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## DATING APPS, FORMS OF ABUSE AND PERSONALITY TYPE

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received: 1. 2. 2024;

revised: 17. 2. 2024;

accepted: 29. 2. 2024

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## Dear Editor,

In an era where technology is reshaping the fabric of human communication, it is imperative to recognize its impact on reinforcing gendered adversaries (Baker & Carreño 2016). Our recent study delving into the realms of mental and physical sexual Abuse experienced by women who engage with dating apps points to a concerning trend (Zimmer-Gembeck et al. 2012). A positive correlation between abuse and factors like participants' age, exposure duration to these platforms, and personality traits has been observed. The study primarily relied on focus group discussions with 20 women who have used dating apps at least once to find a partner.

Depending on the rewards and negative experiences, some individuals persist with dating apps, while others choose to uninstall them. If app uninstallation is permanent for a few participants, it is temporary based on the urge to connect with

others and positive reinforcements associated with dating app usage. The mean age of participants was 23, including working professionals, fresh graduates looking for a job and students with a graduation degree.

Despite their cultural diversity, hailing from different Indian states, a shared experience connects them: the negative experiences of Abuse manifesting in various forms, such as emotional manipulation, public humiliation, and physical assault. Instances of physical Abuse often coincide with vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

Among the distressing narratives shared by participants, disloyal dating emerges as a prevalent tactic employed by perpetrators, often with the intent of coercing individuals into engaging in sexual acts. Such manipulative endeavours are not isolated incidents; at least 10 participants recounted experiencing such abuses on multiple occasions. Moreover, a subset of participants endured even more severe forms of Abuse, with five reporting incidents of sexual assault and three recounting physical violence

ranging from slaps to expressions of hostility and violent behaviours by their partners found through dating apps.

Despite all five personality traits being associated with Abuse, Agreeableness and Extroversion seem to be common traits among those who were exploited emotionally and sexually. Among participants who have gone through any form of physical assault, Agreeableness seems to be a common personality trait. Participants who dared to sever ties with their abusers found themselves ensnared in a web of stalking, fear, and restricted mobility, perpetuating a vicious cycle of victimization. This cascade of Abuse manifested adverse psychological effects, including feelings of guilt, self-blame, social isolation, and an abiding fear of intimacy, echoing the profound trauma inflicted upon them.

At times of distress, peers were perceived as de facto counsellors. However, only three participants sought professional help, with one turning to her parents in financial distress. Others sought their coping mechanisms in physical activities like enrolling in fitness programs or finding companionship with pets.

At least eight participants have adopted a more discerning approach towards dating apps, exercising caution and mindfulness in virtual interactions. They still use dating apps but are more careful than ever. Rigorous background checks of their dates and a network of trusted friends stand ready to intervene at a hostile moment of their dates. Arranging a call to escape to cut off their date was a standard method employed by these mindful dating app users. However, the other 12 participants never re-installed the app due to the fear of being manipulated again. These participants had opted for popular dating apps through peer pressure and a sense of loneliness in a new city. They lacked social connections, mainly when their profession or studies migrated them to a newer city.

While the allure of user anonymity drives initial conversations on dating apps, it introduces challenges along with the virtually materialized relationship (Strickland et al. 2023, Park & Park 2021). First-time dating app users lacked knowledge about probable consequences and varied forms of Abuse of dating apps (Phan et al. 2021, Thomas et al. 2023). They are only aware of individual cases and experiences shared among their peers, and their immediate groups influence their coping mechanisms. Those who have moderate experience of using dating apps are also vulnerable to Abuse. However, the severity

of the Abuse may vary with the usage pattern and the personality type.

**Ethical Considerations:** Does this study include human subjects? YES

Authors confirmed the compliance with all relevant ethical regulations.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest among them, and any organizations or external agencies

do not financially fund this study.

**Funding sources:** The authors received no financial support for this article's research, authorship and publication. The authors received no funding from an external source

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