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Gaslighting in Intimate Relationships: A Scoping Review

Gaslighting em relacionamentos íntimos: uma revisão de escopo

Gaslighting en las relaciones íntimas: una revisión de alcance

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Abstract: This study carried out a scoping review on gaslighting in intimate relationships, with the aim of analyzing how the scientific literature has studied the phenomenon in adults, without restricting the studies according to sex, gender identity or the type of affective relationship of the partners involved. The search was conducted in the databases Scopus, CINAHL, MEDLINE, PsycNet, PubMed, PsycInfo and Sage Journals, and a complementary search in Google Scholar with the aim of screening out national studies not indexed in high-impact journals. The findings resulted in 14 studies considered eligible for inclusion in the main analysis. The results showed that gaslighting in intimate relationships has been investigated from seven main perspectives: risk factors and predictors, tactics or mechanisms, motivations, assessment tools, harm caused to victims, coping strategies and correlated variables of gaslighting. It is important to note that the articles selected adopted a convenience sample design, composed predominantly of female samples, which may influence the understanding of this phenomenon. In short, it is hoped that the findings of this study can contribute to the development of new research into the phenomenon, especially in the Brazilian context, and enable a discussion of intervention strategies that seek to identify, prevent and deal with this form of violence in love relationships, in order to promote healthier relationships.
Keywords: gaslighting; intimate relationships; psychological violence; scoping review

Resumo: Este estudo realizou uma revisão de escopo sobre o gaslighting em relacionamentos íntimos, com o objetivo de analisar como a literatura científica tem estudado o fenômeno, em adultos, sem restringir os estudos com base no sexo, identidade de gênero ou tipo de relação afetiva dos parceiros envolvidos. A pesquisa foi conduzida nas bases de dados Scopus, CINAHL, MEDLINE, PsycNet, PubMed, PsycInfo e Sage Journals, e uma busca complementar no Google Acadêmico com o objetivo de rastrear estudos nacionais não indexados em periódicos de alto impacto. Os achados resultaram em 14 estudos considerados elegíveis para a inclusão na análise principal. Os resultados demonstraram que o gaslighting em relacionamentos íntimos tem sido investigado sob sete perspectivas principais: fatores de risco e preditores, táticas ou mecanismos, motivações, instrumentos de avaliação, danos causados às vítimas, estratégias de coping e variáveis correlatas do gaslighting. É importante destacar que os artigos selecionados adotaram um delineamento amostral de conveniência, composto predominantemente com amostras do gênero feminino, o que pode influenciar a compreensão deste fenômeno. Em suma, estima-se que os achados desse estudo possam contribuir para o desenvolvimento de novas pesquisas sobre o fenômeno, especialmente em contexto brasileiro e possibilitem uma discussão de estratégias de intervenção que busquem identificar, prevenir e enfrentar essa forma de violência nas relações amorosas, a fim de promover relacionamentos mais saudáveis.
Palavras-chave: gaslighting; relacionamentos íntimos; violência psicológica; revisão de escopo

Resumen: Este estudio realizó una revisión de alcance sobre el *gaslighting* en las relaciones íntimas, con el objetivo de analizar cómo la literatura científica ha estudiado el fenómeno en adultos, sin restringir los estudios en función del sexo, la identidad de género o el tipo de relación afectiva de los miembros de la pareja implicados. La búsqueda se realizó en las bases de datos Scopus, CINAHL, MEDLINE, PsycNet, PubMed, PsycInfo y Sage Journals, y una búsqueda complementaria en Google Scholar con el objetivo de localizar estudios nacionales no indexados en revistas de alto impacto. Los resultados dieron lugar a 14 estudios considerados aptos para su inclusión en el análisis principal. Los resultados mostraron que el *gaslighting* en las relaciones íntimas ha sido investigado desde siete perspectivas principales: factores de riesgo y predictores, tácticas o mecanismos, motivaciones, herramientas de evaluación, daño causado a las víctimas, estrategias de afrontamiento y variables correlacionadas con el *gaslighting*. Es importante señalar que los artículos seleccionados adoptaron un diseño muestral de conveniencia, compuesto predominantemente por muestras femeninas, lo que puede influir en la comprensión de este fenómeno. En resumen, se espera que los resultados de este estudio puedan contribuir al desarrollo de nuevas investigaciones sobre el fenómeno, especialmente en el contexto brasileño, y posibilitar la discusión de estrategias de intervención que busquen identificar, prevenir y lidiar con esa forma de violencia en las relaciones amorosas, a fin de promover relaciones más saludables.
Palabras clave: gaslighting; relaciones íntimas; violencia psicológica; revisión de alcance

In recent years, discussions about psychological violence have grown significantly (Capezza et al., 2021; Keatley et al., 2022; Martínez-González et al., 2021). A specific type of this subtle form of abuse that has stood out from others and attracted considerable attention is gaslighting. The term gaslighting has become increasingly popular and is widely used to describe abusive manipulation strategies in various interpersonal relationships (e.g., familial, romantic, or workplace), with the aim of making the victim doubt their own judgment (Gass & Nichols, 1988; Klein et al., 2023; Sweet, 2019).

The growing public interest in the topic is evidenced by the increasing number of online searches for the term, which led Merriam-Webster to select "gaslighting" as its 2022 Word of the Year (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Television programs such as the British reality show Love Island have attracted a global audience, including viewers in Brazil, have sparked online discussions (e.g., on X, Instagram, and Facebook) about intimate partner violence, specifically focusing on gaslighting. The show's popularity, combined with its social media visibility, has contributed to the cultural dissemination of this type of abuse (Porter & Standing, 2020).

Furthermore, the subject has attracted the attention of authors and filmmakers, who have explored the topic in productions such as the films *Your Reality and Captain Marvel* (Hammer & Kavanaugh, 2024), in which the female protagonists experience gaslighting by their intimate partners. The theme also appears in self-help books such as *The Gaslight Effect: How to Spot and Survive the Hidden Manipulation Others Use to Control Your Life* (Stern, 2019) and *Gaslighting: Recognize Manipulative and Emotionally Abusive People—and Break Free* (Sarkis, 2019). These visual and literary representations of violence featured in films, television shows, and books have helped raise public awareness of gaslighting as a form of psychological abuse, enabling individuals to recognize these behaviors in their own lives (Ghaltakhchyan, 2024; Hammer & Kavanaugh, 2024).

In this context, the growing attention and popularity surrounding the phenomenon have also had repercussions in the legal sphere. According to Mikhailova (2018, as cited in Sweet, 2019), gaslighting was officially incorporated into domestic violence legislation in the United Kingdom in 2015, resulting in more than 300 individuals being charged with this type of abuse. In Brazil, although the term gaslighting is not yet explicitly mentioned in the legislation, the phenomenon is legally recognized as a form of psychological violence against women. As established in Law No. 14,188/2021, specifically Article 147-B of the Penal Code, criminal behaviors include manipulation, threats, ridicule, and isolation with the intent to degrade or control a woman's behaviors, beliefs, and decisions, thereby harming her mental health and self-determination (Brazil, 2021).

Relevant data indicate that gaslighting is a central characteristic of intimate partner violence (Bhatti et al., 2023; Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Sweet, 2019), although it may also occur in intimate relationships that are not considered abusive (Klein et al., 2023; Sweet, 2019). This expands concern about the potential impact on victims' health and well-being. Moreover, evidence suggests that psychological violence may be more harmful and have longer-lasting effects than physical violence (Hester et al., 2017), highlighting the urgency of addressing it as a public health issue.

Given the relevance of the topic, it is essential to conduct studies that contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, particularly in the context of romantic relationships, which are often reported as the most common interpersonal setting in which this type of abuse occurs (Akdeniz & Cihan, 2023; Stern, 2007).

Gaslighting: "Which One of Us is Crazy?"

Gaslighting is currently defined as a form of psychological abuse in which one person manipulates another's judgment, causing them to question their mental capacity to perceive reality (Abramson, 2014; Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Sweet, 2019). This phenomenon involves two agents: the perpetrator, referred to as the gaslighter, who employs tactics such as lying, denial, and concealment; and the victim, often called the gaslightee, who begins to doubt their own ability to perceive, judge, and make decisions about their experiences (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Sweet, 2019). However, the concept has not always been defined this way, and its understanding has evolved over time.

The term gaslighting originated from the 1938 play and subsequent film *Gaslight*, written by Patrick Hamilton. The story portrays an abusive relationship in which a woman is led to believe she is going insane due to manipulations by her husband, who plans to have her institutionalized in order to steal her inheritance (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Kutcher, 1982). Gregory, the husband, communicates with his wife Paula in a controlling and ambiguous manner, creating situations that lead her to question her own perceptions of reality. One of the methods he uses to confuse her involves dimming the gaslights, hence the title of the work, and denying any change in the lighting, accusing her of imagining things (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Sweet, 2019).

Following this popular portrayal, similar patterns of manipulative behavior began to be observed in various social contexts, prompting scientific investigations into the phenomenon (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Kutcher, 1982). The earliest accounts in the literature appeared in the 1960s and 1970s (Barton & Whitehead, 1969; Sheikh, 1979; Smith & Sinanan, 1972), describing gaslighting as the perpetrator's attempt to convince third parties, especially psychiatrists, that the victim had mental disorders that rendered them unfit for social life. At the time, gaslighting was viewed as a deliberate act motivated by personal or financial gain or as a way to resolve family problems, and little to no attention was given to the victim (Barton & Whitehead, 1969; Sheikh, 1979).

In the 1980s, a significant shift occurred in how gaslighting was described and understood. Researchers began to define it as a process in which the perpetrator no longer sought to deceive others, but rather the victim themselves, convincing them of their cognitive inability to comprehend and deal with everyday situations (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Kutcher, 1982), which remains the dominant understanding today. Despite this conceptual shift, behaviors associated with gaslighting have been present since Hamilton's play, including deceptive and insidious acts of manipulation such as denying facts the victim has reason to believe, distorting reality, assigning undue blame, and using verbal insults to undermine the victim's mental state (Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023; Sweet, 2019).

Although women can also employ abusive gaslighting tactics against men (Graves & Samp, 2021; Stern, 2007; Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024), gaslighting is frequently associated with gender-based violence, with most studies portraying men as perpetrators and women as victims (Abramson, 2014; Bhatti et al., 2023; Sweet, 2019). Early studies reported cases in which husbands with extramarital affairs used tactics such as lies and accusations to confuse their wives, often relying on sexist stereotypes, e.g., "women are overreactive," "jealous," and "emotional," to invalidate women's feelings and perceptions (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Gass & Nichols, 1988).

In this context, research has emphasized that gaslighting is rooted in gender stereotypes. As a result, verbal insults such as "slut," "crazy," and "hysterical" are frequently used to delegitimize women's beliefs, judgments, and behaviors (Boring, 2020; Sweet, 2019). Although gaslighting shares characteristics with psychological violence and coercive control, it is distinguished by its primary goal: to undermine the victim's self-confidence so they accept the reality imposed by the perpetrator (Abramson, 2014; Sweet, 2019).

Given the various impacts this behavior can produce, some studies have sought to investigate the motivations of perpetrators and the consequences for gaslighting victims (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Klein et al., 2023). Although it can be difficult to determine the intention behind these actions, different studies show that the perpetrator's motivation may be either conscious, driven by personal or financial

gain, or unconscious, stemming from psychological disorders, a need to control the partner, or a desire to avoid accountability for their actions (Bashford & Leschziner, 2015; Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Klein et al., 2023). In this regard, the literature suggests that aversive personality traits, such as psychoticism, sadism, Machiavellianism, and narcissism, may be linked to gaslighting behaviors (March et al., 2023; Miano et al., 2021).

Victims of gaslighting report long-lasting emotional harm, with negative impacts on health and well-being that persist even after the end of the abusive relationship (Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023). Studies highlight loss of self-confidence, feelings of confusion, doubt about memory and perception of reality, and self-perceptions of being "crazy." While some victims report being able to overcome the trauma after the relationship ends, others experience a slower recovery, with emotional consequences (e.g., sadness, guilt, a sense of helplessness) and social consequences (e.g., difficulty trusting others, isolation, and lower relationship quality) that may persist over time (Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023).

Given the notable public attention and growing academic interest in gaslighting, it is important to understand how scientific studies have addressed the topic, especially in romantic relationships, where such abuse is particularly common (Akdeniz & Cihan, 2023; Stern, 2007). Thus, the general objective of this study was to analyze how the scientific literature has examined gaslighting in intimate relationships. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) identify predictors of gaslighting; (2) examine gaslighting tactics or mechanisms; (3) explore the motivations behind the perpetration of gaslighting; (4) identify instruments used to assess gaslighting; (5) investigate coping strategies adopted by victims of gaslighting; and finally, (6) identify variables associated with gaslighting.

Method

This exploratory study conducted a scoping review of national and international publications on the phenomenon of gaslighting in intimate relationships. A scoping review is a rigorous and transparent method that aims to map the existing literature in a specific area, allowing for both the analysis of research characteristics and the identification of gaps in the available literature (Munn et al., 2018). It is important to note that this type of review does not include the assessment of the methodological quality of the studies analyzed (Pham et al., 2014). The scoping review conducted in this study followed the methodological guidelines proposed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (Aromataris et al., 2020) and the checklist Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Page et al., 2021; Tricco et al., 2018). This review was also registered on the Open Science Framework platform and can be accessed via the following DOI https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/Z7RCW.

Search Strategy

This review aimed to answer the following question: How has the scientific literature addressed gaslighting in intimate relationships? To guide the research process, the PCC framework (Population, Concept, and Context) was applied. The population comprised individuals aged 18 and older; the concept focused on studies examining the phenomenon of gaslighting; and the context was restricted to intimate relationships.

As this was a scoping review, no restrictions were applied regarding participants' sex, gender identity, or type of romantic relationship. This decision was based on the exploratory nature of scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020). This strategy aimed to provide a broader overview of how gaslighting has been conceptualized, studied, and discussed in the scientific literature, enabling the identification of knowledge gaps and informing future studies with more specific scopes.

The search strategy covered the period from September 2023 to August 2024 and included the following databases: Scopus, CINAHL, MEDLINE, PsycNet, PubMed, PsycInfo, and Sage Journals. No publication date restrictions were applied, in order to capture the full body of scientific literature available on gaslighting in intimate relationships. Search techniques were developed to be applicable across all databases, using the following keyword strategy: (*relationships* OR "*intimate relationships*" OR "*interpersonal relationships*" OR "*romantic relationship*") AND ("*gasli*" OR "*gaslight*" OR "*gaslighted*" OR "*gaslit*" OR "*gaslights*" OR "*gaslighting*")*, considering both abstracts and titles.

Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria for selecting studies were as follows: empirical scientific articles that (1) involved research studies, interventions, case reports, or experiential accounts; (2) were published at any time; (3) addressed gaslighting in intimate relationships; (4) included samples composed of individuals aged 18 or older; (5) were available via open or restricted access; (6) were written in any language; and (7) were conducted in any country.

Exclusion criteria included documents meeting at least one of the following conditions: (1) titles, abstracts, or full texts unrelated to gaslighting in intimate relationships; (2) publications in the form of book chapters, reviews, theses, dissertations, or theoretical studies; (3) samples including participants under 18 years of age; and (4) full texts not available.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

This scoping review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The PRISMA flowchart detailing the article selection process is presented in Figure 1. Metadata from the articles identified in the selected databases were exported in Research Information Systems (RIS) format. To ensure comprehensive coverage, previous reviews on the topic were also consulted, and backward and forward citation tracking strategies were applied (Haddaway et al., 2022). Additionally, a supplementary search was conducted on Google Scholar to identify non-indexed national studies.

All metadata were imported into Rayyan, a software developed by the Qatar Computing Research Institute, where duplicate records were removed. Study selection and screening were independently conducted by two reviewers across the stages of title and abstract screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. In cases of disagreement, alignment meetings were held, and, when necessary, a third reviewer was consulted to ensure impartiality and rigor. Articles deemed relevant were subjected to full-text content analysis.

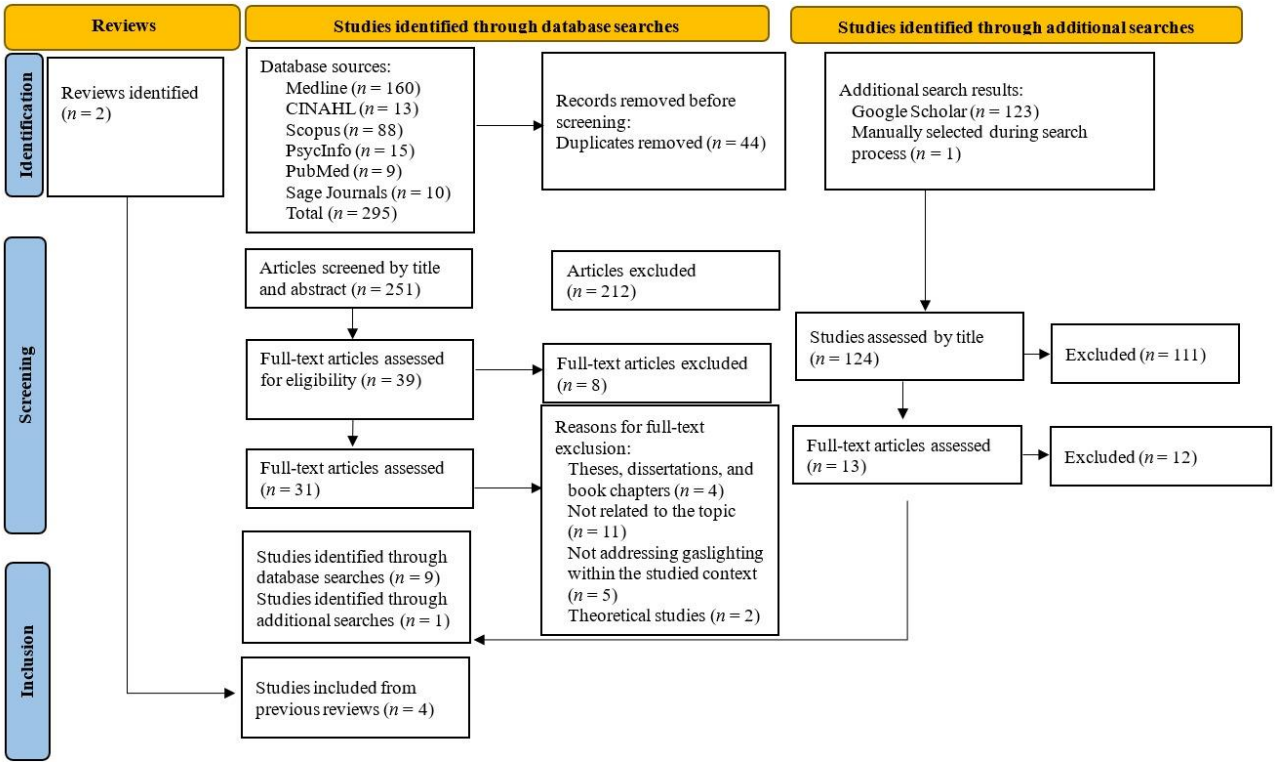
Results

Study Selection Results

The initial search across the Medline, CINAHL, Scopus, PsycInfo, PsycNet, PubMed, and Sage Journals databases yielded 295 records (Figure 1). After removing duplicates, 251 records remained. Of these, 212 were excluded based on title and abstract screening, and 8 were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. Among the remaining 31 full-text articles assessed, 9 were included in the final review. Additionally, findings from previous reviews identified four more studies. The complementary searches conducted during the review process generated 125 results, from which 13 studies were fully assessed, and 12 were excluded. This process resulted in a final inclusion of 14 studies considered eligible for the main analysis.

Figure 1

Flowchart of Study Screening and Inclusion



Characteristics of the Studies

In terms of time frame, the year 2023 stood out with the highest number of publications, totaling four articles. This was followed by 2021 with three articles and 2024 with two publications. The years 1981, 1982, 2015, 2019, and 2022 each had only one study. No eligible publications were found between 1983 and 2014 or in the years 2016, 2017, and 2018.

Regarding geographic origin, most of the articles were from the United States (*n* = 5). Other contributions came from Canada (*n* = 2), Italy (*n* = 2), Pakistan (*n* = 2), England (*n* = 1), Ireland (*n* = 1), Israel (*n* = 1), and Australia (*n* = 1). Notably, one study (Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024) was conducted simultaneously in two countries, Israel and the United States.

As for the type of scientific production, all selected articles were published in English and adopted convenience sampling, predominantly with female participants. Most studies used a cross-sectional design. Seven studies employed qualitative methodologies, using instruments such as case reports (*n* = 4), interviews (*n* = 2), and questionnaires with open-ended questions (*n* = 1). In contrast, eight studies used quantitative methods, relying on self-report instruments (e.g., Revised Conflict Tactics Scale, Aggression Questionnaire, Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse) to analyze antecedent and consequent variables associated with gaslighting. Among these, five studies conducted psychometric analyses to validate specific instruments for assessing gaslighting, including the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ; Bhatti et al., 2023), the Gaslight Questionnaire (Stern, 2007) adapted by Hassan et al. (2022), the Gaslighting Behaviour Questionnaire (GBQ; Dickson et al., 2023), the Gaslighting Questionnaire (March et al., 2023), and the Gaslighting Relationship Exposure Inventory (GREI; Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024).

Summary of the Selected Evidence Sources

Table 1 presents a synthesis of the studies mapped according to the objectives of this scoping review.

Table 1

Summary of the Studies

No.	Author (year)	Country	Title	Design	Sample	Instruments	Main results
1	Calef & Weinshel (1981)	United States of America	*Some Clinical Consequences of Introjection: Gaslighting*	Qualitative	Two couples and two therapist-patient cases	Clinical case reports	Authors discuss unconscious motivations such as mental disorders, control needs, and greed. Family history and psychological effects like insecurity and confusion are highlighted. In one case, therapy helped improve the victim-aggressor relationship.
2	Kutcher (1982)	Canada	*The Gaslight Syndrome*	Qualitative	Two couples	Clinical case reports	Family history and mental disorders are identified as risk factors. In marital contexts, gaslighting is manifested through induced doubt, double-bind communication, and social confirmation.
3	Bashford & Leschzine (2015)	England	*"Gas-Lighting" as a Cause of Fictitious SleepTalking*	Qualitative	One couple	Clinical case report	The perpetrator manipulates physicians about their partner by providing false accounts to achieve financial gain or separation.
4	Sweet (2019)	United States of America	*The Sociology of Gaslighting*	Qualitative	43 women victims of domestic violence	Life-history interviews	Perpetrators exploit gender stereotypes and social inequalities, using strategies like reality distortion, lies, denial, blame, verbal abuse, and isolation attempts.
5	Miano et al. (2021)	Italy	*Personality correlates of gaslighting behaviours in young adults*	Quantitative	250 Italian participants aged 18–30 (*M* = 22.99, *SD* = 3.02); 50.4% female	*Gaslighting experience e Gaslighting behaviours* *Personality Inventory for DSM-5* *Personality Inventory for DSM-5*	Gaslighting behaviors are associated with dysfunctional personality traits in both perpetrators and victims, emphasizing the need for preventive interventions.
6	Graves & Samp (2021)	United States of America	*The power to gaslight*	Quantitative	298 individuals, with a mean age of 19.48 years (*SD* = 1.33), who had been or were currently in romantic relationships; the majority were women (72.5%)	*Dependence power* *Gaslighting*	Individuals with low and high control are more likely to experience gaslighting. The instrument showed preliminary psychometric adequacy.
7	Hassan et al. (2022)	Pakistan	*Adaptation, Translation and Psychometric Properties of Gaslight Questionnaire in Urdu Language*	Quantitative	316 married individuals (67.08% female), aged 18–64 (*M* = 32.47, *SD* = 8.74)	*Gaslight Questionnaire*	The adapted instrument demonstrated validity and reliability in measuring gaslighting among the married Pakistani population.

8	Bhatti et al. (2023)	Pakistan	*Psychometric development and validation of victim gaslighting questionnaire (VGQ): across female sample from Pakistan.*	Quantitative	150 women aged 18–40 (*M* = 23.38, *SD* = 4.03)	*Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire*	The study presented an instrument with adequate preliminary psychometric properties for measuring gaslighting, which may contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon across different contexts.
9	Klein et al. (2023)	Canada	*A Qualitative of Gaslighting in Romantic Relationships*	Qualitative	65 participants aged 18+, with a history of gaslighting in relationships of ≥4 months	Online questionnaire with 15 open-ended questions about experiences with gaslighting	Perpetrators seek to avoid accountability and exert control through verbal abuse, blame, and isolation. Victims report erosion of identity and place high value on ending abusive relationships and fostering healthy dynamics.
10	March et al. (2023)	Australia	*"It's all in your head": Personality Traits and gaslighting tactics in intimate relationships*	Quantitative	315 Australian participants aged between 18 and 82 years (*M* = 42.39, *SD* = 15.6), of whom 62.2% were female, 80.6% identified as heterosexual, and 60.3% were single	*Gaslighting Questionnaire* *Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale* *Brief Pathological Narcissism Inventory* *Two-Dimensional Machiavellianism Scale* *Short Sadistic Impulse Scale* *Intimate Partner Violence Control Scale*	All Dark Tetrad traits were positively associated with greater acceptance of gaslighting behaviors in intimate relationships. These traits were assessed using the Gaslighting Questionnaire, which demonstrated adequate preliminary psychometric properties for measuring the acceptance of gaslighting in intimate contexts, as well as convergent validity with control tactics in intimate partner violence.
11	Hailes & Goodman (2023)	United States of America	*"They're out to take away your sanity": A qualitative investigation of gaslighting in intimate partner violence*	Qualitative	14 victims of gaslighting in the context of intimate partner violence, aged between 19 and 62 years (*M* = 42), including 13 women and 1 individual who identified as non-binary.	Interviews	Gaslighting diminishes victims' self-confidence, undermining decision-making, and empowering partner control. Confidence tends to recover post-relationship.
12	Dickson et al. (2023)	Ireland	*Gaslighting and its application to interpersonal violence*	Quantitative	386 participants (77.2% female), aged 18–72 (*M* = 33.73, *SD* = 13.74)	*Gaslighting Behaviour Questionnaire* *Aggression Questionnaire* *Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse*	Gaslighting was found to be associated with emotional abuse, suggesting it is a form of psychological violence. Additionally, it may be linked to aggressive personality traits. The gaslighting measure used demonstrated adequate preliminary evidence of validity.

13	Bellomare et al. (2024)	Italy	*Gaslighting Exposure During Emerging Adulthood: Personality Traits and Vulnerability Paths*	Quantitative	177 Italians aged 19–26 (*M* = 21.88, *SD* = 1.75); 50.8% female	*Gaslighting behaviours* *Personality Inventory for DSM-5* Italian version	Gaslighting is associated with dysfunctional personality traits. Early recognition of these traits may help prevent aggression in intimate relationships.
14	Tager-Shafrir et al. (2024)	Israel and United States of America	*The gaslighting relationship exposure inventory: Reliability and validity in two cultures*	Quantitative	In Study 1, a total of 509 Israeli participants took part, 50.7% of whom were women, aged between 18 and 70 years (*M* = 41.37, *SD* = 13.77). In Study 2, there were 395 American participants, 54.9% women, aged between 19 and 83 years (*M* = 47.21, *SD* = 15.55). Participants were required to be in a romantic relationship.	*Gaslighting Relationship Exposure Inventory* *Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2)* *Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-7)* *Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ 9)*	The GREI showed strong psychometric properties. Exposure to gaslighting was associated with psychological abuse, higher levels of depression, and poorer relationship quality.

Analyzed Content

Based on the findings of the selected studies, the following categories of analysis were identified: (1) risk factors and predictors of gaslighting, (2) gaslighting tactics or mechanisms, (3) motivations for perpetrating gaslighting, (4) assessment instruments for gaslighting, (5) harm caused to victims of gaslighting, (6) coping strategies adopted by victims of gaslighting, and (7) variables associated with gaslighting. It is important to note that some articles were included in more than one category of analysis, as detailed in Table 2.

Risk factors and predictors of gaslighting. This category includes seven studies that investigated factors influencing the likelihood of perpetrating or experiencing gaslighting. The findings point to antisocial personality traits (e.g., narcissism, Machiavellianism, sadism, psychopathy) as prevalent in both perpetrators and victims (Bellomare et al., 2024; Dickson et al., 2023; March et al., 2023; Miano et al., 2021). Family background is also identified as a relevant factor, with specific mention of a history of intimate partner violence between the victim's parents, parental coldness and rejection, and mental health conditions such as depression in the victim's family (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Kutcher, 1982). Additionally, gender stereotypes and social inequalities are considered mechanisms that facilitate this form of violence (Sweet, 2019).

Gaslighting tactics or mechanisms. This category comprises four studies describing behaviors commonly associated with this form of violence. These include lying, distorting reality, or denying facts, directly accusing the victim of epistemic incompetence, verbal insults, unjustified blame, and attempts to isolate the victim (Bashford & Leschziner, 2015; Klein et al., 2023; Sweet, 2019). Furthermore, tactics such as double-bind communication and social confirmation are also reported (Kutcher, 1982).

Motivations for perpetrating gaslighting. This category encompasses four studies examining the underlying motivations for engaging in gaslighting within intimate relationships. The findings suggest both conscious and unconscious motivations, including mental health issues, a desire to control the partner, greed, as well as efforts to avoid accountability or the consequences of undesirable behavior (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023). Gaslighting may also be driven by financial gain or the intent to provoke a breakup (Bashford & Leschziner, 2015).

Assessment instruments for gaslighting. This category includes five studies focused on the psychometric validation of self-report instruments for assessing gaslighting in intimate relationships. The instruments demonstrated preliminary evidence of adequate validity and reliability, including: the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ; Bhatti et al., 2023), the Gaslight Questionnaire (Stern, 2007),

adapted for the Pakistani population by Hassan et al. (2022), the Gaslighting Behaviour Questionnaire (GBQ; Dickson et al., 2023), the Gaslighting Relationship Exposure Inventory (GREI; Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024), and the Gaslighting Questionnaire (March et al., 2023).

Harm caused to victims of gaslighting. This category includes four studies that detail the psychological consequences experienced by gaslighting victims. Reported harms include feelings of insecurity and confusion about reality (Calef & Weinshel, 1981), reduced sense of identity and increased distrust of others (Klein et al., 2023), significant loss of self-confidence, and difficulties making independent decisions (Hailes & Goodman, 2023). In addition, higher levels of depression and lower relationship quality were observed (Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024). In some cases, after overcoming the violence, victims also reported post-traumatic growth (Klein et al., 2023).

Coping strategies adopted by victims of gaslighting. This category consists of three studies exploring ways in which victims recover from gaslighting. One study highlights the effectiveness of psychotherapy in facilitating significant changes in the victim-aggressor dynamic (Calef & Weinshel, 1981). Other studies emphasize the importance of ending the relationship with the perpetrator as a key strategy to overcome this type of violence and rebuild self-confidence (Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023).

Variables associated with gaslighting. This category comprises four studies investigating the relationship between gaslighting and various psychosocial variables. Findings show associations between gaslighting and interpersonal power dynamics (Graves & Samp, 2021), controlling behaviors in intimate relationships (March et al., 2023), emotional abuse (Dickson et al., 2023), and victimization by intimate partner violence (Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024).

Table 2

Categories of analysis identified from study findings

Category of analysis	Main points discussed
Risk factors and predictors of gaslighting	▪ Antisocial personality traits (Bellomare et al., 2024; Dickson et al., 2023; March et al., 2023; Miano et al., 2021). ▪ Family history of intimate partner violence, parental coldness and rejection, and reports of mental health conditions such as depression (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Kutcher, 1982). ▪ Gender stereotypes and social inequalities (Sweet, 2019).
Gaslighting tactics or mechanisms	▪ Lying, distorting reality or denying facts, directly accusing the victim of epistemic incompetence, verbal insults, unjustified blame, and attempts to isolate the victim (Bashford & Leschziner, 2015; Klein et al., 2023; Sweet, 2019). ▪ Double-bind communication and social confirmation (Kutcher, 1982).
Motivations for perpetrating gaslighting	▪ Mental health disorders, desire to control the partner, greed, and/or avoidance of accountability and consequences of misconduct such as infidelity (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023). ▪ Additional motives, such as financial gain or the intent to end the relationship (Bashford & Leschziner, 2015).
Assessment instruments for gaslighting	▪ Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ; Bhatti et al., 2023). ▪ Gaslight Questionnaire (Stern, 2007), adapted for the Pakistani population by Hassan et al. (2022). ▪ Gaslighting Behaviour Questionnaire (GBQ; Dickson et al., 2023). ▪ Gaslighting Questionnaire (March et al., 2023). ▪ Gaslighting Relationship Exposure Inventory (GREI; Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024).
Harm caused to victims of gaslighting	▪ Feelings of insecurity and confusion about reality (Calef & Weinshel, 1981). ▪ Reduced sense of identity and increased distrust of others (Klein et al., 2023). ▪ Significant loss of self-confidence and difficulty making independent decisions (Hailes & Goodman, 2023). ▪ Higher levels of depression and lower relationship quality (Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024). ▪ Occasionally, post-traumatic growth (Klein et al., 2023).
Coping strategies adopted by victims of gaslighting	▪ Contribution of psychotherapy to changing the victim–aggressor dynamic (Calef & Weinshel, 1981). ▪ Importance of ending relationships with perpetrators of this form of abuse (Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023).
Variables associated with gaslighting	▪ Interpersonal power dynamics (Graves & Samp, 2021). ▪ Controlling behaviors in intimate relationships (March et al., 2023). ▪ Emotional abuse (Dickson et al., 2023). ▪ Victimization by intimate partner violence (Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024).

Discussion

This scoping review analyzed studies on gaslighting in intimate relationships, examining how the scientific literature has addressed the phenomenon. It was observed that the highest number of publications on the topic occurred in 2023, reflecting the recent popularization of the subject, as evidenced by the surge in online searches, which led Merriam-Webster to name "gaslighting" the word of the year in 2022 (Merriam-Webster, 2022). This visibility has drawn the attention of researchers to recent scientific investigations. However, despite the growing interest, the amount of scientific literature on the topic remains limited, indicating the need for further studies (Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024).

In addition, a publication gap of more than three decades was identified, from the early studies in the 1980s until 2015. This gap may be related to shifts in the conceptualization of the phenomenon, which initially involved attempts to convince third parties, especially psychiatrists, of the partner's epistemic incompetence (Barton & Whitehead, 1969; Smith & Sinanan, 1972), but later shifted toward convincing the victim themself of their mental incapacity (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Gass & Nichols, 1988). This change may have been influenced by the closure of psychiatric hospitals in various parts of the world during that period, which made institutionalization less feasible and contributed to a shift in the definition and understanding of gaslighting (Klein et al., 2023).

The analysis also revealed a greater concentration of scientific publications on the topic in the United States, followed by other English-speaking countries such as Canada (Klein et al., 2023; Kutcher, 1982), the United Kingdom (Bashford & Leschziner, 2015; Dickson et al., 2023), and Australia (March et al., 2023). This may be due to the use of the English term to describe the phenomenon and the fact that all identified articles were published in English. However, the borrowing of English terms into other languages, such as Portuguese and Spanish, has been increasing, with words like stalking, cyberstalking, bullying, and gaslighting entering Brazilian vocabulary. This phenomenon is linked to advances in communication technologies and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp), which facilitate the global dissemination of a language (García & Bove, 2022). In light of globalization, the use of an English term should not limit the expansion of knowledge about a phenomenon that occurs in diverse sociocultural contexts.

The content analysis of the reviewed studies revealed the influence of both individual (e.g., gender, personality traits) and social factors (e.g., family history, gender stereotypes, social inequalities) on the perpetration and victimization of gaslighting. Regarding gender, findings suggest that women are predominantly victims and men are predominantly perpetrators of this form of abuse (Bhatti et al., 2023; Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023; Sweet, 2019). However, it is important to note that this understanding may be influenced by the use of convenience samples, which were mostly composed of women. In this direction, some studies suggest that there is no gender difference in gaslighting exposure (Miano et al., 2021), and one recent cross-cultural study found that men may be more likely to experience this type of abuse (Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024).

Researchers have argued that gaslighting is more effective when gender stereotypes and social inequalities are used to manipulate victims' perception of reality (Abramson, 2014; Gass & Nichols, 1988; Sweet, 2019). Discrediting women's judgment with statements like "women are crazy," "overreacting," or "emotionally unstable" has long been a strategy for constructing rationality based on gender and social power. Therefore, this aspect should be considered by scholars when discussing public policies aimed at preventing, educating, and raising awareness about intimate partner violence, specifically gaslighting (Sweet, 2019).

Personality traits have also been identified as important predictors of gaslighting. Studies show that individuals with high levels of antisocial traits are more likely to experience gaslighting, either as victims or perpetrators (Bellomare et al., 2024; March et al., 2023; Miano et al., 2021). These findings align with prior studies showing that dysfunctional personality traits increase the risk of engaging in abusive relationships (Kasowski & Anderson, 2019). Traits such as impulsivity, aggression, emotional coldness, sensation seeking, and antisocial behavior may lead individuals to minimize their own aggressive behavior or deny abusive behavior from their partners (Asen & Fonagy, 2017; Tetreault et al., 2021), thus increasing the likelihood of becoming involved in and maintaining violent relationships.

Family background also appears to influence both victims and perpetrators of gaslighting. Aspects such as exposure to interparental violence, emotional coldness and rejection from caregivers,

and the presence of mental disorders such as depression are highlighted as relevant factors (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Kutcher, 1982). These findings are consistent with evidence suggesting that individuals who grow up in violent or neglectful family environments are more likely to replicate these patterns in their own intimate relationships, mistakenly viewing the perpetration of violence as a conflict resolution strategy (Borges & Dell'Aglio, 2020; Zhu et al., 2023).

In terms of gaslighting tactics, perpetrators commonly employ confusion-based strategies, including lying, distorting reality, denying facts, direct accusations of epistemic incompetence, verbal insults, blame-shifting, and attempts to isolate the victim (Bashford & Leschziner, 2015; Klein et al., 2023; Sweet, 2019), along with double-bind communication and social reinforcement (Kutcher, 1982). These tactics are insidious and difficult to detect. The invisibility of this type of violence makes it especially harmful, as it isolates victims from support and protection, potentially increasing dependence on their abuser. These effects can be as severe, or even more so, than those caused by physical violence (Sweet, 2019).

Regarding the motivations for gaslighting perpetration, early literature characterized this behavior as a conscious manipulation strategy driven primarily by external factors, such as financial gain or the desire to end the relationship (Bashford & Leschziner, 2015). More recent research suggests that perpetrators may not always be fully aware of their motives, which can be emotional or psychopathological in nature, including mental disorders, a need for control, greed, or efforts to avoid accountability for misconduct, such as infidelity (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023).

The consequences of gaslighting span psychological, social, and legal domains. Studies point to serious psychological harm for victims, including feelings of insecurity and confusion about their perception of reality (Calef & Weinshel, 1981), diminished sense of identity and distrust of others (Klein et al., 2023), significant loss of self-confidence, and difficulties in making independent decisions (Hailes & Goodman, 2023). Additional outcomes include increased levels of depression and decreased relationship quality (Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024). These findings are consistent with research on psychological abuse, which shows profound impacts on victims' mental health and well-being, including the development of disorders such as anxiety and depression, along with reduced autonomy due to social isolation. In Brazil, such effects may also have legal implications, since psychological violence is classified as a criminal offense (Brazil, 2021; Capezza et al., 2021; Martínez-González et al., 2021).

Regarding coping strategies adopted by victims of gaslighting, prior research has shown that ending abusive relationships is a crucial step toward recovery (Hailes & Goodman, 2023; Klein et al., 2023). Psychotherapy is identified as a valuable tool, helping victims recognize and respond more effectively to abusive patterns and encouraging them to prioritize healthier relationships (Calef & Weinshel, 1981). Some victims may also experience post-traumatic growth after overcoming the effects of abuse (Klein et al., 2023). These findings are supported by other studies that underscore the importance of therapy and ending abusive partnerships for the well-being of intimate partner violence survivors (Augustin & Bandeira, 2020).

Finally, this review identified associations between gaslighting and various psychosocial constructs, such as interpersonal power dynamics (Graves & Samp, 2021), control tactics in intimate relationships (March et al., 2023), emotional abuse (Dickson et al., 2023), and victimization by intimate partner violence (Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024). These findings suggest the importance of considering both individual and social variables to better understand the phenomenon. Future research should explore previously established associations, such as personality and gender, in diverse contexts and investigate additional constructs such as attitudes and human values, which are important factors in decision-making and social behavior, particularly in the field of social psychology.

Conclusions

Gaslighting in intimate relationships is a complex and increasingly recognized phenomenon, representing a significant social concern. This scoping review provides an overview of how the topic has been investigated to date, addressing the scarcity of such reviews in the literature, particularly in Portuguese. It makes a valuable contribution as the first review to specifically map research on gaslighting within intimate relationships. Previous reviews have focused on other contexts, such as politics, parent–child interactions, and workplace dynamics. The studies included here are relevant to

social psychology, examining the influence of psychosocial factors such as personality traits, gender stereotypes, social inequalities, and family violence history.

Despite the strengths of this review, it is subject to certain limitations: (1) the strict definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria may have led to the omission of studies that, while not meeting all criteria, could still offer important insights into gaslighting in intimate relationships; (2) the choice of descriptors may have excluded relevant studies that addressed gaslighting implicitly or in connection with other forms of psychological abuse. Future reviews should consider broader descriptors, such as "psychological violence" or "emotional abuse," to capture a wider range of related research; (3) the absence of Brazilian samples among the selected studies limits the applicability of findings to the national context; and (4) the predominance of women in the samples may affect the way the phenomenon is understood.

Given these considerations, future research should include cross-cultural studies in non-English-speaking countries to investigate cultural and social differences in perceptions of gaslighting, thereby expanding our understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, it is important to examine how gaslighting has evolved over time and how social changes, such as the rise of social media, have affected its occurrence and the effectiveness of prevention strategies. Researchers should also aim for more diverse samples, including more male participants, to uncover aspects that may have been overlooked in previous studies.

Finally, the legal and political implications of gaslighting deserve attention, particularly in the Brazilian context. Understanding how gaslighting is being addressed in the legal system and its implications for justice may help identify gaps in victim protection and improve public policy. These avenues for future research may deepen the understanding of gaslighting in intimate relationships and strengthen both academic knowledge and strategies for intervention and prevention.

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