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Victims of Stalking in India: A Study of Girl College Students in Tirunelveli City

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The word 'stalking' was not commonly known in India, until Priyadharshini Mattoo's case (1996) hit the headlines. *Eve teasing*, a colloquial word for gender harassment is popularly known and Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Eve-Teasing Act, 1998 on that was developed after the brutal killing of a girl named Sarika Shah in Chennai. Though, stalking is there in the past, it was not acknowledged with this terminology and it was always merged with *Eve teasing*. On the other hand, *stalking* is much graver than *Eve teasing* and it is an obsessive behaviour. After the Mattoo's case, the Indian Criminal Justice System awoke and the National Commission for Women is ready with a draft Bill (*Sexual Assault Prevention Bill*) to make the Indian Penal Code more effective against the menace of stalkers. Research studies related to stalking in India are sparse and there is a need to study this phenomenon in depth. This paper presents some results from a study of stalking victims among Girl College students at Tirunelveli City, Tamil Nadu, India. In-depth questionnaire data are drawn on to investigate the course and nature of prolonged stalking in 150 self-defined victims. Findings indicate a pattern of repeated intrusions, the stalking harassment methods, lack of reporting behaviour, and effects of stalking on the victims.

Keywords: *Stalking; Girl Students; Victimization; Eve Teasing; Sexual Harassment; Victims*

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Introduction

Stalking creates uncertainty, instills fear, and can completely disrupt lives. It can involve severe—even lethal—violence. Stalking involves a pattern of overtly criminal and/or apparently innocent behaviour that makes victims fear for themselves or others. Stalking is distinguishable from many other types of crime in two important ways. First, it entails repeat victimization of a person the offender targets—it is, by its very nature, a series of acts, rather than a single incident. Second, it is partly defined by its impact on the victim (NCVC, 2004).

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 behaviour 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.

There is no Indian definition of stalking, as only after the Mattoo's case stalking has gained significance. On January 23, 1996, the law student (Priyadharshini Mattoo) was found dead in the bedroom of her parents' South Delhi apartment. A year before her death, Mattoo had lodged a complaint with the police about a Delhi University law student who had been stalking her. The stalker was later charged with raping and murdering her, but was acquitted by a

lower court for lack of evidence. However, the High court in 2006 sentenced him to death. Based on this case, the National Commission for Women (NCW) is ready with a draft Bill to make the Indian Penal Code (IPC) more effective against the menace of stalkers (Sarkar, 2005).

It is pertinent to utilize the proposed definition on stalking prepared by the NCW, which is stated to be an amendment to the IPC, as a new section. "Any person who stalks a woman with the intention to cause (a) serious harm or injury to that woman or a third person or (b) apprehension or fear of serious harm or injury to that woman or to a third person shall be punished with imprisonment... or with fine or with both." A stalker can be imprisoned for a period of up to seven years as per the Sexual Assault Prevention Bill prepared by the NCW (Sarkar, 2005) However, it should be noted that this definition does not include men, though men are stalked. To ensure that the law is not abused, the proposed Bill goes on to explain what constitutes stalking. It says that a stalker is a person who has, at least on three occasions, followed or approached a woman, loitered near her, or watched her while she entered a place where she lived, worked or visited. It also says that a stalker is one who keeps a woman under surveillance or interferes with her property. He gives or sends her offensive material, or places offensive material where it is likely to catch her attention. The stalker telephones or contacts a woman or "acts covertly in a manner that could reasonably be expected to arouse apprehension or fear in the woman or engages in conduct amounting to intimidation, or an offence under Section 509" of the Indian Penal Code (Sarkar, 2005).

There have been a number of western empirical investigations into stalking (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998; NCVS, 2004; Morris et.al, 2002; Mills, 1998; Budd, Mattinson and Myhill 2000; Burgess et al. 1997; Coleman 1997; Kurt 1995; Mechanic, Weaver and Resick 2000; McFarlane et al. 1999; Walker and Meloy 1998; Budd, Mattinson and Myhill 2000; Fremouw, Westrup and Pennypacker 1997; Geberth 1992; Meloy 1998; Pathé and Mullen 1997; Hills and Taplin 1998; Spitzberg, Nicastro and Cousins 1998; Logan, Leukefeld and Walker 2000; Hills and Taplin 1998; Budd, Mattinson and Myhill 2000; Harmon, Rosner and Owens 1995; Meloy and Gothard 1995; Mullen and Pathé 1994; National Institute of Justice 1997; Schwartz-Watts and Morgan 1998; Zona,

Sharma and Lane 1993), which have revealed a variety of demographic data concerning the characteristics of both stalking offenders and stalking victims, based upon a variety of research samples.

Even though, we find lots of studies or analysis of stalking in many countries, still there are some lacunae in the empirical nature of studies on stalking in India. There are many studies from Indian context on Eve teasing and sexual harassment; however, there are no studies in stalking, prior to this study. The present study is a pioneering micro level analysis which aims to analyse the nature and extent of stalking of Girl College students.

Methodology

Objectives of the study

- To analyse the nature and extent of stalking victimization among girl college students
- To assess the stalkers relationship with the victims and the stalker harassment methods
- To examine the responses and support for victims of stalking
- To examine the impact of victimization

Research Questions

1. What is the nature and extent of stalking victimization?
2. Whether the victims have awareness of stalking?
3. What is the perception of victims towards stalking?
4. What are the causes of stalking?
5. What is the relationship of stalker with the victim?
6. What is the frequency of meeting of stalker with the victim?
7. What are the methods of stalking harassment?
8. What are support mechanisms that helped the victims?
9. What are the effects of stalking on the victims?
10. What are the social and financial consequences of stalking on the victims?
11. What are the coping strategies taken by the Victims?

Universe, Sampling and Research Tool

The aim of this study was to gather as much information as possible about the nature and extent

of stalking of college students. The universe of the study is Tirunelveli City, Tamil Nadu, India. Purposive (Quota) sampling method was adopted to choose the sample for this study. Only respondents who identified themselves as victims of stalking were chosen for this study (The researchers conducted a meeting of all college students and only who volunteered as victims were included in this study) The study was conducted in selected 10 colleges including Arts, Science, Medicine and Engineering colleges in Tirunelveli City, Tamil Nadu. A total of 150 respondents were selected for this study. A questionnaire constructed by The Network for Surviving Stalking (NSS) (2004) in their website <http://www.nss.org.uk> was utilised in this study. Certain questions were modified and questions related to stalking were reconstructed by the researcher to the needs of Indian situation and was used to elicit the required data pertaining to the present study.

The research tool consisted 35 items pertaining to the objectives of the study. The tool was divided into 4 parts. Part 1 had items relating socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. Part 2 of the tool had items relating about stalking and stalkers. Part 3 had items relating to responses and support for victims of stalking/harassment. Part 4 of the tool had items relating to effects of stalking. The research tool was prepared in the vernacular language (Tamil) and later the answers were translated in English for the preparation of the final results. The data were input by the researcher, using SPSS (version 11) software, and were rigorously and extensively checked for inputting errors. All entered cases were re-checked for accuracy. Descriptive statistics were obtained for all the questions.

Limitations

In common with the investigations cited in the introduction, all samples are non-random and as such generalisations to other survey results cannot be made. Nor can generalisations be made to the entire population of victims of stalking. An unknown number of individuals may not define themselves as stalking victims, or if they do so, they may be unwilling to come forward and speak openly about their experiences. This study is the first of its kind conducted in the Tamil Nadu, with a larger sample size and as such it provides a starting point for others wishing to carry out exploratory studies into stalking and harassment. The scope of the study is limited

only to specific Colleges of Tirunelveli City, Tamil Nadu, India. In future researches, a detailed analysis of the entire Tamil Nadu will be undertaken and this also opens the scope for further research in the Indian Context.

Results and Discussion

Socio Economic Characteristics

Table 1 Socio-economic Characteristics of the Victims

Socio-economic Characteristics	N	%
Educational background		
Arts	59	39.3
Science	41	27.3
Engineering	25	16.7
Medicine	25	16.7
Economic background		
High	19	12.7
Middle	113	75.3
Low	18	12.0

The above table (1) explains the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents such as education and economic background. Arts students, around 39.3% represented the majority of the sample size. 75.3% of the respondents belong to middle income group.

Stalking

Table 2. About Stalking

About Stalking	N	%
Perceptions of Stalking		
Don't know anything	65	43.3
Only happen to others	31	20.7
Severe harassment problem	38	25.3
Mentally sick people	21	14.0
Still being Stalked		
Yes	43	28.7
No	85	56.6
Don't Know	22	14.7
End of Stalking		

Police warning	29	19.3
Conviction	10	6.7
Stalker imprisoned	11	7.3
Warn by others	37	24.7
Got someone to stalk	3	2.0
Just stopped	36	24.0
Don't know	24	16.0
Cause of Stalking		
End of a relationship	23	15.3
Rejection	37	24.7
No cause	90	61.0

Most victims (43.3%) said they had not heard of 'stalking' prior to their own victimization. 25.3% (n=38) believed it to be a severe harassment problem and a small percent (14%) felt that only the mentally ill stalked. 28.7% of the respondents felt that they are still stalked. However, half of the samples felt that they are not stalked at the present. Even though the majority of the victims did not report their victimization to the police a small percentage (19.3% n=21) felt that police warning stopped the stalking. Warning by others has also worked (24.7% n=37) and the stalking has also just stopped without any reason (24% n=36) Majority of the respondents (61% n=90) felt that there was no cause for stalking, on the other hand some of the respondents (24.7% n=37) felt that because they have rejected the stalker, they were stalked and also some respondents (15.3%) felt that because of an end of relationship with their lover, he started stalking.

Stalker

Table 3. About the Stalker

Relationship with the stalker	N	%
Friend	20	13.3
Relative	27	18.0
Unknown	103	68.7
Frequency of Contact with the Stalker		
Once per day or more	55	36.6
More than three times per week	18	12.0
Once per week	31	20.7

Once per month	16	10.7
Less than once each month	30	20.0

Only a minimal amount of sample had a prior intimate relationship with the person who became their stalker. A further 13.3% of the respondents had some prior acquaintance with the stalker, e.g. the stalker was a friend or a neighbour. Around 68.7% (a majority of the victims) felt that their stalkers were strangers. One in 10 stalkers began their campaigns as total strangers to the victim. This underlines the fact that virtually anyone can become the victim of a stalker, and stalkers can be found in most social situations. The victims met their stalkers mostly once per day (36.6% n=55) This finding brings out the significance of stalking in this rural set up.

Stalker Harassment Methods

Table 4. Stalker Harassment Methods

Harassment methods	N	%
Follow	83	55.3
Unsolicited letters	34	22.7
Unsolicited phone calls	46	30.7
Unsolicited emails	20	13.3
Communication	18	12.0
Photograph	7	4.7
Abuse parents	6	4.0
Harm parents	4	2.7
Destroy home	7	4.7
Destroy love	5	3.3
Harass friends	13	8.7
Physical assault	2	1.3
Threaten to physical assault	1	.7
Sexual assault	0	0
Threaten to sexual assault	0	0
Broke home	2	1.3
Visited home	10	6.7
Spied on you	17	11.3
Stood outside home	21	14.0
Stood outside college	19	12.7
Send presents	22	14.7
Spread rumours	11	7.3
Cyber Stalking (Internet)	20	13.3

The 'top five' stalking harassment methods were: Following (reported by 55.3% of victims), unsolicited telephone calls (30.7%), Spying 11.3% (including stood outside home 14%, stood outside college 12.7%), unsolicited letters (22.7%) and trying to communicate with the victim (17.4%) These results corroborate with most of the studies as they showed that the most common harassment methods were being watched, followed and telephoned (Sheridan et.al, 2001) Cyber Stalking is not seen as a major phenomenon in this study. As the respondents were from a rural back ground, cyber stalking may not have been highlighted, because the usage of internet is comparatively less by the rural population. Sexual assault was not found in this study as a harassment method. Still less common methods included standing outside home, college and defamation of character, spreading rumours etc. Typically, stalkers will employ a diverse range of tactics and will only very rarely engage in a single stalking activity.

Victim's Response to the Stalker

Table 5. Victim's response to the stalker

Victim's response to the stalker	N	%
No reply	82	54.7
Telephone	18	12.0
e-mail	10	6.7
Letter	7	4.7
Confront	10	6.7
Threaten	12	8.0
Attack	2	1.3
Asked him to leave	13	8.7
Asked what he is doing	10	6.7
Moment of victim's response	N	%
At the start	99	66.0
In between	25	16.7
After many incidents	26	17.3
Response to the stalker		
Helped	25	16.7
Made things worse	25	16.7
Had no effect	45	30.0
Unsure	55	36.7

Half of the respondents (54.7) did not respond to the stalker. This may be due to fear of attack and social stigma. However, the other half (around 45-50%) of the victims responded. It should be noted the response rate is good among the victims who have responded. Nearly 66% (n=99) of the victims who have responded have responded at the starting of the stalking. 16.7 % of the victims were unsure whether their response helped them. 30% (n=45) felt that their response had no effect on the stalker and only a marginal 16.7% felt that their response helped them.

Support for victims of stalking/harassment

Table 6. Support for the victims

Reporting behaviour	N	%
No	108	72.0
Police	35	23.3
Doctor	3	2.0
NGO	1	.7
Lawyer	3	2.0
Other people response	N	%
No reply	54	36.0
Telephone	18	12.0
e-mail	7	4.7
Letter	7	4.7
Confront	8	5.3
Threaten	51	34.0
Attack	6	4.0
Asked him to leave	3	2.0
Doing	7	4.7
Persons who responded on behalf of the victim	N	%
Brother	30	20.0
Father	14	9.3
Best friend	106	70.7
Impact of Others response	N	%
Helped	82	54.7
Made things worse	13	8.7
Had no effect	21	14.0
unsure	34	22.7

The reporting behaviour of the victims is very poor. 72% of the victims did not report their victimization to police (*However, 23% reporting in rural setup is good*) or to their parents. They have only confided to their best friends (70.7%) and they have responded on behalf of the victim to the stalker asked their help. 9.3 percent of the victims confided with their father and they responded to the stalker on behalf of the victim. It should be noted that, more than half (54.7 %) of the victims have felt that the response from friends and parents helped them. The victim reporting behaviour is higher in western countries and in India the reporting behaviour is lesser. Because of the lack of reporting, the support systems though available were not able to help the victims.

Effects of Stalking

Table 7. Effects of Stalking

Physical effects	N	%
No physical effect	68	45.3
Weight changes	12	8.0
Loss of appetite	5	3.3
Sleep disturbance	35	23.3
Head ache	42	28.0
Tiredness	11	7.3
Vomiting	1	.7
Weakness	13	8.7
Self harm	4	2.7
injuries	0	0
Panic attack	5	3.3
Emotional effects		
No emotional effect	50	33.3
Suicidal thought	3	2.0
Suicide attempt	5	3.3
Depression	33	22.0
anxiety	10	6.7
Anger	39	26.0
Confusion	32	21.3
Fear	29	19.3
Increased distrust	4	2.7
Aggression	6	4.0
Paranoia	2	1.3
Irritation	27	18.0

Stalking's impact is often wide-ranging, severe, and psychologically traumatic. Many victims feel constantly on alert, vulnerable, out of control, stressed, and anxious. Dealing with stalking can consume all their energy. They may experience a loss of trust, long-term emotional distress, and significant disruption of everyday living. As far as physical impact is concerned half (50%) of the respondents did not have any impact. Half (50%) others had physical impact and 70% of the respondents felt. Anger as an emotional effect of stalking topped with 19.3%.

Social and financial consequences

Table 8. Social and financial consequences

Social and financial consequences	N	%
Change course of study	21	14.0
Move home	25	16.7
Social activities	29	19.3
Give up	9	6.0
Forced to see less friends/family	13	8.7
Lost friends/Family	34	22.7
Change phone number	19	12.7
Changed email	18	12.0
Changed vehicle	5	3.3
Changed Identity	43	28.7
Relationship Break up	2	1.3
Expenses	1	.7
Therapy	5	3.3
Legal advice	21	14.0

Stalking can also trigger a wide variety of behavioural reactions. Many victims take steps to avoid being followed and spied on. They alter their normal routines, avoid going out alone, and give up leisure activities. To protect themselves, they may screen all telephone calls (at home and work) and change their telephone number, email and postal addresses. More drastic action may include temporary or permanent relocation. They may move to another place or try to change their identity, leaving behind close friends and relatives, and abandoning their courses. In the present study, a majority of victims (28.7% n=94) had changed their identity. Around 16.7% changed their homes. Psychological counselling

and legal advice is still not the fort of the victims. In India, people become closed when it comes to such victimization and don't disclose it to others. There are instances of changing phone numbers (12.7%) and 14% of the victims had gone for legal advice. Also the victims (19.3% n=29) become aloof and not participated in social activities.

Coping strategies of Victims

Table 9. Coping Strategies of Victims

Methods	N	%
Contact with friends	73	48.7
Medicine	15	10.0
Alternative therapies	14	9.3
Changed their Routine	91	60.7
Carried Weapon	14	9.3
Psychologist	12	8.0
Over all Stalking has made	N	%
Stronger person	88	58.7
Personality	66	44.0
Approach	50	33.3
Change priority	46	30.7
Trust	22	14.7

60.7% of the respondents changed their routine to cope with stalking. 48.7% of the respondents made contact with their friends as a coping mechanism. Taking medicine and visiting psychologist was less in number. Overall stalking made the victims a stronger person (58.7% n=88) Around 44% (n=66) of the respondents felt that their personality is changed. However, because of stalking, some of the victims have lost trust in people (14.7%, n=22).

Conclusion

This investigation has revealed perturbing insight into the experiences of stalking victims and has provided preliminary answers to some of the questions set in the introduction. Although stalking has a nebulous quality in that it often involves no more than the targeted repetition of ostensibly ordinary behaviours, most of the victims surveyed in this study reported shared experiences. The 'top five' stalking harassment methods were: following (reported by 55.3% of victims), unsolicited telephone

calls (30.7%), spying 11.3% (including stood outside home 14%, stood outside college 12.7%), unsolicited letters (22.7%) and trying to communicate with the victim (17.4%) Thus, it may be surmised that a 'typical' case of stalking would share these features. Another perhaps expected finding was that the lack of reporting behaviour among the victims. Majority of the victims did not report their victimization to police or parents. Unless the victims report, it would be impossible for the support mechanisms to help them. Awareness among the victims is found to be the palliative remedy to this problem. Prior to this study, empirical data on the prevalence and characteristics of stalking in the general population were virtually nonexistent in India. Therefore, information provided in this paper can help inform policy and interventions directed at stalking. The implementation of the proposed bill of National Commission for Women on stalking is the need of the hour.

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**Žrtve proganjanja u Indiji: Studija
sprovedena na uzorku studentkinja
ženskog koledža u gradu Tirunelveliju**

Reč "stalking" (proganjanje) gotovo da nije bila poznata u Indiji pre nego što je slučaj Priyadharshini Mattoo (1996) preplavio medije. Široko je poznat kolokvijalni izraz za uznemiravanje na rodnoj osnovi, "zadirkivanje Eve" (Eve teasing) odnosno dobacivanje, a Zakon države Tamil Nadu o zabrani dobacivanja iz 1998. godine donet je nakon brutalnog ubistva devojke po imenu Sarika Shah u Chennaiju. Tako, u prošlosti, "stalking" nije bio prepoznat kao takav, već se uvek svodio na dobacivanje. S druge strane, "stalking" je daleko teži od dobacivanja i predstavlja opsesivno ponašanje. Nakon slučaja Mattoo, indijski krivičnopravni sistem se "razbudio", a Nacionalna komisija za žene je pripremila Nacrt zakona o sprečavanju seksualnog nasilja, kako bi se indijski Krivični zakonik učinio efikasnijim u borbi protiv proganjanja. Istraživačke studije o proganjanju u Indiji su malobrojne i postoji potreba da se ova pojava podrobno istraži. Ovaj rad predstavlja neke rezultate istraživanja žrtava proganjanja – studentkinja koledža u gradu Tirunelveliju u indijskoj državi Tamil Nadu. Podaci su prikupljeni putem detaljnog

upitnika načinjenog u cilju ispitivanja toka i prirode prolongiranog proganjanja kod 150 ispitanica koje su se deklarirale kao žrtve. Rezultati ukazuju na obrazac ponovljenih nasrtaja, metode uznemiravanja kod proganjanja, neprijavlivanje, kao i posledice koje proganjanje ostavlja na žrtve.

Mada proganjanje karakteriše izvesna neodređenost u smislu da on često uključuje ne više od neuobičajenog ponavljanja uobičajenih ponašanja, najveći broj žrtava uključenih u ovu studiju prijavilo je slična iskustva. Najčešćih pet metoda uznemiravanja pri proganjanju bili su: praćenje (koje je prijavilo 55,3% žrtava), neželjeni telefonski pozivi (30,7%), uhođenje (11,3%), neželjena pisma (22,7%) i pokušaji da se uspostavi komunikacija sa žrtvom (17,4%) Može se, dakle, zaključiti da 'tipični' slučaj proganjanja uključuje ove komponente. Drugi nalaz, možda očekivani, odnosi se na nisku stopu prijavljivanja proganjanja: većina žrtava nije prijavila svoju viktimizaciju policiji ili svojim roditeljima.

Budući da, pre ove studije, empirijske evidencije o rasprostranjenosti i karakteristikama proganjanja u opštoj populaciji u Indiji praktično nisu ni postojale, prezentovane informacije se mogu smatrati posebno značajnim za izgradnju politika i intervencija usmerenih na sprečavanje proganjanja u ovoj zemlji.

Ključne reči: proganjanje, studentkinje, viktimizacija, dobacivanje, seksualno uznemiravanje, žrtve