



Review Article

**Stalking and culture; Old behavior, new crime**

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**Abstract**

Stalking, when a person is pursued by acts or omissions over a period of time, in a way that causes extreme discomfort, or in a way that, taken as a whole, can be described as harassment or harassment. Although it does not involve direct violent behavior, behaviors such as disturbing frequent phone calls, text messages, waiting and keeping watch around the workplace, university or home are among the persistent stalking behaviors. Persistent stalking can lead to an increase in the victim's feelings of fear and anxiety. Individuals exposed to this situation may experience psychological and/or physical health problems. According to researches, persistent stalking is a sexist act. The victims are mostly women. Stalking actions are generally carried out by men whom women know and have emotional relationships with. The difference between being a perpetrator or a victim in stalking actions depending on gender change also causes the formation of stalking myths in countries. In this study, stalking, which is a very current concept in the field of forensic sciences, was examined in terms of some sociological variables. Stalking and gender, the effects of honor culture and the meaning attributed to stalking in terms of gender were examined.

**Keywords:** Stalking, honor culture, gender, ascribed gender roles

**INTRODUCTION**

**Stalking and Culture; Old Behaviour, New Crime**

Stalking is a complex crime due to the lack of a clear definition by experts and researchers. There is not a specific border between what we call normal or reasonable behaviour and abnormal unreasonable behaviour. Each kind of behavior (reasonable or unreasonable) are detected in the pursuit, making it difficult for the victim to realize that he or she has been victimized in the early stages of the crime. In the first place, stalking has not involve danger, stress or traumatic effect as much as in other crimes. It is a crime in which the victim exhibits a series of behaviors over a long period of time [1].

**Stalking Behaviors**

Some behaviors associated with stalking may be seen as harmless or innocent when seen in isolation [2]. The problem in establishing the definition of stalking stems from the different features that distinguish stalking from overt violent acts and crimes [3]. Stalking differs from other violent behaviors, such

as sexual or physical assaults. Stalking itself consists more than one action can be seen harmless. For example, sending a gift, sending a text message, or stopping by someone's house is not considered kind of a violation. On the other hand, if they become regular, they can cause fear in a victim and then they are considered as crimes. According to the literature, regarding the explanation of the concept of stalking are examined, it is seen that there are many definitions. These definitions vary depending on the dynamics involved in the etiology of stalking behavior.

Literature studies have shown that the stalking behaviors faced by victims can be divided into another definitions. Especially, according to the literature these are surveillance, hyper-intimacy, interactive contacts, mediated contacts, harassment, intimidation, invasion, coercion, threat and aggression. The over-intimacy behaviors described are typical behaviors often found in romantic relationships. For example, the perpetrator might send texts, emails, or letters, flowers, cards to the victim, call them. These behaviors may be seen kind of romantic by some individuals [4].

The victims may initially view these behaviors as a compliment

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or a nuisance; However, as long as behaviors happens as a pattern and stalker continues, they may disturb the victim [5]. These behaviors may gradually escalate as the perpetrator attempts to approach the victim directly through phone calls and messages, appear in different locations, invade the victim's comfort zone, approach their loved ones, and harm their individual networks [6]. The attacker tries to continue their contact and within this way tries to feel as a part of their lives, to the contrary of all rejections or requests of the person he/she is following.

The next part of behaviors is monitoring and surveillance of another person's behavior. Surveilling the victim, learning more about the victim, learning their routine, and following the victim throughout the day are expected and stereotypical parts of stalking behavior [7]. Although stalking is the most common behavior, in many cases the victim may not be aware that it is happening. This shows the secret nature of the tracking. The next categories are harassment and intimidation of the victim. For that, the stalker harms not just the victim, also the person's loved ones, causes problems in work environments, calls at all hours of the day or non-stop, makes them wait outside their location, and spreads false information. Rumors about the victim and insulting them can also be given as examples. Border violation (invasion) behaviors refer to the violation of both personal and legal boundaries. Because the attacker intends to steal personal information by entering the victim's home or the property of his family and friends [8]. At this point, stalking behaviors are transitioning towards the borders of criminality. The pursuit gradually progresses into more dangerous areas where the offender becomes increasingly violent and unpredictable [1].

As the perpetrator's behavior intensifies, his behavior towards the person being followed also intensifies. Aggression includes coercive and threatening behavior towards the victim or the person's pets, loved ones, and personal belongings (house, car, personal belongings) [9]. The victim's co-workers may find themselves threatened by the perpetrator. This can be seen as a strategy used to put pressure on the victim. In some cases, the perpetrator may threaten the victim by saying that he will kill himself if the victim does not fulfill his [10]. In addition, the perpetrator may send threatening messages to the victim's property, workplace or personal phone; these messages may contain explicit threats about what they will do to the victim or others (friends and family) [2]. Threats in stalking cases are a harbinger of future violence that the victim may receive from the perpetrator. As previous research has shown, stalking perpetrators are likely to act on threats they make against others [11].

### **Stalking and Culture**

It may be easier to observe this situation in honor cultures, as monitoring/controlling the victim and putting pressure on the victim, which are among the persistent stalking motivations of the persistent stalker, are presented in the studies conducted [12]. Most of the studies in the field of stalking were conducted with samples in European countries and North America [13]. Vandello

and Cohen pointed out that although gender-based violence against women is observed in every culture, there may be cultural differences [14,15]. Cultural differences can affect the formation and maintenance of stalking behavior and the reactions to this behavior.

Looking at cross-cultural studies, women in countries with low scores on gender empowerment measures, such as Egypt and India, report being exposed to intrusive behavior such as surveillance, receiving death threats, and sexual contact, while women in countries with high scores on gender empowerment measures, such as England and Australia, report being more likely to engage in sexual intercourse and social contact. They stated that they encountered offers to drink alcohol in environments [16,17]. In the light of the information obtained, the behaviors perceived as stalking, the reasons for stalking, and the ways victims of stalking can cope with these negative situations. It is seen that the methods vary from culture to culture.

It is known that in families in honor cultures, men are responsible for the behavior of women. Resorting to violence against women to protect the honor of women in the family is a practice in these cultures [14,18]. Vandello and Cohen found that when honor cultures and Western cultures are compared, there are differences in attitudes towards partner violence and that the use of physical violence is more approved in countries with an honor culture, such as Brazil [14]. It is important for such cross-cultural studies to be conducted in the future to examine persistent follow-up. Until now, It is thought that most of these variables play a role in seeing stalking as a normal form of behavior, trivializing it, or legitimizing it.

In addition to the main variables such as romanticizing persistent stalking, degree of familiarity of the stalker, gender, sexism, stalking method, masculinity and honor, it is stated in the literature that personal factors such as anger, drug use, mental problems, lack of empathy, humiliation and criticism cause the increase in stalking. There are studies stating that [19-21]. It is thought that such personal factors may be useful to be addressed by researchers and especially to change the attitudes that approve of persistent follow-up on a personal basis.

### **Stalking and Gender**

According to researches, persistent stalking is a sexist act. The victims are mostly women. Stalking actions are generally carried out by men whom women know and have emotional relationships with [22]. In the research conducted by [23] they focused on stalking victims and concluded that women were more disadvantaged than men in stalker actions. According to Başar's study, the preservation of the honor culture also perpetuates the existence of persistent stalking actions [24]. Honor culture legitimizes inequality and violence between genders.

The difference between being a perpetrator or a victim in stalking actions depending on gender change also causes the formation of stalking myths in countries. Spitzberg and Cadiz argue that the

media reproduces these myths [22]. Because women are always shown in a helpless state in the media, and their followers are described as men they do not know who suffer from mental health disorders. Although research confirms that stalkers are mostly men, the number of female stalkers is also significant. West and Hatters Friedman and Meloy and Boyd also conducted studies focusing on female stalkers [25,26]. According to the research of West and Hatters Friedman, the reason why female stalkers carry out this action is that they feel anger towards their lives or the victim they follow, they are obsessed, they feel abandonment and loneliness, and they have internet addiction. According to the results of Meloy and Boyd's study, female stalkers are mostly between the ages of 18-58. They are also white, heterosexual and unmarried. Female stalkers are generally academically successful people who have graduated from high school and even received university and graduate education. The fact that female stalkers are determined and hard-working makes it easier for them to act unobtrusively during persistent pursuit. Logan also focused on female victims in his study [27]. In this context, more than half of women's followers (62%) are their ex-lovers, spouses or current partners. The rest of the follower profiles consist of people they do not know (23%) and people they know somehow (19%). These percentages are observed to be lower in male victims. The followers of these individuals generally include; 36% is a stranger, 34% is someone they know, and 32% is their partner. In this context, it can be said that male individuals are less exposed to persistent stalking.

### Gender of the Stalker

It's been found that women are subjected to more stalking than men [24,28,1]. It was also found that women perceive different behaviors as stalking compared to male participants (Miglietta and Acquadro Maran, 2016) and that female participants are more afraid of stalking than men [12,29,30]. In addition, in a study conducted using scenarios (Dennison and Thomson, 2000; Phillips et al., 2004), it was found that women were more likely than men to describe intrusive behavior in the given scenarios as stalking [31,32].

According to the literature, women view persistent stalking, especially ex-partner stalking, as a more serious issue than men. Similarly, in studies conducted by Dunlap and colleagues, using the jury decision mechanism, they found that male participants were less likely to decide "guilty" for persistent stalking [33]. It was found that women could more easily detect the psychological distress and anxiety levels of the victims [32]. This was especially seen in the male stalker/female victim scenario when female participants empathized with the victim's level of anxiety. Similarly, in another study, it was observed that in scenarios involving male stalker/female victim and female stalker/male victim, men tend to blame the victim more and support persistent stalking myths than women [34]. This rate is higher among men who read the male stalker/female victim scenario. was found to be the highest among the participants. Considering these findings, different variables such as perception of stalking, interpretation,

emotional state, and blaming the stalker or victim are affected by the gender variable.

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### Stalking and Ascribed Gender Roles

In their study, stated that traditional gender roles and the belief that men should be persistent in their romantic endeavors may affect the view on stalking [35]. For both the individual who practices the stalking and the witnesses, the process can be legitimized as a romantic approach, courtship behavior, or showing interest. For example, the belief that men must insist on their offers to be romantic may cause persistent pursuit behaviors to be perceived as both positive and harmless. In their study, stalking practitioners stated that most individuals explain their behavior in romantic terms and attempt to normalize it. Similarly, the explanation was supported in Spitzberg and Cupach's 2003 study [28].

Even though the situation is disturbing for the victim of stalking, if the perpetrator exhibits this behavior after a past relationship, it can be hidden in a relatively positive image as a symbolic transfer of love as a continuation of people's old relationships or as the depth of the love pain experienced. In other words, the perception of romance can normalize persistent pursuit or make it desirable [36].

Another important risk factor for romanticizing stalking is that emotions such as compassion, empathy, and pity felt towards the individual who exhibits stalking behavior can glorify the perpetrator and cause negative attributions towards the victim [34]. The fact that persistent stalking can be explained by romanticism also has the possibility of carrying the stalking to a non-criminal legitimate basis [33].

In addition, men are expected to be assertive in romantic relationships and make marriage proposals [37]. Having such an expectation may cause men to turn a blind eye to their persistent stalking behavior. When we look at the reflection of persistent stalking on the media in Turkey, it can be more associated with issues such as romantic relationships, honor and marriage, even if it involves fear, show of power and violence, whereas abroad it can be reflected in the media as the frightening and violent behavior of a foreigner and someone with psychological

problems [22]. It can be observed in TV series or programs that a woman who is subjected to persistent stalking falls in love with her stalker or gets married to him. This may positively affect the view of people who watch TV series or programs towards stalking.

### The Results of Stalking

According to the study published by Logan and Walker in 2009, persistent stalking was observed in 67% of femicide cases [38]. Although it does not involve direct violent behavior, behaviors such as disturbing frequent phone calls, text messages, waiting and keeping watch around the workplace, university or home are among the persistent stalking behaviors. In a meta-analysis study, the rate of exposure to stalking behavior was found to be 10% for men and 26% for women. According to this information, approximately one in four women and one in ten men may be subjected to stalking. When we look at the people who persistently follow us, it is found that 77% are men and 22% are women [19]. In parallel with the international literature, a recent master's thesis study in our country concluded that women are more exposed to stalking [24].

There are many negative effects that persistent stalking has on the victim. Under general headings, these negativities are listed as psychological, physical or social problems. Persistent stalking can lead to an increase in the victim's feelings of fear and anxiety. Individuals exposed to this situation may experience psychological and/or physical health problems [39,40]. In a 2012 study by Kuehner, Gass and Dressing, it was found that persistent stalking caused problems such as anxiety, depression, feeling of helplessness, nightmares and suicidal thoughts in individuals exposed to it [41]. In another study, it was stated that victims experienced symptoms such as self-harming behavior and sleep problems after the incident [42].

However, persistent exposure to stalking can also affect individuals' social functions. Individuals may restrict their social lives, change their routes for work or university transportation, wait for someone they trust to be with them, or change their phone number. When all this is not enough, they can change the apartment locks or leave their homes [40,43]. As can be seen, victimized individuals try to reduce the negative situation by trying different strategies. In the light of all these data, it is thought that examining the concept of stalking, which is a type of violence and is thought to have continued since the existence of mankind, but has just been included in scientific studies, in terms of the victim's experiences, will contribute to the literature.

### CONCLUSION

Stalking, is a type of behavior that has existed since the beginning of humanity, nevertheless has just begun to take its place in the fields of law and psychology. It is an important problem that the exact equivalent of the concept has not yet been formed. There is a need for qualitative and quantitative researches that will clarify the view on which behaviors can and cannot be considered stalking. It is thought that establishing the framework of stalking

in the studies to be carried out in the continuation of this study will contribute to the concept being examined under a separate heading in our country's judicial systems.

#### Conflict of interests

*The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the study.*

#### Financial Disclosure

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