

What is trauma bonding and how does it present itself in intimate partner violence?

Trauma bonding is a psychological phenomenon where a victim forms an emotional bond with their abuser as a survival strategy in abusive or traumatic situations.

The victim may develop feelings of loyalty, attachment, and even affection towards the perpetrator, despite the harm they have experienced.

This bond is often characterized by a cycle of abuse, where rewards or punishments are given inconsistently or unpredictably in response to certain behaviours, and periods of kindness or perceived "good times" from the abuser.

IN THE UNIVERSITY SPACE, TRAUMA BONDING CAN PERPETUATE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) IN SEVERAL WAYS:

Manipulation and Control:

Abusers in the university setting may use trauma bonding as a manipulative tactic to maintain control over their victims. By alternating between abuse and kindness, the abuser keeps the victim emotionally attached and dependent, making it difficult for the victim to break free from the abusive relationship.

Fear of Reprisal:

Victims may fear the consequences of leaving the abusive relationship, as the abuser may have threatened retaliation or harm if they attempt to escape. This fear can trap victims in the cycle of abuse, making it difficult to seek help or escape the situation.

Isolation:

Trauma bonding can lead to the victim becoming emotionally isolated from their support networks, including friends, family, and peers. The abuser may convince the victim that nobody else cares for them or that they are the only ones who truly understand and support them.

Normalization of Abuse:

Trauma bonding can make abusive behaviour seem normal to the victim, as they become desensitized to the mistreatment and may rationalize or justify the abuser's actions.

Self-Blame and Guilt:

Victims of trauma bonding may internalize blame for the abuse they experience, feeling guilty for the abuser's actions or believing that they somehow deserve the mistreatment. This self-blame can prevent them from seeking help or reporting the abuse.

Impact on Reporting:

Trauma-bonded victims may be hesitant to report GBV incidents to university authorities due to their emotional attachment to the perpetrator, fear of consequences, or a sense of loyalty to the abuser.



How to deal with trauma bonding if you are a victim of trauma bonding:

Dealing with Trauma Bonding: Steps for Victims

1 Recognize the Situation

- Acknowledge abusive relationship
- Understand trauma bonding dynamics

2 Seek Support

- Reach out to friends, family, or support groups
- Find emotional support and validation

3 Self-Blame and Guilt

- Prioritize personal safety
- Seek help from law enforcement or hotlines if in danger

4 Educate Yourself

- Learn about trauma bonding and abusive relationships
- Recognize patterns and take steps to end it

5 Professional Help

- Consider seeking guidance from a therapist or counsellor
- Get support from experts experienced in trauma and abuse

6 Create a Safety Plan

- Develop an emergency plan for leaving the abusive relationship
- Consider physical and emotional safety

7 Set Boundaries

- Establish clear limits with the abuser
- Define consequences for boundary violations

8 No Contact or Limited Contact

- Reduce or cut off contact with the abuser
- Break the trauma bond and gain clarity

9 Build a Support Network

- Surround yourself with supportive and understanding individuals
- Seek help from people who can aid in the healing process

10 Practice Self-Care

- Focus on physical and emotional well-being
- Engage in activities that bring joy and relaxation

11 Be Patient and Kind to Yourself

- Understand healing takes time
- Accept setbacks as a normal part of the process

12 Consider Legal and Protective Measures

- Explore legal options for protection
- Seek advice on obtaining a restraining order or legal support

Who Is More Susceptible to Trauma Bonding?

People with relational and emotional trauma are typically targeted by perpetrators in a trauma bond, intentionally or otherwise. It can be common for abusers to seek out strong, driven, educated, and independent thinkers so that they can make themselves feel superior when they finally break them down.

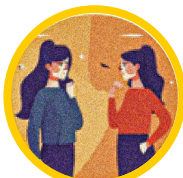
Risk factors for trauma bonding include:

- People with dependent personalities
 - Avoidance of personal responsibility.
 - Difficulty being alone.
 - Fear of abandonment and a sense of helplessness when relationships end.
 - Oversensitivity to criticism.
 - Pessimism and lack of self-confidence.
 - Trouble making everyday decisions.
- Anyone who puts a lot of value on “the good times” and is quick to forgive
- Anyone with a history of being abused in childhood or past relationships
- People with disorganized, anxious, or avoidant attachments
- People with the tendency to question themselves, even despite strong evidence that suggests they aren’t to blame
- Existing mental health concerns, such as depression, BPD, and anxiety
- People with separation anxiety
- People who are sensitive to rejection

Trauma Bonds



Love Bombing



Criticism



Gaining Trust



Manipulation



Giving up & Self-Abandonment



Psychological Distress



Cycle Repetition

On an intellectual level, trauma bond survivors likely know that what is happening to them is wrong and can identify how painful and soul-crushing their relationship is. Still, they often struggle to accept it as abuse.

How to support a GBV survivor as a First Responder?

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Gaining the confidence of survivors: What to say...

I believe you
I am glad you told me
I know it was not your fault
I am sorry this happened to you
I will do my best to keep you safe

A free Online course just for you:

An Approach to Supporting Trauma Survivors in higher Education

- The course is open to all STAFF and STUDENTS
- You receive an electronic certificate after completion of the course
- The course is on Moodle search: "First Responders Guide"
- Enrolment key: 2022AY
- Enquiries: Ulleta.Marais@mandela.ac.za



First Responders Course:

First
Responders
Responsibilities

Understanding
the acute stages of
trauma

Signs of Trauma

Taking care of
yourself as a First
Responder

Avoiding
Traumatization

NMU Sexual
Harassment
Protocol

Reasons why victims do not report intimate partner

violence:

There are various reasons why some people do not report abusive relationships, and these reasons can be complex and deeply personal. Some of the common reasons include:

1 Fear of Retaliation

Victims may fear that reporting the abuse could lead to further violence or retaliation from the abuser, putting their safety and the safety of their loved ones at risk.

2 Emotional Attachment and Trauma Bonding

As mentioned earlier, trauma bonding can create a strong emotional attachment to the abuser, making it difficult for victims to break free from the relationship or see the abusive behaviour clearly.

3 Shame and Stigma

Victims may feel ashamed or embarrassed about being in an abusive relationship and may fear being judged or stigmatized by others.

4 Isolation and Lack of Support

Abusers often isolate their victims from their support networks, leaving them with limited emotional and practical support to turn to if they were to report the abuse.

5 Financial Dependence

Some victims may rely on the abuser for financial support, which can make it challenging to leave the relationship or report the abuse.

6 Cultural or Religious Factors

Cultural or religious beliefs may discourage reporting abuse or seeking help outside the community or family.

7 Believing Abuse Is Normal

Victims may have been exposed to abuse in their upbringing or previous relationships, leading them to believe that the abusive behaviour is normal or something they have to endure.

8 Concerns About Children or Family

Victims with children may fear the impact of reporting on their children or worry about losing custody if they leave the abuser.

9 Distrust of Authority

Some victims may have had negative experiences with law enforcement or institutions in the past, leading to a lack of trust in reporting the abuse.

10 Minimization and Denial

Victims may minimize or deny the severity of the abuse, hoping that the situation will improve over time or that the abuser will change.

11 Lack of Legal Knowledge

Some individuals may not be aware of their legal rights or the resources available to them to seek protection from abuse.

