

## **Abuser profile and victim profile. How to recognize them and what to do when we recognize them?**

The best way to avoid abuse is to be aware of what is happening and to report it. It is therefore beneficial to recognize abusers, when they are around or in our privacy, to know how to react to their abusive behavior. It is helpful to know what the specific profile of a victim is, to know if we are in such a role and to realize that it is neither normal nor beneficial to stay there. We can help others, when we realize that they are in an abusive situation, to know how to support them.

### **Profile of the abuser**

Although it may not seem like it at first glance, abusers are people who feel powerless. And because they want power, they exert it on their victims, sometimes despite the possible achievements they may have in life, and the positions of power they already have.

The profile of the abuser may include the following traits:

- insecurity;
- unrealistic expectations regarding relationships;
- they are not reliable persons;
- they can be jealous;
- are verbally abusive;
- they need to be in control and to be given justice;
- they are possessive - they try to isolate their partner from friends and family;
- are very sensitive and react aggressively;
- have incidents in their life history where they were aggressive;
- they can be cruel to animals or children;
- blame others for their behavior;
- suffer from untreated health problems.

## What makes someone more likely to be abused?

Dependent situations are what create the fertile ground for abusive behaviors. The lack or insufficiency of financial funds, or of a personal place, the lack of contact with friends, family, relatives or even the lack of hobbies will make a person vulnerable, willing to run their life according to someone else's interests, therefore being controllable and manipulable. When the abused person realizes that they are in such a situation, they can take steps towards independence. Opening a bank account in your own name, securing a place where you can always go in an emergency situation, or packing a bag with important things are steps that can prepare for separation. Calling a specialist who can help or organizations specializing in abuse issues are also very helpful measures in such situations.

The life story of the person who enters into an abusive relationship most likely hides a pattern of relating similar or with common elements to a primary attachment figure. Most likely, in order to prevent an abusive relationship, this relationship dynamic must eventually be resolved.

Sometimes, it can be the case that the sole identification with the role of savior fosters the abusive relationship. Beyond all our desire to try to do good, we must not forget two essential things. The first is that when we avoid an outside conflict, we might start a war inside ourselves. The second is that we can save no one but ourselves, and if we don't take care of ourselves first, we can't take care of anyone else. Not in the long run.

## Emotional abuse can lead to physical abuse

Since emotional abuse seems more difficult to be aware of and because it does not have a very concrete form of manifestation, as is physical abuse, it is good to clarify what exactly it represents and which behaviors can be considered abusive. This is necessary especially because it can be a only one step away to physical abuse, but also because, when physical abuse does not occur, the situation seems more uncertain or easier to accept. But it's not like that. Psychological abuse can do even more harm than physical abuse and can be felt more acutely than physical abuse.

Considered in more detail, the characteristics of the abuser can manifest in various forms.

### **Control**

An adult has the right to decide for himself how to organize his day and life. What friends he makes and what friends he maintains, what career choices he wants to follow, how he spends his money, how he dresses, what and how much he eats or what passions he wants to nurture.

A potentially abusive person will not tolerate the fact that the other does what he wants and will try to control one or more aspects of his life, sometimes even his thoughts through various behaviors:

- Trying to make as many decisions as possible that do not concern her but concern the potential victim and his life;
- Threats when the person does not obey the respective decisions or in other contexts that do not suit him;
- Tracking - a potential abuser may constantly try to find out where you are, have you answer the phone immediately, and every time they call you, appear out of nowhere at places you go to check on you. It may also ask you for passwords to online accounts to see your activity and conversations;
- Gaslighting is a form of abuse in which the potential victim is questioned as to whether certain events, lines or arguments ever happened. Or he may be repeatedly told that he does not actually remember things that did not happen. This strategy can threaten the very psychological state of the person;
- Constant and insistent criticism when it comes to minor mistakes;
- Inconsistent behavior that can go from unexpected tantrums to very affectionate behaviors when you least expect it, will generate a lot of anxiety, which will lead to insecurity and lack of confidence in your own behavior. They can also leave in the middle of a discussion/dispute without any "notice".
- The abusive person may claim to "obey" to what he "orders". It seems normal for him to tell you directly what he wants you to do and for you to obey without comment. At the same time, they can seem helpless to convince you to do things that they "don't know how to do or aren't capable of".

### **Isolation**

One of the very "successful" strategies to be able to have as much control as possible, is to isolate the abused person. The reasons may seem to be for her own good, through so-called benevolent replies such as: "Your family makes fun of you." or "Your friends are using you." or "The job you have is not up to your potential." The real goal is the desire to have as much control as possible and to receive all the energy, time and attention of the potential victim. Some subtle strategies, especially in the beginning, may even include cute or romantic plans that "accidentally" overlap with those you have already made with other people. The more isolated the person is, the more the dependency and the control increase and the abusive behaviors will be tolerated.

Pathological jealousy can be one of the causes that lead to the attempt to isolate the partner. The victim may be harassed, stalked or even made so insistent to admit that they are cheating that they may actually do it, even though it is not true.

### **Denigration- the action of unfairly criticizing someone or something**

Since controlling and isolating a person with high self-esteem would be much more difficult, one strategy of the abuser is to first shake the abused person's self-esteem. Humiliation or denigration strategies can be subtle or direct. They can manifest through:

- Constant criticism of personality, behavior or physical appearance through invective;

- The underestimation that can be manifested by a lack of confidence that the victim could handle a situation or, for example, is even good at a topic they are discussing. Also, obvious achievements can be diminished or canceled by remarks like: "You're reading for nothing because you're not left with anything anyway." or "You may have a degree but the college you went to didn't teach you anything practical." Interests or hobbies can be criticized for their lack of importance with lines such as "Aren't you wasting your time with this?";
- Insinuating that they are joking when the victim takes what they say seriously or asks for evidence;
- Screaming or yelling that obviously has the role of intimidating and scaring the person;
- Disinterest shown through body language: reactions such as looking away when the abused person speaks, rolling the eyes, shaking the leg or other signs of irritation.

### **Emotional neglect and indifference to requests for affection**

It might seem that, in the desire to belong completely, the abuser will take care of the victim. Most of the time, however, the opposite happens.

There are situations when the abuser does not use actively aggressive means but only passively aggressive ones. For example, when a friend or partner constantly refuses to listen to you, when you need to be listened to, interrupting or bringing up that what you feel is inappropriate or exaggerated. Also, maybe he doesn't hold your hand even though he knows how much you want it and refuses you impulsively, or he doesn't even touch you at all. In general, ignorance of clearly expressed feelings and needs will make the victim feel frustrated, unimportant, unworthy of attention and appreciation.

### **Threats and acts of intimidation**

In an abusive relationship, the potential victim feels unhappy. But why don't they feel well? From the abuser's point of view, through their own fault, obviously. She may be blamed for flirting or cheating which causes the abuser to be jealous. She can be blamed for not being grateful for what she gets in the relationship and pushed to do things she doesn't want to, because she "owes" the abuser. After the abuser knows the sensitive "buttons" of the victim, he can use them to upset the victim and then reproach her for being sensitive and difficult. If something goes wrong in the life of the abuser, the blame "belongs" most of the time, to the victim. The abuser may retaliate by destroying the victim's belongings (e.g. throwing their phone out the window) and then deny what they did or say it happened by mistake.

## What is the right reaction to have when being in a relationship with an abuser?

Most victims tend to respond in a rational manner to the abuser's behavior. Most of the time they explain to the abuser how they see the situation, thinking that they are interested in understanding. This kind of response, however, does nothing but make the abuser understand that they have gained control over the victim.

A beneficial strategy is to not react to abuse by victimizing (eg crying) so as not to give the abuser the power they are looking for. Instead, he can demand the behavior he wants and set limits. Abusers, like victims, may say they can't control themselves, but that's not true. Most of the time the abuser is not aggressive, for example, with their boss, because they should bear the consequences. The abuser will also blame the victim for their behavior, which implies that the victim needs to change. In turn, the victim will try to change the abuser and hope that this will happen. The beneficial strategy, however, is not to try to change the abuser. He will not change anyway because he likes the fact that he has "power" and will want more and more.

According to statistics, victims endure seven attacks on average. The abuser's main strategy to gain control over the victim is to undermine the victim's self-confidence. In addition, the victim feels ashamed that she accepts the abuse and the situation she is in. Unable to be open, believing that others would criticize and not understand her, she withdraws more and more socially, increasing her dependence on the abuser. In addition, the abuser constantly uses strategies to encourage the victim to withdraw socially, thus ensuring greater control. At the same time, the emotional rejection and fear of being abandoned by the abuser also increases. All of these destabilizing emotions take a break, during the intermittent reassurance or honeymoon period, when the abuser seems re-engaged in the relationship and seems to love the victim. At this point the victim again hopes that the abuser will change.

Because of this vicious circle that is very dangerous, it is beneficial to ask ourselves, right from the beginning of a relationship, if a certain behavior that we tolerate will not make a potential abuser believe that we can accept it in the future and, therefore, he can repeat it. It may not be appropriate to say "the very beginning" of the relationship because abusers usually have a charming personality, can be romantic, successful and make very attractive promises.

Although it seems like a hopeless situation, there are certain steps that the person in the role of victim can follow in order to gradually get rid of the abuse. Telling at least one person who can offer genuine support about your situation can be an essential first step. This will increase the self-esteem of the abused person and gradually she will be able to regain her independence to be able to invest in herself - in relationships, in profession, in hobbies. Once they begin to do this, dependence on the abuser will decrease gradually and the person will gain the courage to detach and be less and less willing to accept abusive behavior. The victim needs to be aware of their needs, to prioritize them, to try to avoid blaming himself, not to enter into the aggressive games of the abuser, but rather not to react and set increasingly clear limits. When they realize that the relationship does not have an optimistic future, they can invest more in themselves: make friends or maintain existing relationships, go to therapy, make sure they have material resources (money,

housing) to be able to be on their own. The exit from the relationship must be made clear, interrupting the relationship through very strict limits (e.g. blocking the number, interrupting contact on social media sites). Last but not least, when anyone gets out of a relationship, especially if it was of this nature, it is beneficial to give yourself time to heal.

In short, if you believe that you may be the victim of emotional abuse but are not sure about this, it would be beneficial to turn to trusted people who could offer you support or/and you can contact the university's counseling services by writing an e-mail to the address [consiliere.studenti@umft.ro](mailto:consiliere.studenti@umft.ro) or [isco@umft.ro](mailto:isco@umft.ro) (for foreign students). In critical or urgent cases, the accredited authorities must be called, such as Emergency Call 112. (only in cases of emergency, which require the prompt intervention of police structures to solve the event).

When violence occurs within the family, all the steps to follow and the necessary information can be found on the website of the Romanian Police, here. (<https://if.politiaromana.ro/ro/informatii-publice/pasi-de-urmat-pentru-victimele-violentei-in-familie>)

If you are a woman and you are the victim of abuse by your partner, you can also call no. 0800500333 for support, advice and guidance or you can visit the website of the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men. (<https://anes.gov.ro/call-center/>). Also, there are associations or organizations that come to the aid of abused women such as the Luthelo Association or A.L.E.G. (Association for Freedom and Gender Equality).

In cases where children are involved, the social assistance service can also be called through the Emergency Intervention Center for neglected, exploited, abused, abandoned children.

Address: P-ța Regina Maria, No. 3, Timiș;

Phone No.119 (unique number for taking over notifications for situations of abuse, neglect, exploitation, etc. on children), 0256/ 490281- ext. 178;

For any additional details in case of abuse, the Timis Police Inspectorate can be contacted:

Address: Str. Take Ionescu no. 46, Timisoara, Code: 300043

Office phone: 0256/40.20.05

Public relations officer telephone: 0256/40.21.10

Resources: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/>

<https://www.healthline.com>

<https://www.apa.org/>

<https://asociatia.luthelo.ro/>

<https://sieureusesc.ro/>

“*Femei dominate, manipulate si abuzate*”-Marie-France Hirigoyen, Ed. Philobia, 2022