern that something is wrong with him
- An inclination to reviewing incidents with the hopes of determining what went wrong
- A loss of self-confidence
- A growing self-doubt
- An internalized critical voice
- A concern that she isn't happier and ought to be
- An anxiety or fear of being crazy
- A sense that time is passing and he's missing something
- A desire not to be the way she is, e.g. "too sensitive," etc.
- A hesitancy to accept her perceptions
- A reluctance to come to conclusions
- A tendency to live in the future, e.g. "Everything will be great when/after . . ."
- A desire to escape or run away
- A distrust of future relationships

If you answered yes to even one, you may be in an abusive relationship. Get help!

Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE, or the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE.

[Dee Louis-Scott is the author of "Believe in the Magic: Let the Tenacity of Mattie Fisher Inspire You," (www.mattiefisher.com), the story of her mother's remarkable journey. Louis-Scott retired after working 30 years as a federal employee. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration. Scott has co-chaired the Black Family Technology Awareness Association's Youth STEM Fair for nine years; its mission is to encourage studies in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math curriculum in urban communities. Twenty years since the death of her heroic mother, Mattie Fisher, Louis-Scott honors her life, which was experienced in a time in American history when it was a double-curse to be a black woman.]