



Cyber Stalking: Sociological and Psychological Perspective

Zainab Bibi | Management Training Officer (MTO), Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA). Email: zainab.llmhr1294iiu.edu.pk
(Corresponding Author)

Ambreen Abbasi | Assistant Professor, Faculty of Shariah and Law, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan.

Abstract: *Cyber stalking is the intimidation or threat to cause distress by blackmailing through internet. Cyberstalking is considered to be a threat to the right to privacy while abusing freedom of information. To discuss the subject issue author has used empirical study methodology. The first part provides an explanation of cyberstalking in detail while discussing its factors, classification and impacts. In the second part, while discussing the impacts of cyberstalking, then further discussion provides glimpses of sociological and psychological perspectives and causes of cyberstalking. Finally, the discussion concluded with recommendations intended to provide a way forward for future research.*

Key Words: Cyber, Freedom, Information, Internet, Stalking

Introduction

The 21st century is inundated with information technology, and the usage of modern technologies has also increased with each passing day. Information technology has widened its usage throughout the world, and it has become the axis of today's development globally, technological enhancement and business growth. With the uninterrupted use of the internet, crimes have also increased. Nowadays, the majority of the violations or offences are related to cybercrimes. Cyberstalking is generally occurred against females, as 90% of cybercrime victims are females. Cyberstalking is considered mainstream cybercrime because it is the only online provocation that is accustomed to threatening victims for sexual purposes or abusing them in the name of using freedom of information by cyberstalkers. Cyberstalking is the abuse of freedom of information as the stalkers use their right to information to infringe others' right to privacy.

The right to freedom of information is not only a fundamental right but is also a facilitator of other

rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to education, the right to participate in cultural life and to relish the benefits of scientific growth and its applications, public and governmental rights, such as the rights to freedom of association and assembly ([La Rue, 2011](#)). Right to web access is turning into a fundamental right (Pasaila, 2011); however, when mostly cyber stalkers are from the male community, female internet users are re-treating their cyberspaces. The female's freedom of information is getting violated because of cyberstalkers.

As excessive information about people is available publicly without any restriction, and to access this information is something like the right of data/information, individuals get the information, and while accessing information, they start to invade others' right to privacy. The publicly available information does not mean to be used by some other people to blackmail, harass, to defame their reputation by making fake profiles on social media in the greed for money or for their own inclination. Cyberstalkers start stalking on social media while

having proper access to data. The limit of freedom of information could not lead to an attack on the right to privacy.

The main objective of the examination is to distinguish the components of cyberstalking that could be tended to expand the freedom of information through social media and its abuse on social media by committing cybercrimes. Contemporarily, cyberstalking is needed to be put into a bottle as it is becoming overpowering, as far as the law is the only solution to protect cyberspace from cyber-stalkers. The parts of this research are extracted from the author's Master's Dissertation In Law.

This article exhibits a basic understanding of cyberstalking while giving an introduction to cyberstalking. With the help of its nature, it will also illustrate the classification of cyberstalking, explains the factors of cyberstalking and tries to explain the motives of perpetrators with the help of reasons behind it while critically analysing the psychological and sociological impact of cyberstalking by realising the internet as a double-edged sword that encourages us to comprehend the complex nature of Cyber Stalking.

Definition of Cyber Stalking

The Act of threatening, harassing or annoying someone through multiple email messages, as through the Internet, esp. with the intent of placing the recipient in fear that an illegal act or an injury will be inflicted on the recipient or a member of the recipient's family or household (Garner, 2014). At its most basic legal definition, cyber-stalking is a repeated course of conduct that is focused on an individual intended to cause trouble and dread of physical harm (Citron, 2014). Cyberstalking can consolidate perils of hostility (constantly obscene), spreading lies pronounced as realities, posting distressing information on the web (regardless of whether compromising photos or social security numbers), and creative attacks (insincerely shutting down an individual's social media account) (Sweeney, 2014). It has been augmented to the degree of mass media interest and subsequently became a public concern (Chahal et al., 2019). In cyberstalking, a stalker may contact an individual either by email, web-based media, updating apps or by social media. To annoy an individual, a stalker may post messages,

pictures or information online about an individual (Sharma, 2020).

Elements/Factors of Cyber Stalking

We have already discussed the meaning of cyberstalking; however, there are some factors which constitute the offence of cyberstalking; these factors are relatively minute though they cause the distress that is the main element of cyberstalking.

Feels Harassed

Cyberstalking is a deviant form of online harassment, particularly while using social media. Cyberstalking is a form of stalking; it seems ordinary at the start when a person used to stalk other people, mostly the non-stranger or even stranger. Cases of cyberstalking can often begin as seemingly harmless interactions. However, a factor of repeatedly and continuously being stalked starts annoying and feeling harassed. Continuance and repeating acts of online stalking constitute cyberstalking (Chahal et al., 2019).

Continuance and Repetitive Conduct

In any case, when you begin getting unwanted and bothering messages consistently and feel annoyed, at that point, the line has likely been traversed. Cyberstalkers may scare victims by sending unpleasant messages deliberately, conceivably, even at various times each day. It is particularly startling when such messages come from different sources or through the indistinguishable individual. It is preferred and a commendable plan to report this to both the social media service provider and the law regulating organisations (Kobets, 2018).

Easy Targets

Stalking over the internet or cyberstalking target people, gatherings, or even associations and can take different forms, including criticism, maligning and threats. It might aim to control or threaten the person in question or to accumulate information to use it in different corrupt behaviours, similar to fraud or offline stalking. While responsibility should not be set on cyberstalking victims alone, however, currently social media platforms lend it for accumulating easy targets. As for now, unfortunately, various social media customers barely care about openly posting individual information, sharing their decisions and

needs, disseminating family photos and more ([Chahal et al., 2019](#)).

Classification of Cyber Stalking

Cyberstalking does not have to incorporate direct correspondence. Hence, a couple of victims may not comprehend that they are being stalked on the internet. Offenders can screen victims through various strategies and use their cumulative information with mala-fide intentions such as misinformation, misappropriation and misrepresentation. Occasionally, the line between the information available on the internet and on real can get darkened, and attackers can accumulate relevant information, contact your friends and attempt to infuriate you (Balaban, 2018).

Cyber stalkers can be classified into three kinds:

Regular Obsession Cyber Stalker

Stalker will not acknowledge that their (stalker and victim) relationship is done.

Hallucinating Cyber Stalker

Stalkers may be encountering some mental flimsiness like Schizophrenia. They expect that someone loves them in spite of the fact that they have never met.

Vindictive Cyber Stalker

Cyberstalkers are furious about their objective due to some minor encounter, either certifiable or imagined. These stalkers may be stalking to dole out the retribution and render revenge and accept that they are a victim. For some reason, most exes can change into this sort of stalker ([Rehman & Shabir, 2020](#)).

Impacts of Cyberstalking

There are three distinguished degrees of stalking effects, such as first, second and third-degree impacts ([Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007](#)).

- a. First-degree impacts are the consequences on the person who is subject to stalking:
 - Emotional well-being (dread, nervousness, disgrace, misfortune, self-destructive/suicidal ideation, despair, depression, weakened mental prosperity)
 - Social well-being (diminished trust, expanded

estrangement, segregation and limited social activities),

- Financial well-being (extra safety efforts, truancy from work),
- Psychological well-being (maladaptive opinions, attributions of self-harm, character variation),
- Physical well-being (physical and sexual savagery) or flexibility ([Dressing, Kuehner, & Gass, 2005](#); [McEwan, Mullen, & Purcell, 2007](#)).

It is a victim who is exposed to prolonged times of stalking experiencing the most striking paces of mental dreariness while not having any idea of the earlier relationship with the culprit and the recency of exploitation ([Purcell, Pathe, & Mullen, 2005](#)).

- b. Second-degree effects will be on the individuals social and institutional associations.
- c. Third-degree impacts are prompt consequences for the association of people with themselves. For example, the victims themselves have already engaged with a potential cyber stalker ([Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007](#)).

The far and wide range of the Internet furnishes people with uncommon admittance to information about others. The Internet, as a gadget for stalking, can be used by stalkers to obtain data about current or potential stalking victims. This may fuse both information put on the social platform by the person (for instance, an individual's social media page) and information put online without the knowledge or consent of the individual and over which the victim has no control ([Worsley, J. D., Wheatcroft, Short, & Corcoran, 2017](#)).

Public information is open through web records regarding consolidated workplaces, addresses, telephone numbers and affiliations or social occasions an individual may have exasperation. This openly accessible information is reachable through looking to the internet that might be enhanced by using paid and online information search specialist organisations ([Tavani, 2005](#)).

The internet gives a wide scope of chances for people to communicate with others that they may, in some way or another, never meet. This grows the accessible pool of victims, which may bring about expanded stalking of strangers as more than four out of ten survey respondents in a solitary report do not

know the character of their cyber stalker ([Tavani, 2005](#)).

Sociological and Psychological Perspective

Cyberstalking is an offence, and if you commit it, you will be held responsible. However, if cyberstalking is a crime, then there should be an element of a normal crime, which means *Mens Rea* and *Actus Reus*. The men's rea behind the subject offence should be pure intention to cause stress, and threat, making them uncomfortable even in their homes or in their comfort zones, which constitutes cyberstalking. As social apps encapsulate information sharing amid the handlers, they also uncover the personal information of users over the other information posted ([Kobets & Kristina, 2018](#)).

Cyberstalking has its own sociological factors for the victim and psychological factors for the offender because the study is not only supposed to interpret cyberstalking as an offence but also comprehend several reasons for studying the offence of cyberstalking. Hence, we will discuss some sociological and psychological factors behind cyberstalking ([Dreßing et al., 2014](#)).

Sociological Impact of Cyber Stalking

Cyberstalking is defined as behaviour in which single, gathered people or affiliations utilise data and interchange the ability to bother another individual, a set of individuals or groups. This activity prompts obsessive enduring to the people in question. Cyberstalking is additionally characterised as the abuse of media transmission innovations like mobile phones, messages, and the internet to menace, undermine, bother, and scare a victim ([Bocij. & McFarlane, 2002](#)).

The stalkers on social media are mostly those who are not having any sort of specific busy life of their own; that is why they are fond of stalking others and invading others' lives and their freedom of information, and violating the right of information. The socially neglected people want to be impressive and effective in someone's life, so for the sake of attention, cyber stalkers seek the attention of the victims by stalking, online harassing them, and even threatening and blackmailing them by using their available information against them ([Kobets, 2018](#)).

The victims and stalker's psyche is something to

be considered in future. A stalker's mind is much more intricate, and there have been numerous distributions by researchers and stalking victims concerning stalkers' mindset, conduct and thought processes. On the stalkers side, there is basically in every case a type of mental issue at play, and keeping in mind that approved alerts, punishments and sentences are objective from a legitimate perspective, the support of well-being experts ought to be sought after right off, in order to decide the guilty party's perspective and subsequently the prospect for additional, more hazardous activities ([Nikolova, 2020](#)).

There are two hypothetical structures inside which stalking exercises can be perceived. In the first place, seen inside a loving structure, stalkers may show an edge or pre-involved connection style. Second, the social objective pursues hypothesis recommends that people who have a partner relationship with the victim with the gathering of their high-level request targets (for example, enjoyment and self-esteem) may contemplate and encounter negative agony when the relationship is thwarted, a conceivably rousing progressing chase of the relationship ([Spitzberg. & Cupach, 2007](#)).

Psychological Impact of Cyber Stalking

In addition to focusing on the reason behind cyberstalking, at some point, it could be considered and changed into as obsessional harassment ([Rosenfeld, 2000](#)). Mental well-being experts excuse themselves to define thoughtfulness regarding the examination of the intention and psychology behind cyberstalking. From the clinical perspective, some sort of syndromes were disclosed behind their disturbing behaviour.

Disorders accrued Cyberstalking

Most recent examination has discovered various unmistakable conditions that may compare with cyberstalking for model grouped stalkers as whether Erotomanic or borderline Erotomanic. The latter applies to persons who are obsessed with other beings; however, their feelings are not reciprocated ([Harmon, Rosner, & Owens, 1995](#)). By discussing widely divergent mental disorders, we can help categorise offenders under a solitary mark (for example, Schizophrenia, melancholy, and other

behavioural conditions) (Reid, 1995). The most common disorder diagnosis among cyber stalkers or obsessive harassment offenders includes delusional disorder, schizophrenia, mania and personality disorder such as emotionally unstable personality disorder (EUPD), avoidant personality disorder etc. (Reid, 1995).

Delusional Problems (DSM-IV)

Delusional problems are characterised by DSM-IV (Nietzel, & Wakefield, 1996). as non-bizarre delusions it involves the situation occurs in genuine, for example, being stalked, harmed, infected or having a sickness, albeit these issues do not happen with regard to a more inescapable mental disorders (for example, Schizophrenia, mood disorder). Delusional disorders include several categories of syndromes, such as erotomania. This problem happens all the more often times among person who become obsessed with famous people or other notable individuals of note and occasionally involved high profile cases in which culprits/disordered person/stalker believe that they are impractically engaged with the victim (Nietzel, & Wakefield, 1996).

Personality Disorder

A personality disorder may include Paranoid, Narcissistic and marginal behavioural conditions that showed up more likely among vengeance-inspired cyberstalkers. People with the marginal behavioural condition may turn out to be unnecessarily irate over an apparent bad behaviour and are inclined to unwise and unfitting practices during unpleasant periods while elevating the danger of perilous conduct over the span of stalking (Meloy, 1998). Narcissistic personality disorder includes the offenders with narcissistic linking fantasy in which they feel associated with a glorified item (Rosenfeld, 2000).

Anti-social Personality Disorder

Another personality disorder is an anti-social personality disorder in which the person typically engages in provocation/stalking to satisfy their desire to continue a relationship or to consider his right to profess wrong. Hence, this disorder is mostly found in offenders suffering from psychotic disorders (Reid, 1995). However, it is indispensable to understand that not every person who is engaged with

cyberstalking requires mental health. There is sufficient proof supporting the perspective that cyberstalking is just an instrument for accomplishing some objective (Short et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The law upon limit on freedom of information must be well-defined, well established, and non-ambiguous. The law must define what the parameters of freedom of information are and would provide the most effective method to manage freedom of information to an ascertained and modified level (Balakrishnan, 2019). The freedom of information on social media must be clarified in which situation and manner it could get governed (Alam, 2015). Cyberstalkers use cyberspace or social media platform for stalking because of the fewer chances to be get traced and to get penalised. The cyberstalker uses modern technology; however, in this contemporary and modernised era, it is not even difficult for investigating agencies to trace the IP addresses of the offender. The execution of the rule of law may compel offenders to stop stalking and stop using cyberspace for online abuse of victims, for the fear would generate to get traced within a reasonable time or held accountable (Pittaro, 2007). Moreover, a gender-based study can be conducted further on the scope of cyberstalking. Work can be done over a comparison of more than two countries, including the legislation in Pakistan over cyber stalking and procuring restrictions on the use of social media. Furthermore, an empirical study of the psycho-socio perspective of cyberstalking can be conducted in future. With the passage of time, the need for strict legislation arises to limit freedom of information and to stop the invasion of the right to privacy of other people. There are two perspectives on freedom of information and right to privacy; the first one is that one person uses his freedom of information and invades others' right to privacy while abusing freedom of information. However, secondly, if the person used his freedom of information so the state could regulate its authority to limit freedom of information and meddle in harassers' right to security and blocking up the content, taking up action against the cyber stalkers/ accused who misuses the available information to harass victims, to make their fake profiles, to blackmail females in exchange of sexual conduct etc. We cannot justify cyberstalking in any

form; however, exceptions are present in every law and enforcement. The nature of cyberstalking and its sociological and psychological impacts gave us insights into the effects of cyberstalking on the perpetrator and victim. The law is the essence of

every state, and international law provides us with the directory for making complex laws to protect the rights of the citizens to the best possible extent ([Bibi, 2021](#)).

References

- Authors, T. G. (2019, January 24). *What Cyberstalking Is and How to Prevent It*. The State of Security. <https://www.tripwire.com/state-of-security/security-awareness/what-cyberstalking-prevent/>
- Sharma, J. (2020, April 15). *Cyberstalking in India - Meaning, Types & Provisions in Law*. Lawyered. <https://www.lawyered.in/legal-disrupt/articles/what-is-cyberstalking/>
- Alam, M. A. (2015). Freedom of Information and Media laws in Pakistan. *CDPI*. <https://www.cpdipakistan.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Right-to-Information-and-Media-Laws-in-Pakistan1.pdf>
- Balakrishnan, A. (2019). *Cyber Stalking: Challenges In Regulating Cyberstalking At The Cyber Space*. Legal Services India E-Journal. <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-214-cyber-stalking-challenges-in-regulating-cyberstalking-at-the-cyber-space.html>.
- Barnett, R. (2014). *What the Law Can (and Can't) Do About Online Harassment*. Scribd. <https://www.scribd.com/article/514003547/What-The-Law-Can-And-Can-t-Do-About-Online-Harassment>
- Bibi, Z. (2021). *Cyber Stalking: Violation of freedom of Information*. LL.M. diss. International Islamic University Islamabad.
- Bocij, P., & McFarlane, L. (2002). Online harassment: towards a definition of cyberstalking. *Prison Service Journal*, 139, 31-38.
- Chahal, R., Kumar, L., Jindal, S., & Rawat, P. (2019). Cyber stalking technological form of Sexual Harassment. *International Journal on Emerging Technologies* 10(4), 367-373. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.27772.90246>.
- Dreßing, H., Bailer, J., Anders, A., Wagner, H., & Gallas, C. (2014). Cyberstalking in a Large Sample of Social Network Users: Prevalence, Characteristics, and Impact Upon Victims. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 17(2), 61-67. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0231>.
- Dressing, H., Kuehner, C., & Gass, P. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and impact of stalking in a European population. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 187(2), 168-172. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.187.2.168>.
- GUZE, S. B. (1995). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th ed. (DSM-IV). *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 152(8), 1228. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.152.8.1228>.
- Harmon, R. B., Rosner, R., & Owens, H. (1995). Obsessional Harassment and Erotomania in a Criminal Court Population. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 40(2), 15339]. <https://doi.org/10.1520/jfs15339j>.
- Kobets, P. N. (2009). The use of psychological methods of arrangement of memory of victims, witnesses and suspects in investigative practices of law enforcement bodies of the Russian Federation and foreign countries. In: *Legal psychology*. 6, 10-14.
- Kobets, P. N. (2017). The threats of cyberstalking – the most important problem studied in the framework of improving aspects of information security of regions in the conditions of globalisation of information space. *Bulletin of Prikamsky Social Institute* 1(76), 28.
- Kobets, P., & Krasnova, K. (2019). Cyberstalking: public danger, key factors and prevention. *Przeegląd Wschodnioeuropejski*, 9(2), 43-53. <https://doi.org/10.31648/pw.3001>.
- La Rue, F. (2011). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf
- Levush, R. (2019). Review of *Limits on Freedom of Expression*. United States: The Law Library of Congress. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue. United Nations General Assembly.
- McEwan, T., Mullen, P. E., & Purcell, R. (2007). Identifying risk factors in stalking: A review of current research. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 30(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jilp.2006.03.005>.
- Meloy, J. R. (1995). Demographic and clinical comparison of obsessional followers and offenders with mental disorders. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 152(2), 258-263. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.152.2.258>.

- Meloy, J. R. (2001). *The Psychology of Stalking*. Elsevier Gezondheidszorg.
- Nikolova, N. (2020). JAPANS POLICY AGAINST THE CRIME OF STALKING. *Economics & Law*, 2(1), 78–87. <https://doi.org/10.37708/el.swu.v2i1.8>.
- Pittaro, M. L. (2007). Cyber stalking: An analysis of online harassment and intimidation. *International journal of cyber criminology* 1(2), 180–190. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18794>.
- Psaila, S. B. (2011, August 7). *UN declares Internet access a human right – did it really?* Diplo. <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/un-declares-internet-access-human-right-did-it-really/>
- Purcell, R., Pathé, M., & Mullen, P. E. (2005). Association between stalking victimisation and psychiatric morbidity in a random community sample. *The British journal of psychiatry: the journal of mental science*, 187, 416–420. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.187.5.416>.
- Rehman, H. U., Hussain, S., & Dureshehwar. (2020). Social Media, Democracy and Fake News in Pakistan: An Analysis. *Global Political Review*, 1(1), 84–93. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2020\(v-1\).10](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2020(v-1).10).
- Rosenfeld, B. (2000). Assessment and treatment of obsessional harassment. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 5(6), 529–549. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1359-1789\(98\)00039-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1359-1789(98)00039-1).
- Short, E., Guppy, A., Hart, J. A., & Barnes, J. (2015). The Impact of Cyberstalking. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 3(2), 23–37. <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v3i2.970>.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2007). The state of the art of stalking: Taking stock of the emerging literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 12(1), 64–86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2006.05.001>.
- Tavani, H. T. (2005). Search Engines, Personal Information and the Problem of Privacy in Public. *The International Review of Information Ethics*, 3, 39–45. <https://doi.org/10.29173/irie348>.
- Worsley, J. D., Wheatcroft, J. M., Short, E., & Corcoran, R. (2017). Victims Voices: Understanding the Emotional Impact of Cyberstalking and Individuals Coping Responses. *SAGE Open*, 7(2), 215824401771029. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017710292>.