

*Project Report on*

**“Psychological Abuse in Romantic Relationships: A Survey Report”**

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## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Date: May 11th, 2022

Respected Ma'am,

This is to inform you that we are submitting our report entitled “Psychological Abuse in Romantic Relationships: A Survey Report” as partial fulfilment of the HUMANITIES FOR ENGINEERS Course(UHU005)requirement.

This survey report delves into the prevalence and impact of psychological abuse in relationships, aiming to shed light on an often-overlooked aspect of intimate partner violence. By analyzing responses from a diverse demographic, the report seeks to understand the patterns, effects, and coping mechanisms associated with psychological abuse, ultimately providing insights that can inform support services and intervention strategies.

Through this report and survey conducted, we intended to bring into the limelight, people's perspectives on psychological abuses in relationships. Considering the goals and that relationships play a crucial role in one's life, we conducted this survey and published our findings in this report.

Most Sincerely,

Achintya Agarwal – 102115126

Akshit Sharma– 102115127

Tejus Kohli – 102115103

**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the project report on **‘Psychological Abuse in Romantic Relationships: A Survey Report’** is a bonafide project work done originally Achintya Agarwal 102115126, Akshit Sharma 102115127, Tejus Kohli 102115103 in fulfilment of the project work given by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology during the year 2024.

Ms Rishita Goyal

Date: May 1, 2024

Place: Patiala

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

"Psychological Abuse in Romantic Relationships: A Survey Report" has been a remarkable learning journey. The successful completion of this project is due to the extraordinary support, guidance, and motivation from our respected teachers at the Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology. We are especially grateful to our professor, Ms. Rishita Goyal, for her invaluable presence during critical decision-making moments. Her deep insights into the subject greatly contributed to the quality and timely completion of this project. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to our family and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement. We firstly express our hearted thankfulness to our professor **Ms Rishita Goyal** in this project who made us feel her presence during all those crucial and decision-making moments this project went through. The deep insights into the subject given to us by her are believed to be the root cause of completing this project qualitatively and timely. Also, through the support provided by her, we have acquired knowledge on the avenues that this project has explored. We extend our gratitude to all our friends for their encouragement and support.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We conducted the survey to assess people's attitudes about the concepts related to psychological abuse.

Emotional Abuse is also called psychological abuse or aggression, verbal abuse or aggression, symbolic abuse or aggression, and nonphysical abuse or aggression. Psychological/emotional abuse has been variously characterized as "the use of verbal and nonverbal acts which symbolically hurt the other or the use of threats to hurt the other" (Straus, 1979); "behaviors that can be used to terrorize the victim that does not involve the use of physical force" (Shepard & Campbell, 1992); the "direct infliction of mental harm" and "threats or limits to the victim's well-being" (Gondolf, 1987), and "an ongoing process in which one individual systematically diminishes and destroys the inner self of another. The essential ideas, feelings, perceptions, and personality characteristics of the victim are constantly belittled." (Loring, 1994). In romantic relationships, it is also possible for both partners to be emotionally abusive to each other. Psychological emotional abuse is considered an important form of abuse because many women report that it is as harmful or worse than the physical abuse they suffer.

Emotional abuse can be harder to spot because it doesn't leave a bruise. This has meant that it's not as well recognized by society. We wanted to conduct this survey because, like physical abuse, emotional abuse can have several short and long-term effects on mental health, giving rise to feelings of anxiety, guilt, and low self-esteem. We as young adults and psychology students recognize the problems of emotional and psychological abuse in society. There is an emerging emphasis on understanding emotional abuse as a construct separate from physical abuse, worthy of its theories and prevention strategies (O'Leary & Maiuro, 2001). The main focus of the survey was to showcase how aware and informed the young adult population is about psychological and emotional abuse in romantic relationships. Relationship separation and poor-quality relationships are likely to be important risk factors for suicidal thoughts and behaviours and are frequent triggers for a suicide attempt. Relationship problems are likely to be an increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Kazan et al., 2016).

With growing sources of information available to the young population about relationships and abuse, we wanted to see if people in the age demographic of 18-25 have become more aware. We



also found a gap in studies conducted about psychological abuse in romantic relationships in the Indian population in the given age bracket.

## **Review Of Literature**

Various studies have found that in a relationship having an unequal power dynamic, the male partners had more power for making decisions than the female partners (Peplau, 1979; Femlee, 1994). Research on power in the household seeks to explain power in terms of “cultural ideologies of gender, particularly those of breadwinning, which construct the man as the main earner” (Zelizer, 1989). (Edgell, 1980) took this further by showing that not all financial decisions were equally important. He found that more important financial decisions, such as setting overall financial priorities, were taken by husbands, based on the breadwinner or provider role; and less important decisions such as spending on food, children, and household items, were left to wives as part of women's traditional domestic roles (Edgell, 1980). It has also been found that the level of financial literacy of women is lower than that of men (Lusardi and Mitchell, 2009).

A study conducted by Bhatt and Prajapati (2021) indicates that women are not fully aware of personal financial planning and they rely on others while making financial and investment decisions. Moreover, this could be due to a belief that if both individuals in a relationship are earning different amounts of income, then decision-making power should be commensurately distributed. Multiple studies indicate a trend wherein “power is coming to be based on the visibility of each individual's earned income, which is deemed to confer power on the owner over how it can be used” (Vogler et al., 2008, Conclusion section, para. 2). According to Vogler et al. (2008), when partners earn disproportionately, relationships may resemble business relationships, governed by ‘equity’ rather than ‘equality’, in which the higher earner enjoys greater control over money. This is also consistent with the Resource Theory, which suggests that power is a function of the number of resources a person possesses (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Blau, 1964). This also re-emphasizes the role of gender, as, most often than not, males tend to have more economic resources, and thereby more power and control over them (Blumstein & Schwartz 1983; Rodman 1972).

In a study conducted by Saxey et al. (2022), it was found that emerging adults may financially deceive their romantic partners. This study was conducted on 1950 emerging adults in the US, results indicated that couple financial communication, the similarity of financial values, and financial socialization may contribute positively toward romantic relationship flourishing but financial socialization and financial deception may contribute negatively toward romantic relationship flourishing.

Silent treatment can generally be understood to cause psychological distress to the individual receiving it. Evidence of this can be found in a study by Williams, Shore, and Grahe (1998). It was found that when receiving the silent treatment, the feelings were coded to indicate threatened needs of belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence. There could be several motives or intentions of individuals withdrawing from confrontation and giving silent treatment. As has been found in a study by Zadro, Arriaga & Williams (2008) these motives are intended to hurt the person receiving silent treatment. In the majority of interviews conducted in the study, ostracism was attributed to punitive motives (i.e., to punish the target for some actual or perceived wrongdoing). Sources also used oblivious forms of ostracism (i.e., where the source acts as if the target is unworthy of their attention and ignores them accordingly). Some protectively used defensive ostracism (i.e., to avoid unwelcome attention or dangerous individuals). Others used defensive ostracism to prevent an argument from developing or to prevent the escalation of an argument.

In a study over 80 couples with a mean age of 24, it was found that a person is more likely to “give in” to their partners’ strong emotional reaction, or let the partner do something which s/he would not have otherwise been able to do if they didn’t show a strong emotional reaction, as the person is now highly attached to their participant and s/he cannot bear to see their partner

“sad”, or sometimes just for the sake of “maintaining the relationship” the partner gives in to their partners’ strong emotional reactions. (Carnelley et al., 2006)

Emotional abuse, like other forms of intimate partner violence, is conceptualized by many relationship theorists as a mechanism or tactic used to achieve power and control over one's partner (Anderson, 2010; Benokraitis, 2008).

Sears et al. (2006), studied abuse in 9th and 11th-grade dating relationships, suggesting that young men use psychological abuse to establish masculinity and maintain control, which is viewed as important for status in male peer groups. d, 2004). In terms of psychological abuse, behaviors are deliberate attempts at control and manipulation rather than impulsive responses to shame/anger.

In a study in 2016, it was observed that due to factors like these, people tend to continue their relationships even in dissatisfaction and availability of alternative mating opportunities (Lindovà et.al., 2016).

A study was conducted in 2008 in order to study the experience and perpetration of relational anger in relationships of young adults. Results indicate that modest involvement in relational aggression is relatively common. Females reported higher levels of perpetration whereas males reported higher levels of victimization ( Goldstein, et.al., 2008).

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To find out how pervasive psychological abuse is in Indian society
- People's attitudes towards psychological abuse

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

After the topic was finalized, an extensive review of the literature was done. The sample for this survey was chosen to be the age group 18 to 45. A self-administered online questionnaire was prepared on Google Forms. This was done to reach more respondents, as it allowed us to get responses from a broader section of the population.

After deciding the population and sample for this survey, the survey questions were designed. For the present survey, close-ended questions were preferred over open-ended ones because close-ended questions provide greater uniformity of responses and are more easily processed. This would also minimize bias in the subjective interpretation of data.

While creating questions, certain principles were kept in mind. For example, questions were framed to avoid jargon or technical terms, as well as direct words that may confuse the respondents. For instance, instead of mentioning the term 'Silent Treatment', the question was framed as "Sudden "switching off" and withdrawal from a confrontational conversation is normal for you.".

Furthermore, an attempt was made to follow the principles of forming good questions, such as avoiding leading questions, double-barreled questions, and questions with double negatives to minimize bias in responses.

The questions were finalized in a manner in which they could tap into the experiences of different age sub-groups of the selected demographic. People of varying ages would be in different stages of life, thus relating to questions differently. Moreover, efforts were made to distinguish questions enquiring about a personal experience from those gauging respondents' awareness and attitudes to stay true to the aim of the study. Lastly, decisions were made about the response categories for each question. For example, 5-point Likert scales were used for certain questions, while multiple-choice options were more suitable for others.

Finally, the questions were arranged in ascending order of directness in the Google Form to ease the participants into the questionnaire. It was also ensured that the initial questions were interesting and were not threatening to the respondents. A face sheet was prepared to state the basic instructions, the purpose of the study, and the respondent's right to consent.

## **DATA SOURCES**

### **• Primary Data**

A questionnaire was filled out by the people. The data collected and the interpretations of the same are presented ahead in this report.

### **• Secondary Data**

Research papers, journals, and magazines were studied. Information from Podcasts was also taken into consideration.

### **• Data Collection Method**

The primary data collection method used in this research is the questionnaire method. Here the data are systematically recorded from the respondents.

The secondary data used here is from published research papers, journals and podcasts.

## RESEARCH TOOL

A structured questionnaire has been prepared to get the relevant information from the respondents. The questionnaire consists of a variety of questions presented to the respondents for their despondence.

## SAMPLING

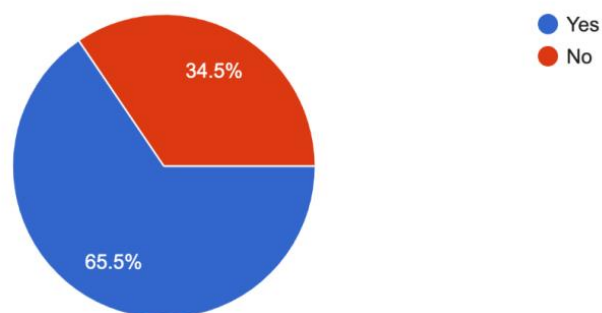
The target sample chosen to be diverse and to reflect various demographic groups. As such, the survey was floated to various friends and family members to effectively gauge their opinions regarding the subject.

*Sample Size*-The sample size chosen for this study is 150 since it is a Mini Research Project.

## DATA ANALYSIS

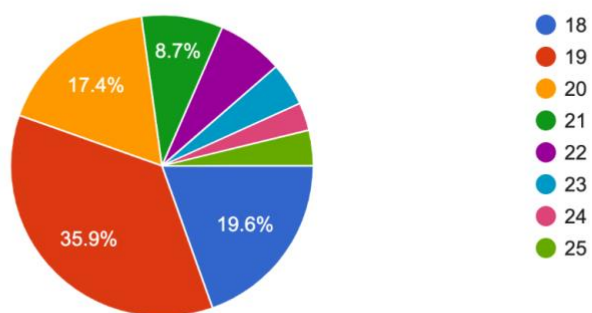
Have you been/ are you currently romantically involved with someone?

368 responses



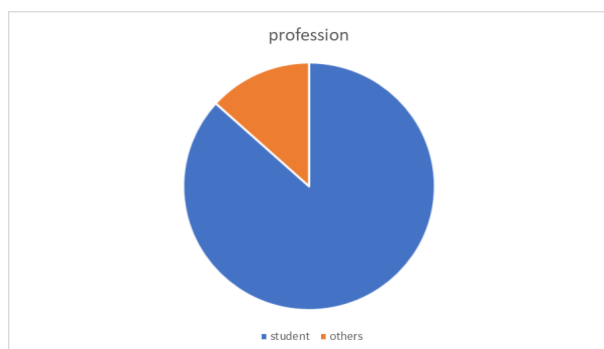
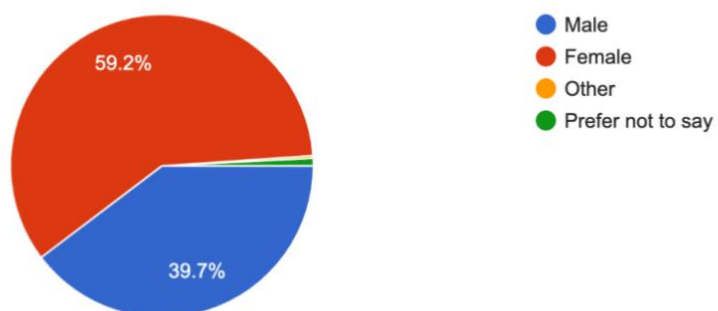
### Age

368 responses



### Gender

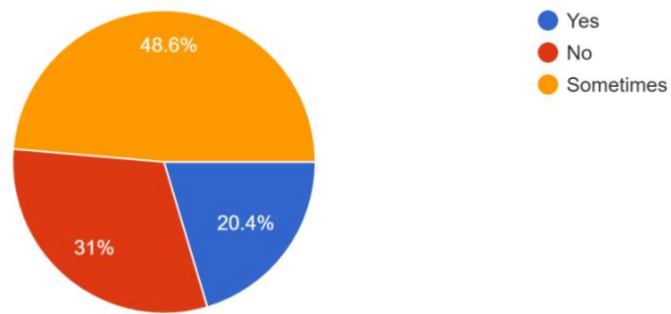
368 responses





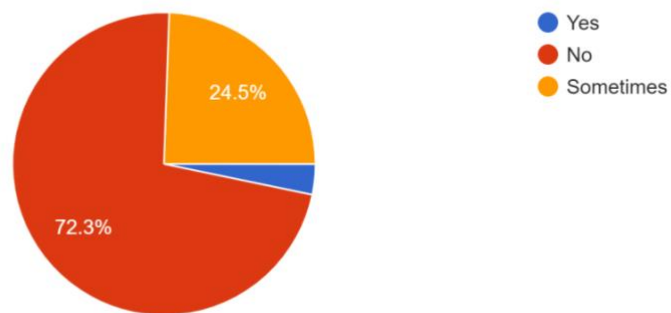
Q.6 In a relationship, your partner should know the details of your whereabouts all the time.

368 responses



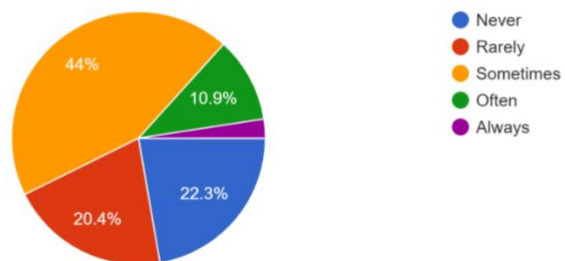
Q.9 It is acceptable if your partner decides who you interact with.

368 responses



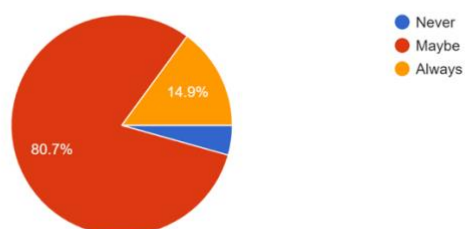
Q.10 When in a relationship, your sense of style is influenced by your partner's choices.

368 responses



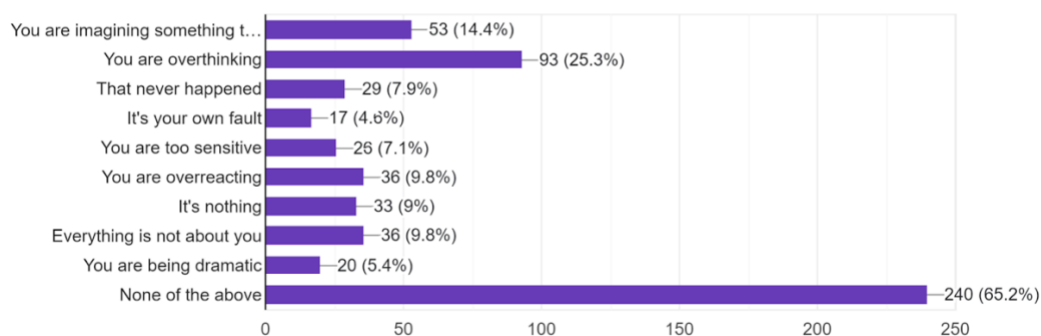
Q.12 You would be the one to apologize and make up after a big fight.

368 responses



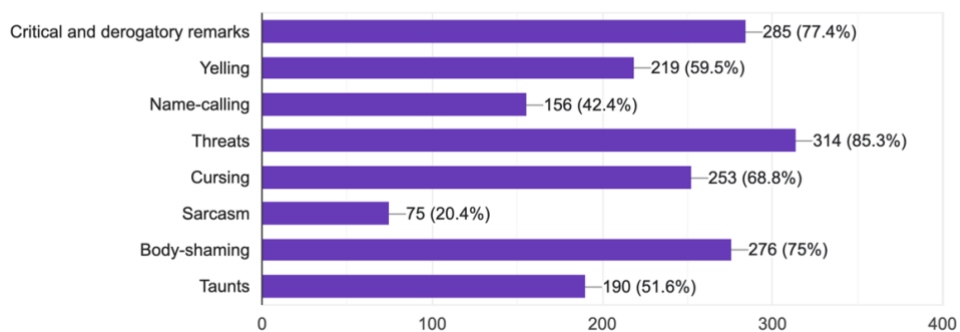
Q.11 If your partner shares certain serious concerns, you are likely to respond by saying (You may tick (✓) more than one.)

368 responses



Q.13 According to you, which of the following qualifies as a form of verbal abuse? (You may tick (✓) more than one.)

368 responses



## KEY FINDINGS

The survey was conducted to study the concept of abuse in romantic relationships.

We found that about 96% of respondents feel that essential matters relating to the relationship should be decided jointly and about 82% felt that it was unacceptable for their partner to ignore their opinion on major financial decisions. From the results, it can also be observed that most people are reluctant or completely against the idea of giving or receiving silent treatment. The results also suggest that forgiving a partner is an essential factor in maintaining romantic relationships. Sometimes just for the sake of “maintaining the relationship” the partner gives in to their partners’ strong emotional reactions. The survey also assessed attitudes about power or control in a relationship. Though most of the respondents disagreed with their partner controlling their behaviour, there was an indication that some participants might be okay with it. The result suggests that 85% of the sample perceived threats as the highest form of verbal abuse and the possible reason for this could be that such remarks have an effect on the partner’s self-esteem and may be seen as one of the primary causes of emotional abuse in relationships. From our results, it can be assumed that the respondents of the survey were quite informed and aware of the concepts related to psychological abuse.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this exploration of psychological abuse in romantic relationships underscores the significant impact of emotional maltreatment on individuals' mental and emotional well-being. Psychological abuse, often characterized by manipulation, control, and demeaning behavior, can erode self-esteem and lead to long-term psychological harm. Recognizing and addressing this form of abuse is crucial for fostering healthier relationships.

To combat psychological abuse, it is essential to raise awareness about its signs and consequences. Educational programs aimed at both the general public and specific at-risk groups can empower individuals to recognize and respond to abusive behaviors. Additionally, providing accessible resources such as counseling, support groups, and helplines is vital in offering victims the assistance they need.

Support networks, including friends, family, and professional services, play a crucial role in helping victims of psychological abuse. These networks can offer emotional support, practical advice, and a safe space for individuals to share their experiences. Strengthening these support systems is a key step in helping victims recover and rebuild their lives.

Ultimately, addressing psychological abuse in romantic relationships requires a comprehensive approach that combines education, support, and proactive intervention. By working together to raise awareness and provide robust support systems, we can create a society where healthy, respectful relationships are the norm and psychological abuse is no longer tolerated.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study cannot claim to be free of the social desirability effect which can be understood as research participants' tendency to bias their responses in surveys and experiments to appear in a more favorable light. Topics such as psychological abuse in romantic relationships can involve hesitations and biases about what is socially correct and what is not which can affect the genuineness of the responses.

Another limitation could be that online surveys serve us from methodological restraints. It is impossible to describe the population to which the surveys are delivered, and respondents may self-select into the sample because of their biases. Only when the results from a sample can be extrapolated to a relevant population does research have any value.

**APPENDIX :****SURVEY FORM AND QUESTIONNAIRE:**

1. Profession \*

---

2. Gender \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. Current Place of Residence (Name of city) \*

---

4. Have you been/ are you currently romantically involved with someone? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. Q.1 In a relationship, which of the following are NOT acceptable to you? (You \* may tick ✓ more than one)

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Sharing of passwords between partners
- ☐ Avoiding difficult conversations
- ☐ Your partner being critical of your choices
- ☐ Any form of aggression from your partner
- ☐ Being ridiculed, or criticized
- ☐ Lack of acknowledgement, or appreciation
- ☐ Your partner being critical of your friends, or family

6. Q.2 It is alright to leave the room in the middle of an argument. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Sometimes

7. Q.3 A strong emotional reaction from your partner would make you give in to  
\* what they want.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Never  
☐ Rarely  
☐ Sometimes  
☐ Often  
☐ Always

8. Q.4 Sudden "switching off" and withdrawal from a confrontational conversation  
is \* normal for you.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Sometimes

9. Q.5 Important matters relating to the relationship should be decided jointly. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Sometimes



10. Q.6 In a relationship, your partner should know the details of your whereabouts all the time.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Sometimes

11. Q.7 After a big fight, all can be forgiven if the partner apologizes and makes up \* by giving gifts, etc.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Never  
☐ Rarely  
☐ Sometimes  
☐ Often  
☐ Always

12. Q.8 It is okay if your partner ignores your opinions on major financial decisions. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Sometimes

13. Q.9 It is acceptable if your partner decides who you interact with. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

14. Q.10 When in a relationship, your sense of style is influenced by your partner's choices.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always

15. Q.11 If your partner shares certain serious concerns, you are likely to respond by saying (You may tick (✓) more than one.)

\*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ You are imagining something that isn't there
- ☐ You are overthinking
- ☐ That never happened
- ☐ It's your own fault
- ☐ You are too sensitive
- ☐ You are overreacting
- ☐ It's nothing
- ☐ Everything is not about you
- ☐ You are being dramatic
- ☐ None of the above

17. Q.12 You would be the one to apologize and make up after a big fight. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Always

18. Q.13 According to you, which of the following qualifies as a form of verbal abuse?  
(You may tick (✓) more than one.)

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Critical and derogatory remarks
- ☐ Yelling
- ☐ Name-calling
- ☐ Threats
- ☐ Cursing
- ☐ Sarcasm
- ☐ Body-shaming Taunts
- ☐

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