

Unhealthy and unhappy: The mental toll of troubled relationships

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Some forms of domestic violence double victims' risk of depression and anxiety disorders later in life, according to University of Queensland research.

The UQ School of Public Health study found many victims of [intimate partner violence](#) at 21 showed signs of mental illness at the age of 30, with women more likely to develop depression and men varying [anxiety disorders](#).

Intimate partner violence classifies [physical abuse](#) as pushing, shoving and smacking.

UQ researcher Emeritus Professor Jake Najman said the team also found equal levels of abuse by men and women.

"The number of men and women who experience intimate partner violence is very similar, leading us to believe couples are more likely to abuse each other," Professor Najman said.

"People generally don't end up in the hospital or a shelter, but there is a serious mental burden from this type of abuse."

The research showed defacto couples and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to be involved in these types of abusive relationships.

Emotional abuse involves comments that make the person feel worthless.

Then there is harassment—a constant and distressing nagging that may have long-term consequences for those on the receiving end.

"It also raises the question, to what extent is this type of violent behavior not just a characteristic of the relationship the couple has with each other, but with other people around them and possibly their children," Professor Najman said.

"There is a range of treatment and counseling programs available for

couples and families to try and improve the way they relate to one another."

The National Sexual Assault, Family & Domestic Violence Counselling Line—1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) – is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for any Australian who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and [domestic violence](#) and/or [sexual assault](#).

The study is published in *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*.

More information: Zohre Ahmadabadi et al. Intimate partner violence and subsequent depression and anxiety disorders, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s00127-019-01828-1](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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