EFFECT OF GASLIGHTING ON MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS

Abstract

Gaslighting is psychological manipulation of ideas, thought and action of a person over a long period of time. As its negative consequences, victims question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories. It leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem. The victim become uncertain for their emotional or mental stability. Gaslighting makes a person confused, isolate, powerless, doubtful and depressive. Person who experience gaslighting are at high risk of anxiety depression and suicidal thoughts. This study is an attempt to find the effect of gaslighting on adolescent's mind because adolescence is the transitional stage of life where many physical and psychological changes occurs. Healthy social and emotional habits are important for their development. Any abusive act of others can make them feel emotionally and mentally ill. This study also suggests the strategies to prevent from this abusive behavior.

Keywords: Gaslighting, mental health, adolescent, emotion, confidence, thought, reality, victim.

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I. INTRODUCTION

If someone is intentionally distorting reality and make you feel like what you are seeing or feeling is not real, you could be a victim of Gaslighting. Gaslighting can come from anyone who may a romantic partner, a boss, a family member, a doctor or anyone your familiar. “Are you sure about that”, “you have a bad memory” or “I think you are forgetting what really happened”, denying something and refusing to admit the lie even after the presence of proof, telling the other person that their goals are stupid, minimizing the hurtful behavior or words by saying something like “It was just a joke” or “You are too sensitive” spreading rumors and gossips and telling the person that other person are gossiping about them, are some example of Gaslighting behavior.

II. WHAT IS GASLIGHTING

In simple term, Gaslighting is a manipulative tactic in which a person plant seeds of uncertainty in other persons mind to gain power and control over another individual.
Psychologically, Gaslighting is the form of emotional and mental abuse where in the gaslighter or abuser manipulates the reality to make other doubtful on their own abilities and qualities. The abuser plants seeds of doubts in victim's mind, making them question on their own reality.

Gaslighting involves an imbalance of power between the abuser and the person they’re gaslighting. Abusers often exploit stereotypes or vulnerabilities related to gender, sexuality, race, nationality and/or class.

It is not enough for the gaslighter simply to control his victim or let the things go on his way rather It is important to him that the victim come to agree with him,”
Andrew D. Spear (2019), an associate professor of philosophy at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. Gaslighting, a specific type of emotional and psychological abuse, is a varying cluster of manipulations used to undermine an intended target person’s mental stability (Welch, 2008). It is an interaction between a gaslighter, who manipulates and desires to maintain control, power, and a sense of being right and the gaslightee who allows the gaslighter to define her sense of reality. (Stern, 2007). Gaslighting involves one person who tries to “impose” his or her judgment on a second person. Gaslighting often evokes disturbing emotions,low self-esteem, and cognitive imbalance by making the individual to question his own abilities for thinking, perceiving, and reality testing. Self-doubt, diminished self-esteem, confusion, anxiety, depression, and even psychosis may develop in victim. (Dorpat, 1996) Gaslighting intends to maintain the power, dominance, and reality by utilizing the covert tactics, behaviours, and subversive communication inherent in covert emotional and psychological abuse. (Stern, 2007). For eg. A child trusts his/ her parents and believe that whatever parents are saying is right and in favor of him/her but when parents verbally and mentally abuse their child by gaslighting (like, when a child is complaining about their siblings’ parents usually say that “you are two sensitive” or “you are not making any sense” or “Don't make me angry”) the child loses his /her self-confidence and believes that he / she is crazy. Child whose brain and emotions are still in the developmental stage, doesn’t have ability to see his/her parents' behavior as abusive. The child trusts the parent even more and begin to believe that he / she is crazy and wrong always. her but when parents verbally and mentally abuse their child by gaslighting

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III. HISTORY OF GASLIGHTING

The term Gaslighting originated in British play from the1930s which turned into film later. The play was called "Gaslight" and the story was about a husband who mentally and emotionally abuses his wife so she can believe that she is crazy by changing the intensity of the gas lamp within their home. He also engaged in other crazy activities such as Knocking on walls or shifting objects around the house to make his intention easy and successful. He married to her because she was wealthy. He used to deny her reality, ideas and thought persistently and finally, succeeded in making her believe that she is crazy. At the end of the play, his wife started to question herself and her sense of reality. This was a sad experience for the audience.

IV. GASLIGHTING IN ADOLESCENTS

A person at any stage of life can be gaslighted by someone but gaslighting, at the stage of adolescents is associated with various type of emotional and physical abuse. Adolescence is the transitional stage of life that lies between a child and an adult, in this stage intellectuals, physical and psychological changes and development take place. Behavioural changes are common in this stage. If adolescents are being gaslighted they can have negative effect on thier mental health. Adolescence who have been gaslighted experience anxiety, depression and mental health problems. They may feel difficulty in trusting their friends, family members and even on themselves. They feel difficulty in making simple decisions and remain confused.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline described five techniques a gaslighter may use against a victim:

- **Withholding** The abuser pretends not to understand or refuses to listen. "Don't talk to me about this again."
- **Countering** The abuser questions the victim's memory of events, even when the victim remembers them accurately and have evidences. The abuser always claims that the incident that the victim explained is a lie. Like: "That's not how it happened. It happened like this."
- **Blocking/Diverting** The abuser changes the subject matter and divert the victim's thoughts. "You have been watching too many dumb movies.
- **Trivializing** The abuser makes the victim's needs or feelings seem unimportant. Like: "That's nothing to get so angry about.", "What I have been through is way more serious, get over it.", "When did you get so sensitive?
- **Forgetting/Denial** The abuser pretends to have forgotten the reality or denies things like promises made to the victim. Example "Huh? What are you talking about?", "Maybe that was just a dream you had."

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V. EFFECT OF GASLIGHTING ABUSE ON MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS

The abusers try to smooth things over with nice words that don't match their actions. They try to separate victims from friends and others who might recognize their abusive symptoms and minimize their offensive word by saying "Ohh! It was just a joke" or "you are too sensitive". Being informed someone that he/she is incorrect, confused or crazy on a regular basis can have a terrible impact on his or her mental health. Adolescence may feel alone and helpless in addition to questioning their own reality and beliefs. low self-esteem, confusion, self-doubt and difficulties adjusting to social and academic situation are also sign of poor mental health.

Adolescence may feel anxiety, sadness and suicidal intentions. They may have PTSD. They could struggle to trust their friends, family members, teachers as well as themselves as they grow older.

They may have difficulty in making simple decisions and like to stay silent rather than speaking up about their thoughts and beliefs. They spend a lot of time in apologizing themselves for their actions and believe that they can't do anything right, they used to walk on egg shells around other person because they feel lonely and trapped.
How to prevent adolescents from Gaslighting abuse?

VI. PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILD AND PROTECT THEM FROM GET LIGHTING

1. **Speak With Your Children's' Teachers and The School Guidance Counselor:** The majority of gaslighting occurs in a school setting. So the teacher must be aware of this situation. Your teen is probably not the only one who is being abused. Schools must inform and educate both children and parents about bullying, including gaslighting and must guide about its protective techniques.

2. **The Use of Social Media Should Be Closely Monitored:** Social media is the most typical area for gaslighting behaviors. Parents must monitor what their children are doing on their phones. Parents can establish a digital curfew that requires all gadgets to be unplugged from the wall so the screen usage time can be controlled.

3. **Teach Your Children To Stay Away From The Gaslight:** Gaslighting is not rational behavior, so Gaslighters do not have any logic or they can't recognize their true motivations or explain why they feel compelled to bully others in this way. The best thing a teenager can do is withdraw from the relationship.

4. **Get Support From A Mental Health Professional:** Therapy and support groups can help adolescent victim who have suffered and feel difficult to recover from self-esteem issues, lack of self-confidence, depression, and/or PTSD caused by this painful experience.

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VII. WHAT ADOLESCENTS CAN DO THEMSELVES TO STOP GASLIGHT ABUSE

1. Adolescents must get support from friends or family. They should talk to someone who understands and believe them.
2. Document everything. Keep a diary of all the events that have happened.
3. Don't act on your doubts. Just because you're having thoughts that don't make sense to you doesn't mean they aren't true. If something feels wrong, pay attention to that feeling instead of doubting yourself.
4. There's always a way back to reality if you stay connected with supportive friends or family so stay connected with them.
5. Discuss with other people who have experienced this kind of behavior from someone else. This will help you feel less alone and more understood.
6. Get professional help if you are feeling unstable, suicidal or struggling with other mental health issues. A therapist can help them work through the effects of gaslighting and start to rebuild their self-esteem.
7. Don't try to change the abuser. Because the abuser tries to get control over you.
8. He will deny your thought.
9. Leave the situation safely as soon as possible. But this might not be the best choice for everyone.
10. If someone is trying to recover from gaslighting. It is important to take time for self-care and create an unshakable foundation of reality. If there is a need of professional help, then seek it immediately.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Gaslighting is a clever act that does not reveal that he/ she is being targeted. Because adolescence is the crucial stage where adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial growth. There are many warning signs to recognize that someone is gaslighting. Never ashamed of your feelings, it is never too late to get help.

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