

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF STALKING ON WELLBEING OF WOMEN

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Abstract: Stalking instills fear, can damage self perception, completely disrupt social life and severely affect victim's usual day-to-day tasks. Since the year 2015 the number of cases reported for stalking has risen. Stalking involves a pattern of repetitive and persistent intrusion into victim's life (especially involving a man constantly following a woman) that makes victim fear for her life. Stalking can even involve violence. This study aims to study psychological impact of stalking on well-being of women. A self structured questionnaire containing 23 questions was used on a sample of 100 married and unmarried women in the age group 25-35years from urban and semi-urban regions and a review of 30 prior published studies in the similar area was done. The results showed frustration, embarrassment, self-blame and guilt among victims. The results also showed that in most of the cases the victim of talking had some form of prior relationship with the stalker. No significant difference was seen between responses of married and unmarried women, whereas a significant difference seen between responses of women from urban and semi-urban regions

Key Words: Stalking, women, violence, victims, psychological well-being.

Introduction: In 2013, Indian Parliament made amendments to the Indian Penal Code, introducing stalking as a criminal offence. Stalking has been defined as a man following or contacting a woman, despite clear indication of disinterest by the woman, or monitoring her through the use of the Internet or electronic communication. A man committing the offence of stalking would be liable for imprisonment up to three years for the first offence, and shall also be liable to fine and for any subsequent conviction would be liable for imprisonment up to five years and with fine.

While legal definitions of stalking vary from country to country, the following is a useful general definition: A course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person fear (National Criminal Justice Association, 1993) A precise definition is given by the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), "Stalking refers to repeated harassing or threatening behavior by an individual, such as following a person, appearing at a person's home or place of business, making harassing phone calls, leaving written messages or objects, or vandalizing a person's property". Any unwanted contact between two people that directly or indirectly communicate a threat or place the victim in fear can be considered stalking.

Behaviors associated with stalking include:

- Following victims
- Loitering near victims' homes and workplaces
- Giving gifts
- Sending letters
- Transmitting e-mails
- Making phone calls
- Vandalizing property (car or home, for example)
- Photographing the victims or their families
- Making threats

- Approaching or confronting the victims in public places or near the victims' homes or workplaces
- Physical and/or sexual assaults

Types of Stalkers: In an effort to understand stalkers, researchers have developed typologies based mainly on stalkers' behaviors and motives for stalking. One of the well-known typologies includes three categories of stalkers: **simple obsessional, love obsessional, and erotomaniac (Zona, Sharma, and Lane 1993)**. These categories are based on the relationship between the stalker and the victim, whether real or imaginary.

Stalkers typed as simple obsessional are the most common: This stalker has had a prior relationship with the victim. The relationship in most cases was intimate. On the other hand, stalker and victim may at one time have simply dated for a brief duration or been neighbors, roommates, friends, or professional acquaintances, such as teacher and student or physician and patient.

The second category is love obsessional: In these cases, stalkers and victims do not usually know each other. The victim may be a local or widely known celebrity or just someone upon whom the stalker has fixated. The stalker believes that if he/ she is persistent, the victim will come to realize that he/she really cares for this person. Many of these stalkers suffer from mental illnesses.

The third category is erotomaniac: In these cases, the stalker truly believes that the victim loves him/ her, although they have not had a prior relationship, and indeed have never met. Erotomaniac stalkers also have mental health problems, as they have developed delusions or delusional systems based on the fantasy relationship they hope to have or believe they have with their victims.

The most dangerous stalkers are those classified as simple obsessional, and the least dangerous are those in the erotomaniac category.

Victims of Stalking: The most common victims of stalking are those who have had intimate relationships with their stalkers; most of these victims are female, and most of the perpetrators are male (Mullen et al. 2000). Some victims include casual acquaintances and friends. Other victims of stalking may be at workplaces or in professional capacities, such as physicians, counselors, and lawyers. In these cases, the purpose of the stalking may be because the stalkers have romantic feelings toward the victims, but they can also be because the stalkers feel that they have not been treated fairly by the victims or others in the same environment. For example, in the workplace, if someone receives a promotion that the stalker believes was rightfully his/hers, this could cause resentment and make the chances of threats or physical assault more likely than if the basis of the stalking were infatuation, even though the chances of such cases resulting in violence are extremely low (Mullen et al. 2000). The least common types of stalking involve victims who are strangers. These strangers may be people the stalkers admire from afar who live in their communities or go to the same school. They may also be people whom the stalkers will probably never meet, who are prominent in the community, national affairs, or the entertainment business.

Impact Of Stalking: The impact of stalking may vary according to the victim's characteristics, past experience, current circumstances, and what they know, or don't know, about the stalker. How others respond to the victim's situation, including how the stalking is managed by authorities can influence the overall effect that the stalking episode has on the victim. Despite the complexities that may vary an individual's experience and reaction to being stalked, research has demonstrated common patterns of response. Although female victims usually report greater levels of fear, studies have found that males subjected to stalking experience similar symptoms to those reported by their female counterparts.

The effects of this crime on victims can range from mere annoyance to fear and terror to severe physical injuries and even death. Most victims report that they are emotionally affected (Pathe and Mullen 1997). Victims may also feel anger toward the stalkers and want to retaliate against them for interfering so dramatically in their lives. Victims will often go to great lengths to avoid and discourage stalkers, particularly if the stalking has continued for some time and/or involves someone who has abused them previously. They will often feel a lack of control over their lives as the stalkers' behaviors invade their personal and professional environments (Pathe and

Mullen 2002). Stalkers do not behave in ways that are logical and generally do not respond to efforts to reason with them. Therefore, victims will feel frustrated as their prior methods of dealing with people, even those they want to avoid, do not succeed.

Besides feelings of frustration, anger, and loss of control, victims may also feel guilty and search for how their behavior may have encouraged the stalking. This may be particularly true if the victims had prior dating or intimate relationships with the stalkers, and they may ask themselves if they could have been more firm when they had told the stalkers that they did not want to see them again (de Becker 2002). Other emotions experienced by victims of stalking can include a high level of anxiety as they wonder how the stalkers will contact them the next time, if they will be waiting for them outside their homes or workplaces, and if they will be threatened or physically attacked. This anxiety may affect the victims physically as they lose sleep or weight or experience increases in headaches, nausea, and weakness (Pathe and Mullen 1997). The range of symptoms experienced by victims of stalking may constitute a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as they feel a lack of control over their lives, high levels of anxiety and stress, and profound weariness and make extraordinary and elaborate attempts to avoid the stalkers (Mullen et al. 2000).

Review Of Literature: A recent study led by researchers at Washington and Lee University has concluded that women who are the victims of stalking are two to three times more likely to suffer from psychological distress than those with similar characteristics who have never been stalked.

The study was conducted by Timothy Diette, assistant professor of economics at Washington and Lee, Arthur Goldsmith, the Jackson T. Stephens Professor of Economics at W&L, Darrick Hamilton of New School University, William Darity Jr. of Duke University and Katherine McFarland, a recent W&L graduate. The researchers used data on women drawn from three major surveys that used face-to-face interviews to collect information on potential determinants of mental disorders in the United States. Those surveys were "harmonized" so that they could be merged, resulting in a sample of 8,109 women. The surveys gathered information on the women's experiences throughout their life. According to the study's data, 7.7 percent of women report being stalked by the age of 45. But the study finds that the adverse impact of stalking on mental health is even more pronounced for women who are older when they are first stalked. For instance, women who are between 23 and 29 and who are stalked are 265 percent more likely to have mental health issues

while those who are between 30 and 45 have 138 percent greater odds compared to women who never faced this source of trauma.

An empirical study of stalking victimization (2000): Department of Criminal Justice, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 28223, USA:

The study found that 25% of the women and 11% of the men had been stalked at some point in their lives and that six percent were currently being stalked. Additionally, the study found that the majority of stalking victims are women who are stalked by male offenders. The sample reported being stalked for an average of 347 days and having engaged in a variety of actions in response. A substantial number of victims reported being threatened by their stalkers. This threat was associated with higher levels of fear among the victims and a greater chance of physical attack by the stalkers, particularly for the female victims

Stalking Victimization among College Women and Subsequent Help-Seeking Behaviors

By-Eric R. Buhi MPH, PhD, CHES, Heather Clayton MPH & Heather Hepler Surrency MPH

(Aug 2010)

This study examined the incidence of stalking victimization and subsequent help-seeking behaviors among college women. Participants and Methods: A stratified random sample of college women (N = 391) completed an anonymous Internet-based questionnaire in spring 2006. Results: One-fifth of women reported stalking victimization while enrolled at their current institution. Individuals known by victims, such as the following, were most commonly reported as stalkers: acquaintances (48.7%), classmates (37.2%), and boyfriends or ex-boyfriends (34.6%). Approximately half of the women reporting stalking victimization acknowledged not seeking help from anyone in relation to these incidents. Of those seeking some sort of help, most sought assistance from friends (90.2%), parents (29.3%), residence hall advisors (12.2%), or police (7.3%). Conclusion: Comparing their findings to a national study of college women, the authors report that being watched, followed or spied on, and sent unsolicited emails are stalking behaviors on the rise. They present implications for college health and future directions for research.

The prevalence of stalking: Current data from a German victim survey

By-Deborah F. Hellmann, Sören Kliem

June 5, 2015: This study, as part of a large-scale victim survey, examined the prevalence and nature of stalking in a representative German quota sample (N = 5779). Applying a broad definition of stalking, the lifetime prevalence added up to 15 percent, depending on respondents' age, gender, and immigrant background, as well as household size and relationship status. Conditional inference trees

revealed that gender, relationship status, and household size were key factors in identifying victims of stalking. Offenders mostly committed stalking against the opposite gender. This pertains especially to female (vs. male) victims. In most cases the offender and victim knew each other prior to the stalking. The results are compared with national and international findings. Implications and potential limitations are discussed.

Aim/Objective: This study aims to study the impact of stalking on emotional well-being of women.

Methodology: A self structured questionnaire containing 23 questions is used on a sample of 100 married & unmarried women from urban and semi-urban regions and a review of 30 prior published studies in the similar area was done.

Results: The analysis of 23 questions show frustration, embarrassment, self-blame and guilt among victims. The results also show women feel stronger fear on being alone. The findings also indicate a lack of reporting of the incident by the victims due to lack of knowledge to do the same. A review of 30 prior published studies on the same brought forth a common aspect of stalking i.e. the victim in most of the cases had some form of relationship with the stalker in past. The analysis of the self-structured survey questionnaire on stalking show similar trend.

- More than 75% of women responded that they knew their stalker in some or the other form, e.g. ex-boyfriend, classmate, friend of friend etc.
- 92% of women were not aware before this questionnaire that Stalking is a punishable crime
- Around 60% of women felt fearful, worried, and guilty and blamed themselves for being stalked.
- Almost all of the women believed that to make stalking a punishable crime is a good move by the government.
- More than 70% of the victims didn't think of reporting the incident to the police due to lack of awareness and availability of specific services by the police.
- No significant difference was observed in the responses of married and unmarried women
- A significant difference was observed in the responses of women from urban region and those from semi-urban regions. Women from urban regions faced stalking more than once but felt less fearful, worried and guilty in comparison to women from semi-urban regions.

Discussion: Stalking can be a dangerous crime that affects every aspect of victims' lives. Stalkers vary in terms of why they stalk, whom they stalk, and the danger they represent to their victims. They will use different methods to stalk, and most will not be deterred by attempts at intervention, even by the criminal justice system. Therefore, those in the

criminal justice system, as well as mental health professionals, need to understand these criminals and the effect they can have on their victims

The Results bring forth the need to empower women by generating specific service such as setting up a few help centers and phone line services for reporting stalking incidents.

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