

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF LIVING WITH A NARCISSIT: A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The research is a mixed method research where in the researcher is exploring women's experiences with their narcissistic partners through a qualitative framework by interviewing and analysing the 14 case studies that focus on understanding the quality of the relationship, their self-esteem and the experience of the women, data has been collected using semi structured interviews of the narcissist's women partners to explore their relationship experience with a narcissist man. The quantitative aspect focusses on understanding the relationship satisfaction and its effects on the self-esteem of the women. The participants are age is between 25 – 35 years old, and have been in a relationship with the narcissistic man for about few years. The analysis is done using the framework of thematic analysis using QD Miner Lite software. The result of study confirm that there are concerns of commitment and women described the uncertainty and lack of long-term relationship commitment from the narcissistic partner's end. The research concurs with the findings of Trauma bonding and Feminist theory contributing to the body of the literature confirming that the partners of the narcissist men experience low relationship satisfaction, self-doubt and dark experiences while staying in the relationship with the narcissist partner.

INTRODUCTION

Narcissism has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in its impact on interpersonal relationships. Defined by an inflated sense of self-importance, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), narcissism often leads to relational dysfunction, particularly in long-term romantic partnerships. Narcissistic men, in particular, present an idealized, charismatic image at the start of relationships, fostering attraction and euphoria (Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

However, over time, the charm fades, revealing emotional manipulation, infidelity, and neglect, ultimately undermining the stability of these relationships (Buckley, 2024; Brunell & Campbell, 2011; Corry *et al.*, 2008).

This shift from idealization to manipulation and instability significantly impacts partners, especially in terms of emotional well-being. Women in these relationships often experience diminished satisfaction, heightened distress, and eroded self-esteem (Knott, 2023; Ye *et al.*, 2016). Narcissists often use a tactic known as 'love bombing' - an overwhelming flood of affection, attention, and gifts at the beginning of a relationship - to gain control over their partners (Foster *et al.*, 2003^{a & b}). While this initial phase may appear rewarding, the long-term costs frequently outweigh the short-lived benefits. As the relationship progresses, the narcissist's emotional neglect, psychological aggression, and relational instability become more apparent, shifting the dynamic to one that is emotionally manipulative and abusive (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finzi-Dottan, 2017).

This paper explores the lived experiences of women in long-term relationships with narcissistic men residing in India. Focusing on seven women who have experienced relational dysfunction, this study provides insights into how narcissistic traits manifest and contribute to emotional distress and long-term psychological harm. The trauma bonding theory explains how the idealization of the partner and the mistreatment from the partner can create a powerful emotional attachment leading to the continuity of the relationship despite any thoughts of leaving. Keeping in mind of the individuals residing in India, the feminist and gender power theory can co-exist to how a patriarchal society works.

The paper expands the literature by exploring how narcissistic behaviours, such as emotional manipulation, love bombing, and psychological aggression, manifest in women's experiences. It highlights the cyclical nature of narcissistic abuse and its enduring emotional toll on victims.

Narcissistic behaviour in romantic relationships has long been linked to significant relational dysfunction, and numerous studies have explored its impact on partners. The "chocolate cake model" proposed by Twenge and Campbell (2009) is a widely referenced concept in understanding the initial allure and eventual disillusionment in narcissistic relationships. It compares the initial euphoria of being with a narcissistic partner to the temporary pleasure of eating a chocolate cake - an indulgence that, over time, proves harmful. In the early stages of the relationship, the narcissist's charm and idealized persona are highly attractive, leading to emotional intoxication. However, as the relationship progresses, this initial allure fades, and the partner's emotional manipulation, neglect, and infidelity emerge, destabilizing the relationship (Brunell & Campbell, 2011; Corry *et al.*, 2008).

Relationship Satisfaction and Narcissism

Research consistently shows that narcissistic traits in partners are correlated with lower relationship satisfaction and heightened emotional distress. Individuals in relationships with narcissistic partners report higher levels of dissatisfaction and greater emotional instability (Ye *et al.*, 2016). Brunell and Campbell (2011) found that narcissistic partners are often perceived as emotionally unavailable and prone to infidelity. The emotional neglect experienced in such relationships is particularly evident in narcissistic men, whose tendency toward self-centeredness and manipulateness leads to a lack of emotional support for their partners (Ring, 2024; Roberts, 2021; Semple, 2001). Psychological aggression has been identified as a key mechanism exacerbating relationship dissatisfaction in narcissistic relationships. Narcissists often engage in psychological manipulation and aggression, which further erodes relational satisfaction and emotional well-being (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finzi-Dottan, 2017).

Women's Experiences in Narcissistic Relationships

The personal narratives of women in relationships with narcissistic partners provide valuable insights into the emotional and psychological toll of such dynamics. Lane (2020) explored the lived experiences of women involved with narcissistic men, noting recurrent themes of emotional instability, self-doubt, and personal loss. These women often experience feelings of inadequacy and self-blame, shaped by their partners' manipulative behaviours. The study highlights how narcissistic partners use charm and strategic emotional manipulation to ensnare their victims, making it difficult for them to recognize or escape the toxic relationship (Knott, 2023).

Knott's (2023) research also emphasizes the enduring emotional abuse faced by long-term partners of narcissists. She found that while initial interactions with narcissists may seem captivating, the psychological distress partners endure increases over time as narcissists exploit their emotional vulnerabilities. This aligns with the findings of Määttä *et al.* (2012), who identified that spouses of narcissists often experience emotional turmoil, which is compounded by the narcissist's emotional instability and need for control. These women endure toxic relational dynamics that contribute to a negative power imbalance, significantly affecting their emotional health. In terms of self-esteem, for the partners of the narcissist, the study by Knott (2023) suggested that the partners self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence was at the lowest at the end of the relationship with the individual. The individuals lose on their self-esteem after staying with the narcissistic partner, even if their confidence was up high before the relationship began. The partners are often rating themselves at a lower level of confidence due to how their narcissist partners treat them.

A key element in narcissistic relationships is psychological aggression, which has been shown to exacerbate relational instability and emotional harm. Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan (2017) investigated the role of psychological aggression in relationships with narcissistic individuals, finding that narcissistic partners often perpetrate this form of aggression, resulting in lower relationship satisfaction for both parties. This psychological control leaves the non-narcissistic partner feeling emotionally drained and powerless, contributing to a cycle of abuse and dependence.

Narcissism and Attitudes Toward Violence

Narcissistic traits are also linked to an increased acceptance of violence as a tool for exerting control. Blinkhorn *et al.* (2016) found that narcissistic individuals were more likely to accept violent behaviour as part of maintaining control over their partners. This tendency to justify emotional and physical aggression as a means of power plays a crucial role in the toxic environment narcissists create within relationships. Narcissists often use gaslighting, emotional manipulation, and at times physical aggression to dominate their partners, leading to an abusive cycle where the victim feels trapped and powerless.

Perception Discrepancies in Narcissistic Relationships

An important feature of narcissistic relationships is the discrepancy between the narcissist's distorted perception of the relationship and the reality experienced by their partner. Lam (2012) examined how narcissists tend to have inflated views of

their relationships, which often leads to dissatisfaction for their partners. Narcissistic individuals believe they are superior and deserving of special treatment, leading them to ignore or dismiss their partner's needs and perspectives. This distortion of reality contributes to feelings of loneliness, emotional neglect, and frustration in the non-narcissistic partner, further damaging the relational dynamic.

The research aims at investigating the wellbeing of the partners of the narcissist. The understanding of the partners self-esteem, relationship satisfaction and the journey it is to be with a man who is a narcissist.

Theoretical framework

The research has been in accord to two theories to interpret the narration and experiences of women, in a relationship with the narcissistic men. First, the feminist and gender power theory (Connell, 1987) forms a relationship with the context presented in the paper according to the gendered social structure identifying how gender shapes the power, and quality of relationships due to cathexis. India is a patriarchal society, with patriarchal values, upbringing and stigma to how a man should be. Women, on the other hand tend to keep harmony by choice and by expectation, avoiding conflict and confrontation willing to keep working on relationships even when mistreated. The theory mentions the gender differences and experiences of women.

Second, Trauma Bonding theory (Dutton & Painter, 1993) which states that the powerful attachment of emotions exists due to the good and bad behaviour of the partner which causes fluctuation of thoughts. This suggests that the women feel that the bad behaviour existing, physically or emotionally abusive will not be repetitive if she prevents it. The theory suggests that by the time the women realizes the intensity of the relationship, the emotional bond would already have been stronger by then due to the time of the relationship, which leads to the powerful attachment. In the form of a relationship with the narcissistic man, the woman is in a state of confusion due to the extreme love bombing and sudden negative behaviours outbursts.

Method

Current study adopted a mixed methods research, for the qualitative part of the study case studies have been included to explore the lived experiences of women in long-term relationships with narcissistic men and the Quantitative study focused on understanding the relationship satisfaction and the effects of the variable on the self-esteem of the women/ partner. The aim is to gain in-depth insights into the emotional, psychological, and relational dynamics these women face. Semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data collection method, allowing participants to share their narratives flexibly and in detail. Thematic analysis is employed to identify patterns and recurring themes across the participants stories using QD Miner Lite. Data saturation has been performed as a guiding principle for the sample. Data saturation was observed in the narratives of the participants when no new categories and themes emerged further on. The quantitative data was collected using Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) and The Relationship Assessment Scale by Hendrick.

Participants

Fourteen women participated in this study and they were recruited through snowball sampling, beginning with an individual who had experienced relational dysfunction with a narcissistic partner. This initial participant referred others who met the study criteria, ensuring a diverse range of experiences. Participants were between the ages of 25 and 35 years and had been in relationships from more than two years. This sample size is consistent with research standards, offering rich data while focusing on individual narratives.

Inclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and depth of the data, participants were required to meet specific criteria:

1. They must have been in a long-term relationship (minimum of two years) with a partner exhibiting narcissistic traits, identified either through self-report or prior knowledge of their partner's narcissistic behaviours.

2. Participants must have experienced emotional or psychological abuse, including manipulation, control, and neglect, during the relationship.

Qualitative Data Collection, Interview Process & Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow participants to share their experiences freely, while providing enough flexibility to explore specific aspects of their relationships in greater depth. The interview questions were designed to address key themes such as:

- Initial perceptions of their partner and the early stages of the relationship,
- Critical turning points and changes in the relationship dynamics,
- Emotional responses and psychological effects throughout the course of the relationship.

The interviews were held in a confidential and safe environment, ensuring that participants felt comfortable to share their stories at their own pace. The interview protocol was structured to explore emotional and psychological abuse, manipulation, and relational instability in a way that allowed participants to express their experiences openly, without any suggestions or bias from the interviewer that might influence their responses. Each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes, was audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcribed interviews, following a systematic process:

1. **Familiarization with the data:** The researcher read and re-read the transcripts to become deeply familiar with the content.
2. **Initial coding:** A preliminary round of coding was conducted to identify significant excerpts related to emotional distress, manipulation, and other key phenomena.

Quantitative Data Collection & Analysis

For the quantitative analysis the participating women were shared the assessment tools to measure their relationship satisfaction and self-esteem using the two tools Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) and The Relationship Assessment Scale by Hendrick. Participants consent was taken before filling the questionnaire. The quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft excel. Pearson's correlation was conducted to find the relationship between self-esteem and relationship satisfaction. A simple linear regression was later performed to whether relationship satisfaction predicted self-esteem.

Result and Discussion Qualitative Analysis

The thematic analysis of the interviews revealed five major themes that characterize the experiences of women in long-term relationships with narcissistic men. These themes reflect the psychological, emotional, and relational dynamics these women encountered, providing a deeper understanding of the impact of narcissistic abuse and how they lead to lower self-esteem for individuals.

Effortless Charisma

The themes had been initiated with codes like, charming, good looking man. The first theme, effortless charisma, emerged as a significant factor in the initial attraction to narcissistic partners. Participants described being captivated by their partner's charm, physical appeal, and self-confidence early in the relationship. Narcissistic individuals often create an idealized persona that masks underlying toxic traits. This initial allure, which participants found irresistible, mirrors Twenge & Campbell's (2009) "chocolate cake" metaphor, where the early sweetness of the relationship ultimately led to emotional damage. The charisma served as a mask for manipulative behaviours, making it difficult for the women to recognize the narcissist's true nature until later in the relationship.

Excerpt:

"He was so charming, he was wanted by majority of the girls around, and he was eyeing on me so I was loving it."

Participant 1

"I had heard about him no lies through mutual but we met because we matched on the dating app. So he was never an unknown, he's been such a great looking man!"

Participant 2

"I felt like he's the most amazing person ever. He was very charismatic, very caring, very attentive to everything"

Participant 10

Extreme Love Bombing

The second theme, extreme love bombing, highlighted the overwhelming affection, attention, and material gifts showered upon participants during the early stages of the relationship. The codes generated were, initial love, , gestures and financial and sexual satisfaction. This emotional intensity created a sense of euphoria and dependence, leading women to interpret their partner's actions as genuine affection. This phase, often experienced as a whirlwind of romantic gestures, obscured early manipulative tactics. As described by Lane (2020), the intensity of the narcissist's affection during this phase created a false sense of security, preventing women from recognizing the manipulative behaviours until they became more pronounced over time.

Excerpt:

"My first 3 months were butterflies, a lot of love bombing, a lot of giving love, surprises. I almost thought I hit a jackpot."

Participant 1

"My first 3 months were fabulous I think, there was so much of love bombing, pampering, chasing. I mean he made me feel like I'm the best girl in the world and so special."

Participant 2

"Just him getting me some stuff you know I'm getting me food pampering yeah that's it and that's what I realized it was just pampering nothing else."

Participant 12

Trust Vulnerability

Codes generated for the theme consisted of cheating, comparison, emotional neglect and uncertainty. The third theme, relationship and trust vulnerability, focused on the emotional instability and insecurity that marked these relationships. Participants reported cycles of emotional neglect, infidelity, and frequent relational breakdowns, creating an environment of trust fragility. Narcissistic partners manipulated women through emotional volatility, leading to a constant state of uncertainty. This dynamic aligned with Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan's (2017) findings on psychological aggression, where narcissists destabilize their partners' emotional security. This created a cycle of emotional distress and dependence, leaving women vulnerable to further manipulation.

Excerpt:

"So, in the five years, I think I broke up with him more than 50 times."

Participant 7

"I felt bad, he has cheated on me too, don't judge me but imagine I still stayed, it felt like a trap."

Participant 2

"He would talk to multiple women, objectify and compare them to me in terms of looks"

Participant 4

Self-Doubt and Negative Perception

Naming a few, the codes generated for this theme consisted of low self-esteem, self-blame, low self-confidence, self-doubt. The fourth theme, negative self-perception and doubt, captured the psychological toll these relationships had on participants' self-esteem. Many women described feelings of inadequacy, self-blame, and confusion as their narcissistic partners consistently undermined their sense of worth. Manipulative behaviours, such as gaslighting and constant criticism, led to the erosion of self-esteem. These findings align with Knott's (2023) exploration of emotional abuse, which illustrates how narcissists diminish their victims' sense of self. Participants often questioned their worth and abilities, experiencing long-term psychological harm due to these tactics.

Excerpt:

"I knew it is because of my low self-esteem that I have stopped stepping out much, wearing the clothes I like and posting on social media."

Participant 5

"I had no self-esteem, no care towards one self and anxiety started to kick in."

Participant 4

"And I always take a selfie or something and I had lost my self-esteem completely like, in the past."

Participant 13

Emotional intensity and Manipulation

Aggressive, Abuse, controlled behaviour were the codes generated for this theme. The final theme, emotional intensity and manipulation, encompassed the manipulation and gaslighting along with controlled behaviour from the narcissistic men that participants endured. Narcissistic partners frequently used tactics such as gaslighting, manipulation to maintain control. These women reported feeling trapped and powerless, afraid to assert themselves or leave the relationship. The women showcased a sense of dependency towards the narcissistic man due to their life circumstances of the or the kind of relationship portrayal was given initially due to which they feel that life wouldn't be right without them. The gaslighting and manipulation experienced by participants were central to the narcissist's strategy of control, leaving women emotionally drained and fearful with lack of empathy

Excerpt:

"I am a human. If I get a call from a boy from a past friend, then what's my fault in that? But he was controlling."

Participant 6

"So, basically trying to control your whole mindset and you know trying to make sure that you know it's their way and never your way."

Participant 9

"He has slapped me. He has been very violent verbally. He's abused me a lot."

Participant 7

Physical and Verbal Violence

Aggressive, Abuse, emotional violence and physical violence were the codes generated for the theme. The theme, physical and verbal violence included the aggressive behaviour narcissistic man towards their partner, leading to shouting, abusing and even physically and emotionally violating them too. Objects were thrown and doors were slammed too in anger. This something that Durvasula, R. (2015) also covered that physical, emotional abuse like yelling, shouting and abusing were endemic, belonging to being in a relationship with a narcissist. Disturbing accounts of emotional and physical violence echoed the findings of Blinkhorn

et al. (2016), who noted that narcissistic individuals are more likely to justify violent behaviours as a means of asserting power.

Excerpt:

"I was numb. I didn't understand anything, he ended up fighting with me, he was very aggressive, abused me."

Participant 4

It was how I was treated. How I was put down, not taken care of even my emotions. He had a lot of anger issues, he would abuse in anger and I knew it's not my thing.

Participant 3

He was very aggressive, very very aggressive. He has abused me multiple times and yes has slapped me once.

Participant 2

Emotional healing

This final theme, included the rediscovering identity of the women who left the narcissistic relationship. The women concluded to feel back to self, doing much better or finally realizing their worth. Initially of being a relationship with a narcissistic man included low self-esteem, self-doubt with the gradual restoring one own self. Women described having friends and family support and the distance from the narcissistic partner helped in rebuilding their own self, slowly.

Excerpt:

"I became more self-aware and by the end of the relationship, obviously, I lost a huge part of myself. Yeah. Which I'm gaining back till today."

Participant 10

"And post my breakup, I'm in therapy now and getting to do my work and working on it pretty well."

Participant 7

"But thank god for the support I still get from my close ones, they make me get up!"

Participant 12

Result & Discussion for Quantitative Analysis

Correlation analysis

Pearson's correlation was performed to examine the relationship between relationship satisfaction and self-esteem. Result indicated a positive relationship between the two variables, $r(13) = .82$, $p < .001$, which enables us to understand that the higher the relationship satisfaction, the higher the self-esteem and vice versa. (table 1)

	<i>Self esteem</i>	<i>Relationship satisfaction</i>
Self esteem	1	
Relationship satisfaction	0.822293991	1

Table 1: Pearson's correlation between self-esteem and relationship satisfaction

Regression

A linear regression was performed to understand whether relationship satisfaction predicted the self-esteem. The model suggest, $F(1,13) = 26.57$, $p < .001$ and explained 68% of the variance in self-esteem (R square = .68, adjusted R square = .65)

Equation;

Self-esteem = - 0.47 + 1.13 (Relationship satisfaction)

Therefore, relationship satisfaction is a positive predictor of self-esteem. (table 2)

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.822293991
R Square	0.676167408
Adjusted R Square	0.649181359
Standard Error	3.000938215
Observations	14

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	225.646724	25.0561837	0.00030642

Residual	12	9.0056301 7		
Total	13			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	0.450549451	-0.14251	0.8890419 8	-7.3389274	6.4378285 1	-7.3389274	6.43782851
Relationship satisfaction	1.133903134	5.0056152 1	0.0003064 2	0.64034488	1.6274613 9	0.64034488	1.62746139

Table 2: Regression of self-esteem and relationship satisfaction
The results of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics in relationships with narcissistic partners, emphasizing the profound emotional and psychological toll on women involved with narcissists. The five key themes identified - effortless charisma, extreme love bombing, relationship and trust vulnerability, negative self-perception and doubt, and violence and manipulation - highlight the cyclical and devastating nature of narcissistic abuse.

These findings align with and extend the existing literature on narcissism, emotional abuse, and manipulation, validating the harmful effects narcissistic individuals have on their romantic partners (Knott, 2023; Blinkhorn *et al.*, 2016; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). The participants' narration aligns closely with the trauma bonding theory and feminist theory indicating of how the initial charisma and love bombing made them attracted to men, which later lead to a lot of confusion of treatment women received. Sometimes love, sometimes manipulation and abusing. The relationships have lasted for more than 2.5 years and ended later than that despite of any treatment due to the intense emotional bonding due to which the relationship lasted for that long where women couldn't leave the man. The feminist theory extends to the pressure of women to make the relationship work, leading to decision making made by the male partner and self-sacrifice to try and make the relationship work despite of mistreatment. By the results, the women try to think "things will change" or "It's okay, I will work through it", due to the thought of giving the chance in the relationship, to the man they've stayed for this long with.

The Role of Initial Charisma and Love Bombing

These first two themes, effortless charisma and extreme love bombing, resonate strongly with the "chocolate cake model" described by Twenge and Campbell (2009), which likens the initial attraction to narcissistic partners to the fleeting pleasure of eating a chocolate cake. Participants in this study described being captivated by the narcissist's charm, which initially concealed manipulative behaviours. This initial allure aligns with findings in previous research on narcissism in romantic relationships, where intense affection and attention early on often create a false sense of security (Lane, 2020). However, as the love bombing phase subsides, narcissistic behaviours become more emotionally manipulative, gradually eroding the partner's trust and well-being, a dynamic echoed in the findings of Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan (2017).

Emotional Vulnerability and Relationship Breakdown

The theme of trust vulnerability underscores the emotional instability and manipulation these women experienced, leading to a fragile relational dynamic. Narcissists' emotional volatility creates uncertainty, destabilizing trust and leaving their partners in a continuous state of emotional distress. This finding corroborates Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan's (2017) work, which highlighted how narcissistic behaviours contribute to relationship dissatisfaction through psychological aggression and manipulation. The emotional neglect and dependency observed in this study mirror relational patterns in narcissistic relationships, as victims become entangled in a cycle of emotional turmoil and fear.

The Erosion of Self-Worth

The theme of Self-doubt and Negative perception reflects the psychological damage narcissistic relationships inflict on women's self-esteem. Many participants reported feelings of inadequacy, self-blame, and confusion due to the narcissist's constant

undermining behaviours. This theme strongly aligns with Knott's (2023) research, which explored how narcissists exploit their partners' emotional vulnerabilities through tactics like gaslighting and criticism, ultimately eroding their sense of self. The pervasive emotional abuse experienced by participants in this study is consistent with broader literature on narcissistic abuse, where victims struggle to retain their identity amidst ongoing psychological manipulation.

Violence and Control

The theme, highlights the extreme tactics narcissists use to assert control over their partners, including both emotional and physical abuse with extreme level of aggression. Participants' accounts of emotional and physical violence resonate with Blinkhorn *et al.*'s (2016) findings, which suggest that narcissistic individuals exhibit higher tolerance for violence as a means of exerting control. Narcissistic individuals use methods like intimidation, gaslighting, and physical aggression not as reactive responses, but as strategic manipulations aimed at preserving dominance in the relationship. This contributes to an emotionally drained, fearful partner who feels trapped and powerless.

Self-Renewal

The final theme, highlights the healing journey towards being themselves and getting better as each day passes by. Knott (2023) highlighted the coping and recovery of the partner of the narcissist that leads to person to take out time for themselves and beginning the journey towards healing. A few participants mentioned the support of family and friendships and a client mentioned about going to therapy has been a benefit.

The quantitative analysis provides deeper insights and a great combination to the thematic analysis. Participants showed how manipulation, violence, erosion of self-worth lead to diminished self-esteem. The findings highlight how while a supportive relationship may serve as a protective factor to self-esteem, the lower relationship satisfaction appears to diminish the self-esteem too of the individual. Both the qualitative and quantitative underlines the importance of how the satisfaction in a relationship can address issues in self-esteem.

Implications and Future Directions

The findings from this study carry important implications for both research and practice. Theoretically, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how narcissistic behaviours foster emotional abuse and relational dysfunction. The study also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the emotional and psychological effects of narcissistic abuse, which often go unacknowledged until the victim reaches a breaking point.

From a practical point of view, mental health professionals, relationship counsellors, and support organizations can use these insights to better identify and assist individuals in abusive relationships with narcissistic partners. Interventions should focus on restoring self-esteem, providing emotional support, and helping victims recognize manipulative behaviours early in the relationship.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of narcissistic abuse on mental health, particularly the impact on children who witness such relationships. Additionally, examining how different types of narcissistic traits (e.g., grandiosity vs. vulnerability) affect relational dynamics could provide a more nuanced understanding of narcissistic abuse in intimate relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the emotional and psychological dynamics in relationships with narcissistic

partners, focusing on the lived experiences of women involved in long-term relationships with narcissistic men. The mixed method findings reveal five critical themes - 'effortless charisma', extreme love bombing², relationship and trust vulnerability³, negative self-perception and doubt⁴, and violence and manipulation⁵ - that illustrate the cyclical and devastating nature of narcissistic abuse. These themes underscore the profound impact narcissistic behaviours have on women, leading to emotional distress, self-doubt, and relational instability. They highlight how narcissistic behaviours manipulate, control, and ultimately harm their partners over time. The quantitative analysis indicate that lower relationship satisfaction is linked to lower self-esteem. Together, these findings emphasize a crucial role in understanding that a relationship, where the partner is having to deal with a few things like for a woman with a narcissistic man, the self-esteem is an outcome of those relationship issues that leads to lower relationship satisfaction.

The findings align to the feminist theory where women in a relationship with the narcissistic man stays despite of any mistreatment, abuse and manipulation just because of the way, women have been told to give relationships, another chance. India is a patriarchal and collectivist society, men are brought up in a certain way, which leads to the development of feeling special and higher than others, sometimes. Women are told to give chances to relationships despite any indifference caused. The times could be changing slowly, but some things still remain a little similar than ever.

The women stay in relationship by giving time, love and energy leading to trauma bonding theory, where they feel the partner will change and maybe never does, which leads to staying a relationship for longer than expected and makes it tougher to leave.

The findings even align with existing literature on narcissism and emotional abuse (Knott, 2023; Lane, 2020; Blinkhorn *et al.*, 2016; Twenge & Campbell, 2009), providing valuable insights into the lasting emotional toll narcissistic abuse inflicts. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the manipulative, controlling behaviours of narcissists and emphasizes the enduring psychological impact on victims.

Practical implications include the urgent need for improved recognition of narcissistic abuse, particularly within intimate relationships, and targeted interventions to support victims in restoring self-esteem and emotional well-being. Future research should focus on investigating the long-term psychological effects of narcissistic abuse, especially on children and individuals at different stages of narcissistic relationships. Additionally, exploring the influence of various narcissistic traits on relational dynamics could offer a more nuanced understanding of how narcissistic behaviours vary and impact their victims.

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