

# HERVISION

POWER • RELATIONSHIPS • FAMILY • YOUR QUESTIONS

## EMOTIONAL ABUSE

### HOW YOU MIGHT BE PSYCHOLOGICALLY ABUSING YOUR MAN

WHILE DOMESTIC ABUSE IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH WOMEN AS THE PRIMARY VICTIMS, STATISTICS SHOW THAT MEN ALSO EXPERIENCE ABUSE, ALTHOUGH MOST SUFFER IN SILENCE.

CULTURALLY, MEN RECEIVE LITTLE SUPPORT AND ARE FREQUENTLY RIDICULED FOR APPEARING WEAK. WHEREAS MANY WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCE ABUSE PRESENT PHYSICAL INJURIES THAT ARE EASIER TO RECOGNISE AND ACT UPON LEGALLY, ABUSIVE WOMEN OFTEN RELY ON MENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TACTICS THAT ARE HARDER TO DETECT AND PROVE, WRITES DALLEN NAMUGGA

**F**or the past three years, I lived in fear of reporting or confiding in my family," says Samson Muyabonga, a resident of Busoba sub-county in Mbale district. According to recent police reports, Muyabonga, a resident of Mbale district, lived for years in a home where conflict rarely announced itself loudly. Instead, it came quietly, through constant belittling, prolonged silence after disagreements and moments when meals were deliberately withheld as punishment.

He told the Police that weeks could pass without a word exchanged, and that questioning the silence only made it last longer. Afraid of being ridiculed and unsure who would believe him, he endured the abuse privately, convincing himself that this was simply part of marriage and that, as a man, he was expected to cope.

It was only when the emotional strain escalated into repeated threats and fear for his safety that he sought help; a decision he says came after years of shrinking himself to keep the peace.

When he approached the Police, Muyabonga says: "It was challenging. The Police judged me as if I were the one causing the problems. They didn't take any significant action."

#### WHAT IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

Emotional or psychological abuse is one of the most damaging yet least understood forms of intimate partner violence. Unlike physical abuse, which leaves visible scars or injuries, emotional abuse erodes a person's sense of self-worth, dignity and emotional

stability over time.

Experts define emotional abuse not by its loudness, but by its impact on the victim's mental health and daily functioning. It chips away at confidence, breeds anxiety and depression and makes victims feel trapped, isolated, or unworthy of respect and love.

Many survivors, male and female, describe it as a slow, corrosive process that dulls the spirit long before anyone recognises what is happening.

#### WHY MANY MEN SUFFER IN SILENCE

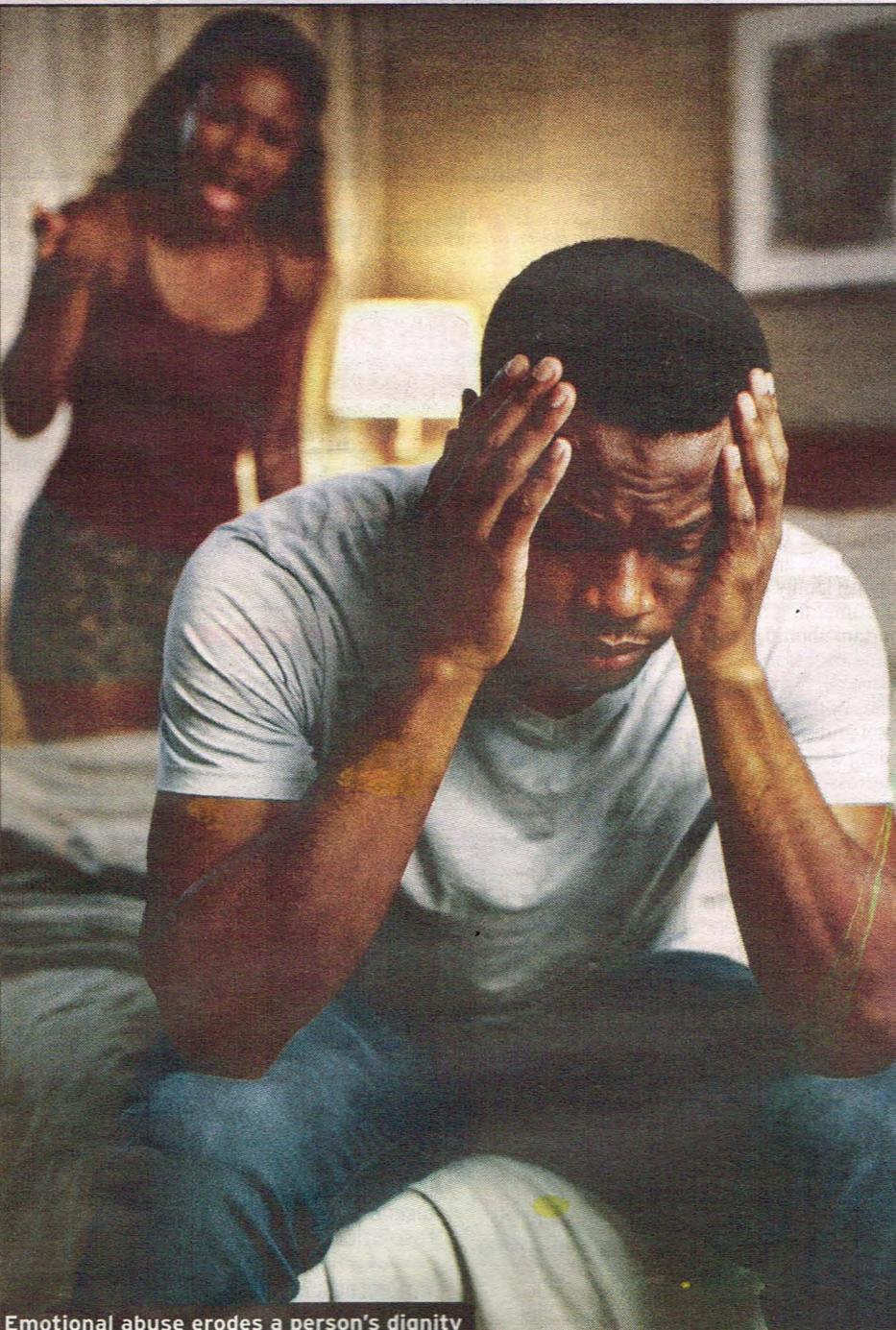
Counselling psychologist Rogers Namwiyiri of C-Care International Hospital Kampala says deeply rooted cultural expectations around masculinity in Uganda continue to make it difficult for men to openly acknowledge emotional abuse.

In his work with male clients, he explains that many men are raised to believe they must always appear strong, resilient, and in control as heads of their families. Admitting emotional harm from a partner is, therefore, perceived as weakness, exposing them to ridicule and loss of respect in their communities.

"Cultural notions or norms emphasise that a man is supposed to be strong as the head of the family, a belief that pushes many to remain silent even when they are hurting," Namwiyiri notes.

He adds that when men consider speaking out, their fears are often shaped by shame and social consequences rather than the abuse itself.

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Emotional abuse erodes a person's dignity

# EMOTIONAL ABUSE ERODES SELF-WORTH – EXPERTS

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On the issue of support systems, he observes that Uganda's legal and social frameworks still largely overlook men as victims of emotional or psychological abuse.

While laws exist to address domestic violence, implementation and public perception tend to prioritise female victims, leaving men "isolated, ignored and unheard."

Namwiyiri points out that although social dynamics are changing, with some women now holding more economic or social power in households, recognition and support for abused men have not evolved at the same pace.

"Shame and self-blame," he explains, "often manifest in male victims through withdrawal, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Many men internalise the abuse, blaming themselves rather than naming what is happening to them."

Over time, this silence takes a toll on their mental health. As Namwiyiri cautions, unresolved emotional abuse frequently resurfaces later as chronic anxiety or depression.

#### WHAT MEN CAN DO

To cope, Namwiyiri encourages men experiencing emotional abuse to seek professional support early, noting that counselling provides a safe space to process emotions and develop healthy coping strategies.

He stresses the importance of community and trusted support systems, clear boundaries within relationships, and, where necessary, involving family elders or mediators.

"Documenting incidents can also be important should legal intervention become necessary."

Above all, Namwiyiri reminds couples of the value of serious pre-marital and marriage counselling, warning that emotional abuse left unaddressed rarely disappears, it



Namwiyiri



Buhenzire

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simply reappears in more damaging ways later.

#### ARE YOU THE ABUSER? DO BETTER

Harm is not always intentional,

and awareness is the first step to change. Experts urge self-reflection, open communication, and seeking counselling when patterns of harm appear.

"Many of these actions are not driven by malice. They may stem from stress, unresolved trauma, or learned behaviour. However, unintentional harm is still harm. When such patterns persist, they can cause long-term emotional damage and quietly destabilise relationships," Namwiyiri says.

He says recognising these behaviours is not about assigning blame, it is about accountability, awareness and creating healthier ways to relate to one another.

Dickson Tumuramye, a marriage and relationships counsellor, says there are various things women can do to improve their relationships such as active listening, patience

#### IN NUMBERS

Uganda's police crime reports show that domestic violence remains among the top categories of crimes reported across the country.

According to the 2023 police annual crime report, 3,243 male adults were registered as victims of domestic violence in that year alone, a figure that has stayed high over recent years even as overall crime rates fluctuate.

Experts on intimate partner violence emphasise that emotional abuse can operate as a precursor to physical violence. Control, humiliation and belittling behaviour can increase stress and conflict within a household, which in some cases escalates into physical confrontations.

In a society that often teaches men to endure in silence and women to express pain loudly, emotional harm can easily go unnoticed. But love should never require one person to shrink so the other can feel powerful. The question worth asking is simple: Does your partner feel safe, respected and valued with you, even when you disagree?

and empathy. "Make an effort to understand your man's perspective and feelings. Also, communicate openly and honestly by sharing your thoughts, feelings, and needs in a respectful manner."

Namwiyiri notes that lack of awareness does not lessen the impact of such behaviour on the

person receiving it.

"Belittling a man, teasing, abusive language, name calling, ignoring a man's feelings are all part emotional abuse, sometimes people consider only physical torture," he says.

Tumuramye urges women to allow men to lead. "Where you feel he is going off-track, offer constructive feedback, not orders. Most important; show appreciation and gratitude and don't weaponise sex. In the same way, prioritise self-care; take care of your physical, emotional and mental well-being to maintain a healthy and fulfilling relationship. Don't focus more on your husband and children and forget yourself."

Dr Leona Buhenzire, a clinical psychologist based in Kampala and director at Quickcare Wellness Centre, says many people do not realise how much everyday interactions can affect a partner's emotional wellbeing.

"People often think emotional hurt only happens in extreme situations, but normal patterns of communication can leave deep emotional marks if we're not careful."

Buhenzire's work in mental health highlights how common stress, criticism or silence, even when not meant to hurt, can shape how a partner feels over time.

"Understanding the emotional impact of our words and actions is not instinctive; it's something we must learn," she says, noting that limited public discussion about emotional experiences in relationships makes this awareness even harder to achieve.

In Uganda, where clinical psychology is still gaining visibility and social norms often dictate how couples interact, Buhenzire urges that recognising unintentional harm is the first step toward healthier communication and mutual respect in relationships.

#### BELITTLEMENT, HUMILIATION

This can take the form of mocking a partner's intelligence, career, income or decisions, sometimes disguised as jokes or "constructive criticism." In social settings, it may appear as constant correction, sarcasm or sharing private shortcomings with friends or family.

For example, a man is repeatedly called 'useless' or 'a child' during arguments, or laughed at in front of others for not meeting certain expectations.

Over time, belittling erodes self-confidence and dignity. The affected partner may begin to doubt their worth, avoid social situations, or stop expressing opinions altogether.

#### SILENT TREATMENT

Withdrawing communication after conflict is often framed as needing space. However, when silence is used

## COMMON ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR THAT IS UNLOOKED

deliberately and extended for days or weeks, it becomes a form of emotional punishment.

After a disagreement, one partner refuses to speak, acknowledge greetings, or engage in normal household interaction, leaving the other guessing what they have done wrong.

Prolonged silence creates anxiety, confusion and emotional insecurity. It shifts power in the relationship and discourages healthy communication or resolution.

#### WITHHOLDING AFFECTION AS PUNISHMENT

In some relationships, care is conditional. Basic acts of partnership, cooking, affection and emotional support are withdrawn to express anger or

enforce compliance.

A partner refuses to cook, show affection or offer emotional support until an apology is given or behaviour changes.

This turns care into leverage. It teaches the other partner that love and support are earned through obedience rather than mutual respect.

#### CONSTANT COMPARISON TO OTHER MEN

Comparisons are often made in moments of frustration, but repeated comparisons can be deeply damaging.

If a partner is frequently told they are not as successful, strong, attentive or ambitious as other men, whether relatives, friends or public figures.

Constant comparison breeds inadequacy and resentment. It communicates that the

partner is perpetually falling short and can never be enough.

#### EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION

Emotional manipulation involves using guilt, fear or obligation to control behaviour.

It often appears subtle and emotionally charged. Statements such as, "If you loved me, you would do this," or "After all I've sacrificed, you owe me."

Manipulation undermines autonomy and replaces honest communication with pressure and guilt, making consent and choice unclear.

Compiled by counselling psychologist Rogers Namwiyiri of C-Care International Hospital Kampala