

## Stalking Behavior: Socio-Psychological Factors and Psychological Impacts on Victims

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### Abstract

Stalking is a growing social and psychological issue, which involves the constant and unwanted behavior of certain people with a tendency to result into fear, stress, and significant psychological damage. The current research studies stalking with a social-psychological perspective and the focus is made on the negative outcomes that are imposed by victims. The conceptualization of criminal harassment is a deviant behavior that is regulated to adhere to existing social norms, power structure, and individual psychological characteristics of the person.

This study used a quantitative research design to explain the relationship between stalking and its psychological implications. The data collection involved the usage of a structured questionnaire that included a Likert-type scale that was aimed at registering both an individual experience of stalking and the aftermath of such experience in terms of its impact on the mental health and the social functioning of victims. The Statistical Package of the Social Sciences ( SPSS) was used to carry out the statistical analysis using both the descriptive and inferential methods to reveal the patterns and relationships. The results indicated that stalking has a huge negative effect on the psychological health of the victims, which includes anxiety, fear, psychological distress, sleep disturbance, and social isolation. The paper also highlights the importance of social-psychological factors e.g. the societal acceptance of bullying and decline in informal social control in perpetuating the acts of bullying. These findings shed light on the necessity to consider stalking as a serious psychosocial and mental health problem that has implications in the support of the victim, community education, and preventive measures. Pearson correlation, as a form of inferential analyses, was applied in order to test the association between stalking and psychological impacts that were experienced by victims.

**Keywords:** Stalking behavior; Socio-psychological factors; Psychological impact; Victimization; Mental health; Deviant behavior

### Introduction

Stalking is an extensive social and psychological condition, which is a repetition of undesirable and intrusive behaviors towards a person. This behavior includes long-term stalking, unwanted contact and other types of intrusions that are often accompanied by fear and emotional distress in the victim. Although in the past it has been classified as a minor or even non-criminal offense, modern literature is slowly recognizing stalking as a deviant behavior that has deep psychological and sociocultural implication.

Under the social psychology perspective, bullying is influenced by the normative social contingencies, power relations and social interactional patterns. Where harassment is accepted or poorly dealt with, the action can be accepted or ignored, thus allowing it to continue. Saliency motivators of bullying also include psychological factors including obsessive preoccupations, a need to control, jealousy, and affectionate dependency. Bullying victims generally suffer serious psychological consequences, such as anxiety, depression, fear, sleeping problems, and isolation. With long-term exposure to bullying, it may disrupt the daily routine, worsen the quality of life, and trigger chronic mental-health issues. Social effects include isolation, loss of interpersonal trust, and dysfunctional performance both in education and professional situations.

Despite the number of literature studies available on the subject of bullying behavior and victimization, the literature has been deficient in empirical studies that focus on the socio-psychological aspects of bullying and psychological effects of bullying on victims in low- and middle-income countries. Cultural values, lack of legal protection implementation, and victim stigmatization can harm and hinder reporting.

The current research aims at analyzing stalking in terms of the social-psychological perspective and assessing its psychological impact on victims using a quantitative approach to research. With the help of the combination of criminological and mental-health approaches, the proposed study will help shed light on the social and psychological aspects of stalking and offer effective prevention and supportive interventions to the group of victims.

### **Literature Review**

The stalking phenomenon is common knowledge within both criminological and psychological research as a set of recurrent, uninvited invasions that cause great damage to the victim. Academics conceptualize stalking as behavioural pattern that is characterised by perseverance, obsession and control with often motivation by emotional attachment, jealousy and hunger to dominate. It has been empirically noted that harassment can be a process that lasts long and not a one-time event with the propensity to escalate with time in the case of failure to intervene.

In the context of social psychology, the social norms, gendered expectations, and power relations influence bullying. In many societies, such practices as the continuous surveillance, surveillance, and record of intrusion are usually considered as the norm or are minimized, thus enabling the continuance of harassment without social or legal justice. The Social Learning Theory asserts that the individuals can develop persecutory behavior when this action is accepted or indirectly reinforced in their social environment. Psychological investigation has over and over again highlighted the far reaching negative impact of stalking on the psychological health of the victims. The manifestations of anxiety, fear, depressive symptoms, emotional volatility, and sleeping disturbances are frequent complaints of victims. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, a lack of self-esteem, and a lack of social functioning are related to persistent victimisation. Fears about further persecution often cause the alteration of everyday activities, the limitation of social interactions, and the absence of social relations.

Empirical research also indicates that victimisation is a phenomenon with ill-repercussions on the wellbeing of the society. Victims can be socially isolated, distrusting and have difficulties with being able to maintain academic or occupational performance. The mental burden of bullying may continue even after the end of open aggression, which indicates long-term mental health effects.

Despite increased awareness, the existing scholarship on bullying majorly focuses on Western settings. There is a lack of quantitative data in developing countries; in addition, the attitudes, prejudices against people, and poor reporting systems are deeply rooted in cultures and contribute to the suffering of the victims and underreporting. Indirectly, there is an urgent necessity of empirical studies combining social-psychological theoretical perspectives with evaluations of

psychological performance. The current paper aims to address the above gaps by investigating stalking as a social-psychological construct and reviewing its psychological consequences to the victims systematically. The combination of social and psychological perspectives will promote a more detailed vision of stalking and the related outcomes.

### **Research Gap**

Although stalking is now recognized as a serious form of victimization, existing research has mainly focused on legal definitions, prevalence, and gender aspects, leaving significant gaps in our understanding of the underlying behavioral mechanisms. In Pakistan, there is a significant lack of research examining stalking from a criminological and social psychological lens, focusing on how cultural norms, power relations, and social expectations shape stalking behavior and victim responses. Furthermore, previous research has not adequately investigated the role of digital technology and social media in facilitating stalking. The rapid expansion of online platforms has transformed harassment from primarily physical acts to a hybrid phenomenon that includes cyber harassment, online surveillance, and persistent digital communication. However, empirical studies conducted in Pakistan rarely distinguish between offline and online harassment or assess their combined psychological impact on victims.

Another major gap is the limited consideration of institutional and systemic responses to harassment. Few studies have assessed victims' willingness to report incidents of stalking, trust in law enforcement, or perceived effectiveness of legal protection. The absence of such analysis limits the development of victim-centered policies and evidence-based prevention strategies. Consequently, there is a pressing need for quantitative, context-specific research that integrates socio-psychological factors, technological dimensions, and institutional responses to provide a comprehensive understanding of stalking behavior and its consequences in Pakistan.

### **Methodology**

This study used a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between stalking behavior and its psychological impact on victims. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire administered to respondents living in the selected areas. This questionnaire was developed using a Likert scale to measure perceptions of domestic violence and its impact on neighborhood safety, social relations, and community harmony. Non-probability sampling techniques were used to select participants based on their suitability to the research situation. Data collection was conducted within a limited time frame, and respondents participated voluntarily with guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics, and inferential techniques were used to examine the relationship between domestic violence and neighborhood outcomes. Pearson correlation analysis was used to statistically examine the relationship between stalking and the psychological impact on the victim.

### **Findings**

The results of this study are based on quantitative data analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The results indicate that stalking has a significant negative impact on the psychological well-being of victims. Respondents who reported frequent harassment also reported higher levels of fear, anxiety, and psychological distress.

The analysis showed that bullying behavior is closely associated with psychological symptoms such as stress, sleep disturbances, depression, and persistent anxiety. Victims reported changes in daily life, avoidance of public places, and decreased social interactions in response to their harassment experience. These behavioral changes reflect the severe psychological strain imposed

by constant unwanted attention. The results also suggest that social psychological factors, including social tolerance of stalking and lack of effective informal social control, contribute to the persistence of stalking. Victims often felt unsupported or misunderstood in their social environment, which increased their psychological distress. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between stalking and the psychological impact on the victim. The results revealed statistically significant relationships between the study variables. Overall, the results show that stalking is not a minor social problem, but a serious form of deviant behavior with long-term psychological consequences for victims.

### **Pearson Correlation between Stalking Behavior and Psychological Impacts**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Psychological Impacts</b>
Stalking Behavior	<b>0.49**</b>
Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>0.002</b>
N	49

Note. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between stalking and psychological impact on the victim ( $r = 0.49$ ,  $p$

### **Discussion**

The results of this study highlighted that stalking is a serious socio-psychological problem that has serious psychological effects on victims. The strong association between stalking and psychological distress supports existing psychological literature that identifies sustained unwanted attention as a major cause of anxiety, fear, and emotional instability. These results show that bullying goes beyond short-term harm and creates long-term psychological vulnerability. The statistically significant results obtained through Pearson correlation analysis strengthen the empirical support of the research findings. From a social psychology perspective, this result suggests that low social tolerance for bullying and low informal social control play an important role in the persistence of bullying. When harassment is normalized or minimized on social media, perpetrators are encouraged to continue the behavior, while victims may be discouraged from seeking help. This is consistent with social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of social reinforcement in shaping deviant behavior.

Psychological effects such as depression, sleep disturbances, and social isolation reported by victims are consistent with trauma-related research. Constant fear and hypervigilance interfere with the victim's daily activities and limit their participation in society. The findings also show how harassment affects victims' feelings of safety and independence, forcing them to change their daily habits and restricting their personal freedom. Overall, this discussion reinforces the need to recognize stalking as a form of psychological violence that has serious effects on mental health. For effective prevention and intervention strategies, it is essential to consider both the social conditions that foster harassment and the psychological damage caused to victims.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated stalking as a social-psychological phenomenon and used a quantitative research approach to assess its psychological impact on victims. The findings provide clear evidence that stalking is associated with significant psychological harm, including anxiety, fear, psychological distress, depression, and social withdrawal. The findings highlight that stalking is not a trivial or harmless behavior, but a serious form of deviant behavior that harms victims' mental well-being and sense of safety. Socio-psychological factors, such as social tolerance of bullying and low informal social control, contribute to the persistence of bullying and increase its negative

impact on victims. Pearson correlation results confirmed a statistically significant association between stalking and adverse psychological outcomes.

This study contributes to the criminological and mental health literature by highlighting both the social and psychological aspects of stalking. Recognizing stalking as a serious social and psychological problem is essential to developing effective strategies for prevention, awareness and support for victims.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have important implications for mental health professionals, law enforcement, and policy makers. From a practical perspective, the significant psychological impact that harassment has on victims highlights the need for early detection, counseling services and victim support mechanisms. Mental health workers must be trained to recognize the trauma associated with stalking and provide appropriate psychological interventions to reduce long-term harm.

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the need to create stronger legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to combat harassment. Awareness campaigns and educational programs should be conducted to challenge social norms that condone harassment and persecution. Law enforcement agencies must adopt a victim-centered approach to ensure timely reporting of harassment and protection and support for those who are being harassed.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Despite its contributions, several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, this study used a quantitative cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between stalking and its psychological effects. Second, the data were collected over a limited period of time, which may have limited the sample size and depth of responses.

This study relies on self-report data and may be affected by recall bias and social desirability bias, especially given the sensitive nature of the victims. Cultural biases and fear of retaliation may also influence participants' willingness to reliably report harassment experiences. Furthermore, this study focused only on the victim's perspective and did not include the offender's or institution's perspective. Future research should consider longitudinal and mixed methods approaches to examine the long-term psychological effects of victimization and change over time. The inclusion of qualitative interviews provides deeper insight into the lived experiences of victims. Expanding research to include diverse populations and institutional perspectives such as law enforcement and support services will further improve understanding and intervention strategies.

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