

Union of Saints

Abuse-to-Genocide Pathway

1. Abuse in Relationships

Definition: Abuse in relationships can be physical, emotional, psychological, or financial.

How it escalates:

- **Cycle of control:** Abusers isolate, demean, and manipulate their victims. Over time, victims' autonomy and sense of self are eroded.
- **Normalization of harm:** Repeated abuse makes extreme behaviors seem acceptable or inevitable.
- **Micro-genocidal dynamics:** In extreme cases, intimate abuse can involve **dehumanization**, leading to severe physical harm or even killing.

Mechanism:

- **Dehumanization** → victim is seen as “less than” → moral barriers to violence decrease
- **Isolation** → victim has no allies → abuse goes unchecked
- **Escalation** → verbal/psychological abuse → physical abuse → attempted or actual destruction

Example: Severe domestic abuse where repeated dehumanization escalates to murder is a microcosm of genocidal dynamics.

2. Abuse Outside Relationships (Social / Political / Cultural)

Definition: Large-scale abuse of populations through oppression, systemic discrimination, or violence.

How it escalates to genocide:

- **Dehumanization:** Targeted groups are portrayed as inferior, dangerous, or subhuman.
- **Legal and social sanctioning:** Discrimination, exclusion, and scapegoating normalize harm.
- **Incremental violence:** Bullying, harassment, and microaggressions pave the way for mass atrocities.

- **Systematic elimination:** Once dehumanization is entrenched, large-scale physical violence or forced removal becomes possible.

Mechanism:

- Verbal abuse → social exclusion → systemic oppression → organized violence/genocide

Historical Examples:

- Holocaust: Jews and other minorities were dehumanized and blamed for societal problems before mass killings occurred.
- Rwandan Genocide: Tutsis were repeatedly demonized and dehumanized in media before mass slaughter.

3. Common Themes: Abuse to Genocide

Stage	Personal/Relationship Context	Societal Context
Dehumanization	Name-calling, belittling, objectifying partner	Propaganda, slurs, demonizing a group
Isolation	Victim cut off from support	Segregation, social exclusion, limiting allies
Normalization of Harm	Emotional/physical abuse repeated	Discrimination, legal inequalities, social acceptance of violence
Escalation	Threats → physical violence → murder	Harassment → pogroms → mass killings

[Stage 1: Verbal & Emotional Abuse]



[Relationships] Name-calling, belittling, intimidation → Isolation → Loss of autonomy



[Society] Slurs, propaganda, scapegoating → Social exclusion → Group marginalization



[Stage 2: Dehumanization]



[Relationships] Victim seen as "less than," moral barriers drop → escalation to physical abuse



[Society] Targeted groups labeled subhuman → justification for discrimination or violence



[Stage 3: Normalization of Harm]



[Relationships] Emotional abuse → physical abuse → threats → murder



[Society] Discrimination → harassment → systemic oppression → organized violence



[Stage 4: Escalation to Extreme Harm]



[Relationships] Severe injury or death; cycle of abuse persists or spreads



[Society] Pogroms, mass killings, genocide

Key Takeaways

1. Abuse starts small—verbal attacks, ridicule, or microaggressions—but the **psychological mechanisms are the same at personal and societal levels**.
2. **Dehumanization** is the critical link between abuse and extreme harm.
3. **Isolation and normalization** allow abuse to escalate unchecked.
4. **Intervention matters early**—setting boundaries, therapy, and social action can prevent escalation.
5. **Patterns repeat across scales**—understanding relational abuse helps recognize societal risks.