

# Personal Judgments and Psychologically Abusive Behaviour: An Analysis of Ethnic Differences in Namibia

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## Abstract

Using a self-report measure that was adapted by the author, this study asked Namibian men and women from 5 ethnic groups (Afrikaners, Damaras, Coloureds, Hereros, and Ovambos) about their perceptions of psychologically abusive behaviour on a global measure and four subscales: Restrictive/Denigration, Equity/Mind Game, Denigration, and Passive Aggression. These individuals were recruited from various organisations in Windhoek the capital of Namibia. Due to violations of the normality assumption and the failure of transformations, standard ANOVA and T tests were not performed. Instead, results from the appropriate non-parametric analyses (Kruskal Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests) showed **that** significant gender and ethnic differences exist in the way psychologically abusive behaviour **is** perceived. **Women, in particular,** rated individual **behaviour** on a global measure of psychological abuse, and on the restrictive denigration abuse subscale, more psychologically abusive than men. Significant differences also existed in the way psychologically abusive **behaviour** is perceived between the Afrikaner and the Ovambo groups and between the Afrikaner and Damara groups. The largest effect size was noted between the Afrikaner and Damara groups. These findings ran contrary to study hypotheses; instead of the mean ranks for the Afrikaner group being higher than the other ethnic groups, the Afrikaner mean ranks were the lowest on all dependent variables. Implications for further research, policy, and practice are discussed.

## Introduction

Researchers have suggested that a great percentage of abuse in intimate relationships is psychological rather than physical (Kazdin & Painter, 1992). An understanding of psychological abuse is important because it often precedes physical abuse. Unfortunately, most research literature fails to investigate psychological abuse independently from physical abuse, thus creating a one-dimensional viewpoint towards the conceptualisation and treatment of abuse in intimate relationships.

One of the consistent findings of research on psychological abuse is that it coexists with physical abuse (Collider, 1995; Simonelli & Ingram, 1998; Walker, 1984). In a longitudinal study of community couples, Murphy and O'Leary (1989) found that emotional abuse by either partner was one of the strongest predictors for the first occurrence of physical abuse in the relationship. In the same study, Murphy and O'Leary (1989) found that 72% of the 234 battered women reported that their partner's emotional abuse was worse than the physical abuse they endured. Those incidents that were considered emotionally abusive, were incidents where the women were ridiculed and confronted with threats of abandonment. They felt that their partners were likely to carry out their threats and felt that the emotional abuse was justified. Studies have also shown that the more psychologically abusive partners are to one another, the more likely they are to become physically abusive (Straus, 1974; Strauss & Smith, 1990).

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There is a general lack of consensus regarding which particular behaviour constitute psychological abuse. Several researchers (e.g. Walker (1984; Loring, 1984; Marshall, 1994) have attempted to define psychological abuse in intimate relationships and have created scales of psychologically abusive items based on research literature and anecdotal information. Through multiple conceptual lenses, researchers have defined and identified psychological abuse as: (1) the felt consequences of the perpetrator's behaviour; (2) the intent of the abuser, and (3) the impartial judgment of outsiders on the deleterious impact of one person's behaviour on another person's psychological state.

Walker (1984) defined psychological abuse as all behaviour that undermines a partner's self-esteem or sense of control and safety. In this definition, abuse is defined by the "felt consequences" of the victim. If the victim felt diminished or controlled by the perpetrator, he or she was a victim of psychological abuse, even if the perpetrator had no conscious intention to harm the person. Loring (1984), on the other hand, emphasised specific patterns of behaviour by the perpetrator which constitute abuse. He defined psychological abuse, from the intent of the aggressor, as an ongoing process in which one individual systematically diminishes and destroys the inner self of another person. The concept of the inner self includes ideas, feelings, perceptions, and perceived personality characteristics.

Marshall (1994) defined psychological abuse based on certain behaviour. According to this author, psychological abuse is the common day-to-day communication and interaction with a partner that undermines the victim's psychological, emotional, or behavioural competence, regardless of whether the intent was purposeful or out of loving concern, or whether the victim realises that these effects have occurred. Therefore, psychological abuse can be defined differently through the victim's reaction, the perpetrator's intent and/or behaviour, or by the expert's evaluation of the deleterious effects of certain behaviour. Regardless of the differences on the focus of these definitions, most scholars identify six core components of psychological abuse (Follingstad, et al., 1990):

1. Verbal attacks (ridicule, verbal embarrassment, name calling)
2. Isolation (social or financial)
3. Jealousy and/or possessiveness
4. Verbal threats
5. Threats to divorce, abandon, or to have an affair
6. Damage to property or destruction

In addition to the lack of agreement by researchers about which behaviour constitutes psychological abuse, there is a paucity of research on how men and women perceive psychologically abusive behaviour. Men and women appear to use different definitions for abuse (Lanner & Thompson, 1982; Szinovac, 1983). For example, women do not necessarily label behaviour that is considered psychologically abusive towards men as abusive. Therefore, psychological abuse may be better understood by considering individual difference variables rather than macro-level explanations. Macro-level explanations, although helpful, tend to generalise and assume that all people share the same perception of what psychological abuse is, or that there is a universal understanding of psychological abuse. For that reason, it is imperative that researchers study individual differences on the perceptions of psychological abuse in order to better understand the phenomenon.

Historically, most of the research on psychological and physical abuse has been done in the Western sector of the world. This has created a great disparity in the assessment, identification, understanding, and treatment of psychological maltreatment in intimate relationships in non-Western parts of the world. One part of the world that is currently

confronting these problems is Namibia, a country located in the southern part of Africa. While incidents of physical abuse in Namibia have clearly been widely documented (Wallace & Seymour, 1999), the more salient issue of psychological abuse has been neglected in the focus of research.

The purpose of this study is to look at psychological abuse in intimate relationships in Namibia and to determine: (1) whether Namibian men and women perceive psychologically abusive behaviour in a similar manner; (2) whether the different ethnic groups in Namibia perceive psychologically abusive behaviour in a similar manner, and (3) on a behavioural continuum, which behaviour is considered the most to the least psychologically abusive.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The study participants were 203 Namibian men and women of at least 18 years or older, recruited from various organisations. Their average age was 27.7. Regarding their ethnic background, 9.4% were Afrikaners, 18.7% were Coloureds, 16.3%, 16.3% were Damaras, 11.8% were Hereros, and 43.8% were Ovambos.

Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 250 were completed. Of these, 47 were unusable due to errors or omissions, therefore only 203 questionnaires were analysed.

### **Measures**

For this research, a questionnaire was developed that was a blend of four widely used scales: The Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI, 24 items), the Men's Psychological-Harm and Abuse in Relationships Measure-Overt-Scales-and-Subtle-Scales (MP-HARM-O and MP-HARM-S, 14 items), the Index of Spouse Abuse (ISA, 4 items), and the Dominance Scale (3 items). Items from each scale that targeted psychological abuse as operationally defined for this study were included, while all other items were omitted. In addition, 10 items were developed and included by the author to specifically apply to the Namibian context. Reliability analyses indicated an alpha coefficient on the Global Psychological Abuse Scale of .98. Breaking the items down to reflect the parent test from which the items were derived, alpha coefficients remain uniformly high: Men's Psychological-Harm and Abuse in Relationships Measure-Overt scales and Subtle scales MP-HARM-O and HARM-S, alpha coefficient= .90 (Marshall & Guarnaccia, 1998, 14 items), PMWI; alpha coefficient= .96 (Tolman, 1989, 24 items), Index of Spouse Abuse; alpha coefficient= .60 (Hudson & McIntosh, 1981, 4 items), Dominance Scale; alpha coefficient= .59

The fifty-five items were divided in four subscales to capture the distinct subcategories of psychologically abusive behaviour as suggested by Murphy and Hoover (2001). The behaviour identified was based on the form of behaviour expressed and presumptions about their intended emotional consequences (Murphy & Hoover, 2001). The first subscale was labeled Dominance/Intimidation; the assumption was that the intended effect of behaviour under this category was to produce fear or submission through the display of verbal aggression and threats. This pattern had a moderate, significant association with attachment insecurities in the separation pretest.

The second subscale, *Restrictive Engulfment*, lumped all behaviour that intended to isolate the partner and restrict the partner's activities and social contacts. *Denigration*, the third subscale, was based on behaviour that intended to reduce, through direct attacks, the partner's self-esteem. Anxious and insecure attachment and a compulsive need for nurturance have been associated with this behaviour pattern. In a prior study (Murphy, Hartman, Muccino, & Douchis, 1995), this pattern was highly associated with interpersonal

dependency, relationship-specific dependency, jealousy, and other dependency-related variables. Restrictive engulfment has a moderate association with physical abuse, suggesting that it is independent of physical abuse in dating relationships. The third subscale, *Denigration* is intended to reduce, through direct attacks, the partner's self-esteem. The fourth subscale, *Hostile Withdrawal*, included behaviour that are intended to punish the partner and increase the partner's anxiety or insecurity about the relationship. Specific behaviour, such as the avoidance of the partner during conflict and withholding of emotional availability or contact with the partner in a cold or punitive way, was associated with this subscale. Hostile Withdrawal had a moderate association with attachment insecurity and a low to moderate association with physical aggression.

**Of the four sub-scales, Dominance/Intimidation and Denigration are considered to be more closely related to physical violence than either Hostile Withdrawal or Restrictive Engulfment.**

### **Procedures**

All participants from the 5 ethnic groups (Afrikaner, Coloured, Damara, Herero, Ovambo) completed the questionnaire. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants and they were given a choice to participate or quit at any point.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

- (1) Do Namibian men and women perceive psychologically abusive behaviour in a similar manner?
- (2) Do the different ethnic groups in Namibia perceive psychologically abusive behaviour in a similar manner?
- (2) On a behavioral continuum, which behaviour is considered the most to the least psychologically abusive?

This study aimed at exploring these differences by testing several hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1a:** On a global measure of psychological abuse, there will be significant differences between Namibian men and women, with women rating certain specific behaviour as more abusive.

**Hypothesis 1b:** On each of the subscales of psychological abuse, there will be significant differences between Namibian men and women with women rating the behaviors as more abusive.

**Hypothesis 2a:** On a global measure of psychological abuse, there will be significant differences in scores by ethnic group, with the Afrikaner group rating certain behaviour as most abusive.

**Hypothesis 2b:** On each sub-scale of psychological abuse, there will be significant differences in scores by ethnic group, with the Afrikaner group rating certain behaviour as most abusive.

**Hypothesis 3a:** Controlling for gender, female Afrikaners will rate certain behaviour as more abusive than the other ethnic groups on both the global and the sub-scale measures.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Controlling for gender, male Afrikaners will rate certain behaviour as more abusive than the other ethnic groups on both the global and the sub-scale measures.

## Results

### **Reliability and Construct Validity of the Psychological Abuse Scale**

The Cronbach Coefficient alpha value for the entire 55 items was .97, showing that the global measure was reliable. An exploratory principal components analysis was run using varimax rotation to assess the construct validity of the measure. Theoretically we expected to be able to extract 4 components or subscales from the global measure of psychological abuse. Using the default eigenvalue greater than 1 rule and by examining the scree plot, the existence of four components was confirmed. A factor loading criterion of .4 or higher was used to show which items loaded highest on which component/subscale.

**Table 1**

#### **Reliability Analysis for the Subscales**

Subscales	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha
Restrictive/Denigration	28	.98
Denigration	10	.94
Equity/Mind game	4	.77
Passive Aggressive	4	.79

## Main Analysis

### **Testing of Parametric Assumptions and Use Non-Parametric Tests**

Due to the fact that the normality assumption was violated even after transformations were performed, and the data had several outliers, the non-parametric equivalent (Mann-Whitney U test) of the independent samples t test was performed on each dependent variable (Morgan, Reichert, & Harris, 2002; Pett, 1997).

**Hypothesis 1a:** On a global measure of psychological abuse, there will be significant differences between Namibian men and women with women rating the behaviour as more abusive.

A Mann-Whitney U test was run, examining gender differences on a global measure of perception of psychologically abusive behaviour. The Mann-Whitney U test revealed significant differences between men and women in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. As proposed, the sum of the average ranks that women assigned to the abusive behaviour was significantly higher (M Rank = 106.82, n = 152) than the sum of average ranks assigned by the men (M Rank = 87.63, n = 51)  $z(203) = -2.019, p = .043$  - see **Table 2** for means and standard deviations and **Table 3** for mean ranks).

**Table 2**

#### **Means and Standard Deviation for Gender**

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
203	1.251	.434

Table 3

Mean Ranks for Gender on the Global Scale		
Gend	N	Mean Rank
Female	152	106.82
Male	51	87.63

**Hypothesis 1b:** On each of the subscales of psychological abuse, there will be significant differences between Namibian men and women with women rating the behaviour as more abusive.

On the Restrictive/Denigration subscale, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed significant differences between men and women in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. As proposed in the hypothesis, the sum of the average ranks that women assigned to the abusive behaviour was significantly higher (M Rank = 107.29, n=152) than the sum of average ranks assigned by the men, (M Rank = 86.24, n = 51),  $z(203) = -2.215$ ,  $p = .027$ .

On the Denigration subscale, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed borderline differences between men and women in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. As proposed in the hypothesis, the sum of the average ranks that women assigned to the abusive behaviour was significantly higher (M Rank = 106.57, n = 152) than the sum of average ranks assigned by the men, (M Rank = 88.39, n = 51),  $z(203) = -.913$ ,  $p = .056$ .

On the Equity/Mind game subscale the Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant differences between men and women in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. The sum of the average ranks that women assigned to the abusive behaviour was not significantly higher (M Rank = 102, 72, n = 152) than the sum average assigned by men (M Rank = 99.84, n = 51),  $z = (203), = -.304$ ,  $p = .761$ .

On the Passive Aggressive subscale the Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant differences between men and women in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. The sum of the average ranks that women assigned to the abusive behaviour was not significantly higher (M Rank= 101.36, n= 152) than the sum average assigned by men (M Rank = 103.91, n = 51)  $z = (203), = -.304$ ,  $p = .788$ .

**Hypothesis 2a:** On a global measure of psychological abuse, there will be significant differences in scores by ethnic group with the Afrikaner group rating the behaviour as most abusive.

A Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance (ANOVA) on a global measure of psychological abuse revealed significant differences in scores across ethnic groups ( $\chi^2(4) = 12.44$ ,  $p = .014$  - see Table 2 for mean ranks).

**Table 4**

**Mean Ranks for Ethnicity on the Global Scale**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean Rank</b>
Afrikaners	19	59.37
Damaras	33	114.94
Colourds	38	100.9
Hereros	24	100.63
Ovambos	89	107.49

The Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed significant differences between Afrikaners and Ovambos in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. However, the sum of the average ranks that Afrikaners assigned to the abusive behaviour was not significantly higher as proposed in the hypothesis (M Rank = 33.24, n = 19) than the sum of average ranks assigned by the Ovambos, (M Rank = 59.04, n = 89),  $z(108) = -3.260$ ,  $p = .001$ .

The Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed significant differences between Afrikaners and Damaras in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. However, the sum of the average ranks that Afrikaners assigned to the abusive behaviour was not significantly higher as proposed in the hypothesis (M Rank = 17.63, n = 19) than the sum of average ranks assigned by the Damaras, (M Rank = 31.61, n = 33),  $z(52) = -3.203$ ,  $p = .001$ .

The Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed no significant differences between Afrikaners (M Rank = 21.00, n = 19) and Coloureds (M Rank = 33.00, n = 33),  $z(57) = -2.573$ ,  $p = .010$  in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. There were also no significant differences between Afrikaners and (M Rank = 17.50, n = 19) and Hereros (M Rank = 25.56, n = 24),  $z(43) = -2.092$ ,  $p = .036$  in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour.

**Hypothesis 2b:** On each sub-scale of psychological abuse, there will be significant differences in scores by ethnic group with the Afrikaner group rating the behaviour as most abusive.

A Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the Restrictive/Denigration subscale revealed significant differences in scores across ethnic groups ( $\chi^2(4) = 12.85$ ,  $p = .012$ ).

A Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the Equity/Mind game Denigration subscale also revealed significant differences in scores across ethnic groups ( $\chi^2(4) = 9.895$ ,  $p = .042$ ).

However, a Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance (ANOVA) did not reveal significant differences in scores across ethnic groups for the Denigration subscale, ( $\chi^2(4) = 7.321$ , and  $p = .120$ ) and the Passive Aggressive subscale ( $\chi^2(4) = 7.318$ ,  $p = .120$ ).

Given a significant Chi-Square value for the Restrictive/Denigration and Equity/Mind game subscales, a follow-up or post-hoc Mann-Whitney *U* test with a Bonferroni adjustment was performed.

On the Restrictive/Denigration subscale, the Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed significant differences between Afrikaners and Damaras in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. However, the sum of the average ranks that Afrikaners assigned to the abusive behaviour was not significantly higher as proposed in the hypothesis (M Rank = 17.58, n = 19) than the sum of average ranks assigned by the Damara, (M Rank = 31.64, n = 33),  $z(52) = -3.223$ ,  $p = .001$ .



Mann-Whitney *U* test also revealed significant differences between Afrikaners and Ovambos in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour on the same subscale. However, the sum of the average ranks that Afrikaners assigned to the abusive behaviour was not significantly higher as proposed in the hypothesis (M Rank = 31.50,  $n = 19$ ) than the sum of average ranks assigned by the Ovambos, (M Rank 59.41,  $n = 89$ ),  $z(108) = -3.527$ ,  $p = .000$ .

**Hypothesis 3a:** Controlling for gender, female Afrikaners will rate the behaviour as more abusive than the other ethnic groups on both the global and the sub-scale measures.

A Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant differences in scores of women across ethnic groups ( $\chi^2(4) = 10.25$ ,  $p = .036$ ) only for the Restrictive/Denigration subscale.

A Kruskal Wallis analysis of variance on the Equity/Mind game subscale revealed borderline significant differences in scores of women across ethnic groups ( $\chi^2(4) = 9.128$ ,  $p = .058$ ).

On the Equity/Mind game subscale, the Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed borderline differences between Afrikaners and Damaras in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. The sum of the average ranks that Afrikaners assigned to the abusive behaviour was significantly higher as proposed in the hypothesis (M Rank = 34.76,  $n = 19$ ) than the sum of average ranks assigned by the Damara, (M Rank = 21.74,  $n = 33$ )  $z(52) = -2.995$ ,  $p = .003$ .

The Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed no significant differences between Afrikaners, (M Rank = 35.18,  $n = 19$ ) and Coloureds (M Rank = 25.91,  $n = 38$ ),  $z(57) = -2.000$ ,  $p = .045$ , Afrikaners (M Rank = 26.18,  $n = 19$ ) and Hereros, (M Rank = 18.69,  $n = 24$ ),  $z(43) = -2.000$ ,  $p = .045$ , as well as Afrikaners, (M Rank 71.58,  $n = 19$ ) and Ovambos, (M Rank 50.85,  $n = 89$ ),  $z(108) = -2.627$ ,  $p = .009$ ) in their rankings of psychologically abusive on the Equity/Mind game subscale. Given a significant Chi-Square value for the Restrictive/Denigration subscale, a follow-up or post-hoc Mann-Whitney *U* tests with a Bonferroni adjustment were performed.

The Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed borderline differences between Afrikaner and Ovambo women in their rankings of psychologically abusive behaviour. However, the sum of the average ranks that Afrikaner women assigned to the abusive behaviour was not significantly higher as proposed in the hypothesis (M Rank = 24.54,  $n = 19$ ) than the sum of average ranks assigned by the Ovambo women, (M Rank = 47.42,  $n = 74$ ),  $z(87) = -3.013$ ,  $p = .003$ ).

Mann-Whitney *U* did not reveal significant differences between Afrikaner women (M Rank 12.62,  $n = 13$ ) and Damara women, (M Rank = 23.08,  $n = 25$ ),  $z(38) = -2.758$ ,  $p = .005$ , Afrikaner women (M Rank = 12.65,  $n = 13$ ) and Coloured women, (M Rank = 22.44,  $n = 24$ ),  $z(37) = -2.627$ ,  $p = .007$ , Afrikaner women (M Rank = 11.15,  $n = 13$ ) and Herero women (M Rank = 18.13,  $n = 16$ ),  $z(29) = -2.196$ ,  $p = .028$ ).

**Hypothesis 3b:** Controlling for gender, male Afrikaners will rate the behaviour as more abusive than the other ethnic groups on both the global and the sub-scale measures.

A Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed no significant differences in scores of men across ethnic groups. Results for the global and subscales were; Global, ( $\chi^2(4) = 4.307$ ,  $p = .366$ ), Restrictive/ Denigration ( $\chi^2(4) = 4.118$ ,  $p = .390$ ), Denigration ( $\chi^2(4) = 2.046$ ,  $p = .727$ ), Equity/Mind game, ( $\chi^2(4) = 2.792$ ,  $p = .593$ ), and Passive Aggressive, ( $\chi^2(4) = 4.229$ ,  $p = .376$ ).



## **Discussion**

### **Factor Loadings**

One of the most important findings in this study is that across the five Namibian ethnic groups there were four factors of psychological abuse, supporting Murphy and Hoover's (1999) assertion that psychological abuse is a multifactorial construct. Murphy and Hoover (1989) found distinct dimensions corresponding to the behavioural categories of Restrictive Engulfment, Hostile Withdrawal, Denigration, and dominance/Intimidation. The factor structure found with this sample differs from the one obtained by Murphy and Hoover (1989). In the current study, Restrictive Engulfment (control) and Denigration most often occurred together in a single factor. In Namibia, it appears that if someone feels that controlling behaviour is abusive, they equally likely are to find that denigrating behaviour is abusive. This is behaviour following the same pattern much of the time, particularly if the controlling behaviour occurs prominently and repeatedly.

A second factor consisted of only denigrating items, and indicated that Namibians do recognize a subset of behaviour that is abusive but is strictly confined to denigrating behaviour. Consequently, while they can envision someone being denigrating, they generally find it much more difficult to envision that they are controlling without also being denigrating.

A third factor renamed as "Equity/Mind game", consisted of manipulative as well as authoritative behaviour. The fourth and last factor renamed "Passive Aggression", consisted of behaviour that denoted emotional withholding in a cold and punitive manner.

### **Gender differences in the perception of global psychologically abusive behaviour**

Results in this study indicate that gender differences exist in the way psychologically abusive behaviours are perceived. Specifically, results revealed that women rated individual behaviour, on a measure of psychological abuse, more psychologically abusive than men. These results do not confirm the existing stereotypes held about African women. If wife battering is regarded as normal within traditional African culture, (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994), one would expect all the women in this sample to view this kind of behaviour as not psychologically abusive (indeed, they would see this as a sign of a normal, healthy relationship). On the contrary, however, all the women except the Afrikaner women rated the behaviour as very abusive.

These results also challenge the notion held by cultural theorists about Africa as a continent that is "traditional" and has not gone through change. As a Nigerian scholar points out, change is inevitable in every society and social practices are constructed and reconstructed in response to the challenges that confront a people. African people have gone through changes from the pre- and post-colonial era and are not isolated from the currents of change in their societies and culture (Okome, 2001).

In addition, these results refute the homogenisation and over-generalisation of African women and traditional African marriages. The cookie cutter approach to conceptualising gender-based violence in Africa can be dangerous and can misrepresent Africans. For example, the notion that the "African tradition" condones wife battering can be misleading and does not explain groups in Africa that do not condone wife battering.

## **Gender differences on the perceptions of different subcategories of psychologically abusive behaviour**

According to Murphy and Hoover (1999), the assessment of battered women and women in distress identified subcategories of abusive behaviour, such as isolating and restricting the partners' activities, attacking the partners' self-worth through humiliating and degrading comments, as well as threatening harm or violence. Despite these distinct categories of psychologically abusive behaviour, Murphy and Hoover (1999) noted most measures do not assess these distinctions. Understanding psychological abuse as a multi-factorial construct helps to identify the types of psychologically abusive behaviour. Whilst not all behavioural traits may be associated with physical abuse, they cause damage to individuals. In the case of Namibia, knowing this information may have important value in the establishment of preventative programs for physical and psychological violence.

Results on the subscales in the current study showed differences between men and women for the combined *Restrictive/Denigration* subscale, indicating that overall; women find restriction and denigration more psychologically abusive than men do. This factor contained all the behaviour that intended to isolate the partner and restrict the partner's activities and social contacts, as well as behaviour that was intended to directly reduce the partner's self-esteem. Despite the fact that there were no statistically significant differences between men and women on the other factors, *Denigration*, *Equity/Mind game* and *Passive Aggression*, women had a higher mean rank on the denigration factor and the equity/mind factor, suggesting that with additional subjects, these two factors would show the same results as the *Restrictive/Denigration* factor. The *Passive Aggression* factor showed men with a higher mean rank. While not statistically significant, it is important to note that this is the type of psychological abuse that men often experience from women and so it makes sense that they would rate this factor as more psychologically abusive (since they are the victims instead of the perpetrators of this violence).

Of all subscales, the behaviour associated with the *Restrictive/Denigration* subscale is perhaps the most closely associated with domestic violence. *Restrictive/Denigration* involves controlling behaviour as well as humiliating and degrading attacks on the partner's self-esteem. It is not surprising that *Restrictive/Denigration* has been rated as less abusive by males than females, in a country with a high prevalence of male perpetrated domestic violence. As stated earlier, denigration is highly associated with physical violence. O'Leary (2001) supports this association and states that dehumanising forms of labeling have been used in wars due to their power to facilitate aggression and allow the enemy to be attacked without remorse.

In Namibia, degrading, humiliating attacks as well as gender inequality may contribute to domestic violence. The fact that the women in 4 out of the 5 ethnic groups rated most of this behaviour as psychologically abusive, suggests that explanations other than ethnic socialisation practices are impacting these women. Given that this sample was drawn from an urban area with the mean age of 27.7 years, factors such as age and location may play a role. Further, research with rural populations is needed to see whether geographical location influences perceptions of psychologically abusive behaviour.

## **Ethnic differences in the perception of global psychologically abusive behaviour**

The results in this study indicate that there are differences in the various ethnic groups in Namibia concerning their perception of psychologically abusive behaviour. The Afrikaners rated this behaviour as less abusive compared to the other ethnic groups in this study. Several limitations should be considered in interpreting these findings. First, given the size of the sample, the results should be treated with caution. Secondly, because of the unique

composition of this sample, no conclusions can be drawn about all women and men from these ethnic groups. Thirdly, findings in the present study may not be generalised beyond this sample; further research is needed to examine these differences.

The findings in this study call for more research with larger samples in order to make more definitive conclusions. Based on these results, the most compelling question is: Are Afrikaner women truly more accepting of psychologically abusive behaviour than women from other ethnic groups?

Namibian policy makers and health professionals need to be aware of the complex relationship between physical and psychological abuse. Namibia will benefit from research on the different facets (subcategories) of psychological abuse. Knowledge of these subcategories may enable mental health professionals to identify couples who are at risk for physical abuse early enough and provide the necessary treatment to potential victims and perpetrator.

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