

# DECIPHERING THE ISSUES RELATED TO PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE AMONG THE SLUM WOMEN: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON SLUM WOMEN RESIDING ON BURDWAN TOWN

**Sovana Mukherjee**

*Ph. D Research Scholar, Sociology,*

*Department of Sociology,*

*The University of Burdwan, Burdwan, West Bengal, India*

## **Abstract:**

*Psychological abuse is an insidious and pervasive form of violence that is affecting numerous women across the globe, with female inhabitants residing in slum being particularly vulnerable. Slum women often experience, in some cases extreme level, emotional manipulation, verbal abuse, and isolation, leading them towards devastating consequences such as depression, anxiety and even suicidal tendencies. This sociological study tries to analyze the experiences of vivid complexities of psychological abuse among slum women in Burdwan town of state West Bengal in India, revealing a complex web of additional factors contributing to this phenomenon. This study aims to contribute to the existing literatures on psychological abuse as well as gender-based violence, hereby providing a nuanced perception of the vivid experiences of slum women residing in Burdwan town. This may help to shed some lights on this critical issue, the study intends to spark significant discourse and inspire the distinctive yet needful action to combat with different aspects of psychological abuse and thus promote a more righteous and equitable society for both the genders.*

## **Key words:**

*Psychology, Violence, Abuse, Maltreatment, Slum Women*

## **Aims:**

This sociological study aims to explore the different aspects and key factors related to various forms of psychological abuse that slum women often face in their everyday lives. This study also aims to examine the impact of abuse on not just their mental health but also on their social as well as physical well being.

## **Research Objectives:**

1. To analyze the sociological factors contributing to psychological abuse
2. To identify the identify themes, patterns, and trends interrelated to psychological abuse
3. To study the connection between mental health outcomes and psychological abuse
4. To develop a outline for comprehending psychological abuse among the slum women

## **Methodology:**

The study avails qualitative approach, specifically phenomenological approach, to decipher the deep-seated level of psychological abuse inflicted upon the slum women residing in Burdwan town and to investigate the lived experiences of such slum women who had either faced or are facing psychological abuse in their lives. Thematic Analysis on how different forms of psychological abuse effects their lives to substantiate the themes are done.

## **A brief Description of the Research Area:**

Burdwan town and its slum settlements: Burdwan, a town located within the state of West Bengal, is a historically significant town with a rich and prosperous cultural heritage that dates back to the 10th century. The town has a blend of Bengali with different periodical invasions and was a significant center of trade and commerce. In present time, the town is regarded as an educational and health hub, and has thriving agricultural and industrial sectors too. The town is home to historical landmarks, vibrant markets, and a diverse cultural fabric, with many festivals and nearby attractions.

Burdwan town is home to 144 slums illustrated by high population density, overpopulation, and poor living conditions. The slum inhabitants are mostly migrants from rural areas, confront significant challenges. The majority of households are marked by low-

income with a considerable number of female-headed households.

**Results and Discussions:** Following arguments had been put forwarded as results of this analytical paper:

1. Identifying the perpetrators who are inflicting psychological abuse on slum women
2. Agencies (institutions) that supports such maltreatment
3. Experiences of Psychological Abuse among the Slum Women
4. The interconnection between psychological abuse and other forms of abuse
5. Impact of psychological abuse on slum women's health, mental well being and social life as well

**Introduction:**

Slum women often face a menacing and persistent threat to their mental (emotional), physical and social well-being in the form of psychological abuse. This latently ravages their sense of self, dignity, and hope, worsening their vulnerability that they face in their everyday lives due to living in intergenerational poverty, marginalization, unemployment, and limited access to basic resources needed for survival. Psychological abuse includes harmful behaviors like emotional manipulation, verbal aggression and control, which crumble their confidence and self-esteem. Perpetrators of such abuse utilize tactics like shame, guilt, and fear to uphold their dominance and power, leaving the victims feeling helpless and

trapped. This abuse can be pulled off by intimate partners, family members, community leaders, or even those in positions of authority. The circumstances slum women residing in lead to severe and long-lasting consequences. Institutionalizing different forms of Psychological Abuse: Various agencies of socialization, including family, education, workplace, peers, religion, media, and cultural norms, perpetuate psychological abuse against slum women and girls. These agencies teach unhealthy coping mechanisms, create negative self-image, and encourage harmful comparisons, leading to long-term damage. Family dynamics can be a significant source of abuse, with parents or guardians using gaslighting, emotional manipulation, or constant criticism to control and dominate. Educational institutions marginalize and neglect slum girls, while religious and cultural norms reinforce patriarchal control through harmful practices. Media representation perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes, and peer groups and neighbors contribute to abuse through social isolation, emotional blackmail, and bullying. Recognizing the role of these institutions is crucial to addressing the psychological abuse faced by slum women and girls, which can shape their self-perception, emotional regulation, and relationships, and impact their lives significantly. The following table sums up the various forms of psychological abuse:



Source: Own Compiled Data

Sociological Factors Contributing to Psychological Abuse: Slum women's autonomy is limited by factors like poverty, lack of education, employment, and resources, making them reliant on abusive partners or family members and vulnerable to abuse. Socio-

cultural norms reinforce patriarchal attitudes, condoning male dominance and controlling behavior, while socialization teaches slum women to tolerate abuse, maintain silence, and be submissive, further reinforcing their powerlessness. Living conditions in slums,

such as overpopulation and lack of privacy, create a traumatic environment conducive to abuse.

Restricted access to counseling, healthcare, and support services exacerbates the situation, while stigma and shame surrounding abuse prevent slum women from seeking help or revealing their experiences. Fear of abandonment, retaliation, or violence keeps them trapped in abusive relationships. Community dynamics, institutional failures, and cultural and religious norms that justify abuse or blame victims, further entrap slum women. Abusers exploit social connections to control and monitor victims, making it difficult for slum women to break free or seek help, leaving them without recourse or support.

**Inter-relation between Psychological Abuse and other forms of Abuse:** Psychological abuse is, time and again, intertwined with other forms of abuse that slum women face, creating a complex web of violence and exploitation. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, and economic abuse frequently co-occur with psychological abuse, intensifying the trauma and harm experienced by these women. Physical abuse can be used to reinforce psychological manipulation, with threats of violence or actual harm used to control and intimidate. Similarly, sexual abuse can be used to degrade and humiliate, further eroding a woman's sense of self and autonomy. Economic abuse, such as controlling access to resources or exploiting a woman's labor, can also be used to perpetuate psychological abuse. Women may be forced to rely on their abusers for basic needs, making it difficult to escape or resist abuse.

Furthermore, psychological abuse can be used to justify or downplay other forms of abuse. Abusers may use gaslighting or emotional manipulation to convince women that they are overreacting or deserving of physical or sexual abuse. The intersection of psychological abuse with other forms of abuse can also perpetuate cycles of violence. Women may be more vulnerable to abuse due to prior experiences of trauma, and psychological abuse can reinforce these patterns.

### **Impact of Psychological Abuse on Slum Women:**

**Impact on Mental Health:** Psychological abuse has a profound and lasting impact on the mental health of slum women, leading to a range of symptoms including anxiety, depression, PTSD, low self-esteem, and emotional regulation difficulties. These women often struggle to cope with constant stress and fear, leading to mood swings, suicidal thoughts, and substance abuse. Dissociation and detachment serve as self-protective mechanisms, but hinder emotional connection and intimacy. Feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame reinforce negative self-perceptions, leading to a loss of identity and autonomy, and increasing dependence on their abusers. Overall, psychological abuse has a devastating impact on the mental health and well-being of slum women, making it essential to provide support and resources to help them heal and recover.

**Impact on Physical Health:** Psychological abuse has a profound impact on the physical health of slum women, leading to a range of debilitating symptoms including chronic stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, fatigue, and headaches. This can trigger physiological responses like increased blood pressure and heart rate, making them more susceptible to illnesses. Poor nutrition, reproductive health issues, and somatic symptoms like muscle tension and gastrointestinal problems can also arise. These physical health consequences can be severe and long-lasting, and may be misattributed to physical causes, delaying appropriate treatment.

**Impact on Social Life:** Psychological abuse has a profound impact on the social life of slum women, leading to social isolation and disconnection from their communities. Women may withdraw from social interactions due to fear of judgment, rejection, or further abuse, and abusers may manipulate them into cutting ties with friends and family. This can lead to feelings of loneliness, stigma, and shame, causing social exclusion and making it difficult for women to access support or resources. The abuse can also erode their sense of identity and self-worth, making it challenging to form new relationships or engage in community activities. As a result, women may feel disconnected, alone, and vulnerable, with the

social consequences of psychological abuse being devastating and long-lasting.

**Impact on Slum Communities:** Psychological abuse has a profound impact on slum communities, perpetuating cycles of violence, fear, and mistrust, and can become normalized, leading to a breakdown in community cohesion and social isolation. This can further entrench poverty, inequality, and social injustice, erode community resilience, and perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes, limiting opportunities for women and girls. The impact is far-reaching, affecting individuals and the social fabric of the community, and requires a comprehensive approach to address, involving community members, leaders, and external support services to create a safe, supportive, and empowering environment.

**Domestication of Psychological Abuse among Slum women of a small town like Burdwan:** Slum women residing in small towns like Burdwan face unique challenges due to the close-knit nature of their communities. Psychological abuse can have a suffocating impact, as women may feel trapped and unable to escape their abusers. The lack of anonymity in small towns means that women's lives are often under scrutiny, making it difficult to hide the abuse or seek help without being judged or ostracized. Limited access to resources, support services, and employment opportunities further

exacerbates their vulnerability. Tight social networks can also perpetuate abuse, as abusers may use community connections to control and monitor their victims. Additionally, small-town dynamics can perpetuate patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes, condoning male dominance and control over women. The isolation and lack of resources in small towns can make it difficult for women to escape abusive relationships or rebuild their lives after abuse.

**Conclusion:**

The impact on their mental health and well-being is profound, affecting their ability to form healthy relationships, access education and employment opportunities, and maintain physical health and resilience. Breaking the silence surrounding psychological abuse is crucial to supporting slum women and empowering them to reclaim their lives, dignity, and futures. This requires immediate attention, understanding, and action to address the complex interplay of factors contributing to psychological abuse in slum communities.

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