

Use of technology in responses to intimate partner violence: Victims Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Background: Technology has invented many appliances and tools (e.g. smart phones, GPS, mini cameras, mobile phones, internet, much software, etc.) which has also opened various career prospects for professionals. Use of technology has both positive and negative effects on human life. Police administration uses technology in searching and arresting criminals. At the same time criminals are also using technology for extending their crimes. Technology has a crucial role in both preventing and increasing intimate partner violence. Intimate partners are using technology as a tool of “Power & Control” to abuse their spouses.

Aims: To discuss the nature of intimate partner violence with the help of technology, based on few case studies from India & USA.

Tools: Use of modern technologies like Mobile Phones, telephone, Fax Machines, computer, Cameras, internet etc.

Results: Focused on the victims and their perspective on their feeling as a “double victim”; they become victims of undocumented and unreported violence by their intimate partners as well as of the technology. Intimate partners make the victims more helpless, silent and to stay in the abusive relationship.

Conclusion: it is important for advocates, counselors and other professionals working in this field to know more about the technologies and also how to operate them. So that when the victims come to seek help from them, they can provide them with technology aided safety planning to protect the victims from further abuse.

Keyword: Intimate Partner Violence, Women, Violence, Technology, Power & Control.

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INTRODUCTION

In this study focused on the intimate partner violence with the help of technology, based on few case studies from India & USA. It has discussed on the victims and their perspective on how they are feeling as a “double victim”; they become victims of undocumented and unreported violence by their intimate partners as well as of the technology. Use of modern technologies by their intimate partners makes victims not only more helpless but forces them to remain silence due to the fear being stalked, this does not give them a moment of peace as they always feel someone is there to watch every breath they take, every move they make (“Every breath you take” is a song by The Police in their 1983 album *Synchronicity*). It also forces them to remain in the abusive relationship without protesting or seeking any help. We have also discussed how the use of technology makes intimate abusive partners more powerful and violent and victims more terrorized, traumatized and victimized by the use/misuse of these technologies. Last but not least; we have discussed on the probable intervention

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options on how to prevent women’s victimizations of crimes by the intimate partners.

Use of “Power and Control” is not a new phenomenon in human society. It is a prominent feature in both Eastern and Western Society. Our society is growing with modernization; inventing various technologies and tools for the use of “Power

and Control” shows that intimate partner violence is not only limited to physical violence. In this modern era when we are using technologies for better medical treatment, better and enhanced quality of life, better and outstanding career and lifestyle opportunities, there are few people misusing technologies to control their spouses in the form of stalking and indecent exposure of their partner on social-net working sites and other sites. Advancement of technology provides stalkers with a sophisticated selection of tools, which are being misused by the abusers to harass their current or former spouses, boy or girlfriends and or other intimate partners. There is much research conducted in Western countries regarding the same.

In the United States of America, it is estimated that each year more than three million people have experienced stalking (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009). It has also been reported by various researchers that *stalking is a crime of intimidation and psychological fear that often has distressing consequences for victims* (NCVC, 2007). There are many psychosomatic effects which have been reported by the victims of stalking. They may experience physical, emotional or psychological harm, poor health condition, stress of ongoing fear, anger and even insomnia. Remarkable disruptions in victims’ social and or professional networks also have been reported by the researchers (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Brewster, 1999; USDOJ, 2001; Bjerregaard, 2000; Fisher Cullen, & Turner, 2000, 2002; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Davis, Coker, & Sanderson, 2002). However, in India though intimate partners are abused by the use or misuse of technology, we are still lacking behind with research and data on the prevalence on intimate partner violence with the use of technologies.

There is a significant difference in Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence. Domestic Violence is only limited to the domestic partner, where the abuser live with the victim in the same household. However, in intimate partner violence, the abuser may not be living with the victim. He/she could be living in a different city, state or in another country. However, with the use or misuse of modern technologies, they are stalking on their current or former spouses. So that he/she could have updated information of the victim and is able to control them without physically living in the same household.

We are witnessing the launch of new appliances and devices in the consumer market every month. There are several schemes and payment options creating a good demand and easy access to these technologies, which is providing stalkers more opportunities to stalk and victimize their current or former intimate partners. Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002, p.72) in their article have rightly stated that *“the information revolution has vastly increased the scope of technologies of intrusion” and*

thus “expanded the arsenal of the stalker”. Moreover, the grey markets are flooded with duplicate sophisticated breakthrough technology made by some third world countries as well as cracking the code of the original ones and duplicating it without license; it has become very easy for someone to lay their hand on most of the technologies in at a competitive price and use them at their own free will with being tracked by the authority.

Use of “Power and Control” is so deep rooted in our culture that family members intentionally or unintentionally overlook the complaints made by the victims. Instead of taking it seriously family members either joke about it or say that it is love and care for the victim by their partner which the victim is unable to understand. It has been reported by many immigrant victims that their family back in India never tries to understand the problem. They have also reported that, this sort of behavior makes the family feel secure about the female who is abroad. Family members come to the conclusion that there daughters’ husbands are really caring and that is the reason they are following/ observing all their activities from outside and within the four walls of their home, so as to prevent any danger or harm that might affect them otherwise. There are case studies below where we have elaborated more on the victims and their family perspectives.

Case Study 1

Meera (identity changed due to privacy and protection of the client) a survivor of intimate partner violence. She was forced to stay in the abusive relationship for five years. She was constantly stalked by her husband at home. He would keep a check on with whom she was talking over the phone or whomever she corresponded with over email, what were the websites she had visited. There were hidden cameras all over the house which prevented her to pack her stuff and take out the important documents outside the premises of her home which would be needed after she flees. She became depressed, traumatized, complained of multiple somatic problems. The doctors were not able to diagnose the reasons of those symptoms. She was isolated from her family, friends and others. She was forced to be a housewife and a slave to all her husband’s whims and fancies; she was deprived of monetary support as well. Lastly, after silently and patiently cohabiting with the abuser she was compelled to leave the house without her important documents. She got in touch with an organization working for the South Asian Women in East Coast, USA and has been sent to a shelter. Later on, Police helped her to get her important immigration papers and documents from her marital home.

In the mid-1990s awareness of technology harassment started. Online harassment and threats started during that

time and the Internet users began reporting of these crimes. This use of technology was labeled as «cyber stalking». U.S. Congressional defines cyber stalking as “the use of the internet, e-mail, or other electronic communications devices to stalk another person” (Department of Justice, 1999, What Is Cyber stalking section, para 1). Many researchers have defined cyber stalking more broadly and included the use of electronic communication such as pagers, cell/mobile phones, emails and the internet, to intimidate, terrorize and or stalk a victim (Laughren, 2000; Ellison & Akdeniz, 1998; Cyber Angels, 1999; Dean, 2000; Ogilvie, 2000; Maxwell, 2001). A study conducted in 1998 noted that “Electronic stalking often leads to, or is accompanied by, physical stalking and explicitly or implicitly threatens physical stalking” (Lee, 1998, p. 391). To recognize the full range of technologies, stalking experts are moving away from the term «cyber stalking» and beginning to use «the use of technology in stalking» (Bahm, 2003, p.2).

In this paper we have discussed some of the common uses/misuses of technology by intimate partners in stalking. Victims and survivors both report that stalkers are using many forms of technologies to stalk even if the relationship has ended, to control, intimidate, and terrorize them (Lamberg, 2001, para 2).

Use of Telephones

The most common and age-old technology used by intimate partners to stalk anywhere in the world is the telephones. Intimate partners stalk their current or former spouses/partners by calling in their Landline phones or mobile phones. They tap the phones so that they will be able to trace and or listen to each and every call that the victims are receiving or making.

The improved technology has given chance to call to anywhere in the world in very low cost or sometimes free of cost. The internet phone system made immigrants lives easier by helping them stay connected with their families back in India. Internet facilities in India helped in bridging the distance between the families of origin with the nuclear families in different states of India and Indian’s living outside India for better job/career and other purposes.

It is technology which has given us a Caller Identification (Caller ID) device, which helps us to see the name and or number of the caller. Even in the USA it provides the location (city and state) of the caller. Intimate partners are using this tool to monitor and stalk on their victim’s telephone calls, even if the relationship has ended. It was reported by the Associated Press (March 1995) that an abuser in Texas, USA used Caller ID to trace his ex-girlfriend and murdered her. Still in India, most of the household does not have any Caller ID in their landline phones. Unavailability of the caller id makes victim more terrorized of the phone calls.

Use of Mobile Phones

Victims Mobile phones have also been used by the abusers to stalk them. Most mobile phones keep an internal record of the calls, both incoming and outgoing calls. Abusers can monitor their victims’ mobile phone use through the call history on the monthly billing records or online records by hacking their victims online account passwords. Abusers also use instant messaging (SMS) and pagers to remain in regular contact with their intimate partners. They use abusive SMS to harsh their inmate partners.

Southworth and Tucker (2007, p.674) mentioned in an article, that in Rhode Island, USA one abuser searched caller history of his wife’s mobile phone to get the shelter home’s phone number and information where his wife was planning to go. He did not stop the search; he had assaulted her and forced her to stay back in the abusive relationship for another one year (Safety Net, 2004).

There are new software and appliances available in USA that one need to just download or buy to use in their mobile phones and with the use of these appliances they can change their mobile phone numbers to any known numbers of the victims or to any random number to reach the victims and to treat them in any abusive way they feel like.

Mobile with camera is creating another nuisance. The abuser captures moments of their togetherness and even other inmate pictures of the victim without victim’s knowledge and threatens the victim to send mms or upload the pictures or short films on the net.

Case Study 2

Anu an educated, corporate woman (changed her name for privacy) from a very posh area of a metro city of India was married off to an NRI who was a frequent visitor to India. He came and stayed with his newly married wife a few times. During his stays he would capture their moment of togetherness saying that as he misses her a lot as he does not stay with her for long and as her paper will take time. Things went soar when she would that he is already married with children staying in foreign shores with him. When she denied the relation and wanted to go for a divorce he threatened to upload her pictures. He was also stalking her over her phone, and emails. Anu reported during a counseling session that her husband took a few nude pictures of her without her knowledge by using his mobile phone camera and then he posted them on the websites. She was ashamed of that and was unable to inform her family members. Her husband blackmailed her for quite some time before she could walk out of the relation with help from different sectors.

Use of Fax Machines

In the same article Southworth and Tucker (2007, p.674) mentioned a case where the abuser misuse Fax phone records

to abuse the victims. The woman of this case had to fax some papers to her attorney from her shelter for proceeding and by mistake her attorney faxed the paper to abuser's attorney without removing the fax number of the woman. His attorney gave him the document received from the plaintiff's attorney without removing the fax number of the victim/plaintiff. This way the abuser received the fax number of the shelter where the victim was staying.

Use of Computer and Internet

Originally Computer Monitoring Software - «SpyWare» was developed to monitor children's use of internet to prevent them to access to the unwanted sites. The abusers even did not let this tool go. They installed this software in the victim's computer or laptops. This software allows an abuser to stalk on the victim's activities over computer and Internet. Using SpyWare, abusers are easily able to trace victim's escape plans, and or access for help. A Michigan man installed Spy Ware software in his separated wife's computer without her knowledge. This enables him to stalk on her computer, internet and web activities. He was receiving regular reports in the form of emails from SpyWare and was getting updated on where she is sending emails or from whom she is receiving emails. After a while he was caught and was charged in September 2001 for installation of SpyWare in her computer without her knowledge (Wendland, 2001).

Use of Cameras

We have been watching in the Hollywood and Bollywood movies that use of tiny hidden cameras helps to nab the suspects of a crime. Abusers are using this technology to stalk on their intimate partners. A small, tiny camera can be hidden anywhere, inside the lamp, or bulb holders or chandeliers, or even in any corner of the wall (by making a tiny invisible hole). In the USA Intimate partners use this technology much in comparison to any other technology to stalk on their victims. There was a case in 2003 at The Supreme Court of New Jersey where the defendant installed a camera in his separated wife's bedroom to stalk on her. He evidently stalked on her each telephonic discussions followed her after intimidating to kill her if she did not drop the divorce petition (H.E.S. v. J.C.S., 2003). The abuser even use this to record tapes of their intimate partner in compromising situations and threatens them to use it for public viewing unless they are obeyed.

Use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS)

GPS uses satellite receivers to provide precise real-time positioning worldwide. It has been extensively used by Police to surveillance on criminals and parolees. It is also used in cars to prevent car thefts. A Wisconsin man installed a GPS device under the hood of his ex-girlfriend's car without her knowledge and stalked her for months until he was caught in December 2002 (Orland, 2003, para 2).

Media and Intimate Partner Violence

Media started making movies on domestic violence and intimate partner violence for quite a few decades. *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991) by Julia Roberts was produced by Hollywood on stalking by intimate partner. With the same theme our Indian Cinema Industry made quite a few movies on Stalking. *Yaraana* (1995) Madhuri Dixit was the Heroine in this movie and was victimized by Raj Babbar. *Agni Sakshi* (1996) Manisha Koirala was stalked by her ex-husband Nana Patekar. Another movie on stalking movie in Hindi was *Daar* (1993) Juhi Chawla was stalked by Shahrukh Khan both over the phone and in person and *Daraar* (1996) where Juhi Chawla was the victim.

Victims' Perspective

Working with the South Asian Women victims and survivors of intimate partner violence in USA, it became prominent that even if they have the facilities at home, they are unable to utilize these facilities due to the stalking by their intimate partner. A few of them also reported that they have surveillance cameras in their houses, and the camera records everything, including their activities at home. Due to the camera, victims are unable to pack their luggage and or get their important documents out of their home to a secure place so that when she leaves, she will have access to all of these important and vital papers needed for her survival abroad. This way the victim becomes helpless and traumatized, and they are unable to seek help and become a prisoner in their own homes.

This does not happen only to the women in USA this happens to all women, irrespective of class, caste, religion, and nationality and also global location. We have the same response from our clients in India. They reported their inability to use existing technologies to seek help due to fear of the abuser. One victim of such abuse said in a counseling session, "Believe it or not, the amount sometime spent on these activities is enormous and that sum could have secured a normal life in a safe place for me".

Fear plays a key role in these scenarios. Fear is a factor which does not allow these women with lost self esteem to take action. The most important fact about fears that we should always bear in mind is that: Fear is not a normal, coherent reaction to whatsoever challenges we have in life. Fear is all inside our mind, in us and not something peripheral to us. However, in case of DV, Fear can cause the victim to make an irrational response to challenges they face. Fear enforces restrictions on the minds of the victims, takes away their clarity and leaves them with only unenthusiastic negative thought patterns. Fear makes a victim to act emotionally because when someone panics, their mind shutdown and respond impulsively in order to protect themselves (Jeffers, 2006).

In a report of USDOJ (2000, revised 2002 & 2012) stated that fear of retaliation by the abuser is one among the major reasons females did not report their victimization to the police.

CONCLUSION

Tracy Bahm, the Director of the Stalking Resource Center in Washington, D.C. has rightly stated in her book, *"No matter what tools they use, stalkers are still stalkers"* (Bahm, 2003, p.2). Technology is being used by the intimate partners as a form of "Power & Control" over the victims. Therefore, it is important for advocates, counselors and other professionals working in this field to know more about the technologies and also how to operate them. So that when the victims come to seek help from them, they can provide them with technology aided safety planning to protect the victims from further abuse.

A few safety planning tips

- The victims should be asked to follow their instinct because in most cases if they feel that they are followed then generally they are.
- A new email account should be created for further correspondence by the victim. Always use a safer computer and safer computer sites should be accessed by the victims.
- It is a good idea to use the computers of Cyber Café; however, keep changing the Cyber Café as often as possible or use different computers every time. Even erasing the internet History and downloads permanently after the use of a computer is good practice. Do delete all the cookies and other off-line folders which sometimes keep information of the user as a backup.
- Educate them on not to access the old software installed in the home PC or laptop and if possible, not to use the computers anymore. Victims should not open any emails from any unknown source.
- Should change all existing passwords and PIN number the victim was using for online banking or operating online phone and internet accounts immediately. Tell them to create passwords with no personal information.
- Help the victims to be technology savvy.
- Insist the victim install a caller ID and not pick up calls from any unknown numbers.
- Finally, urge the victim to get their laptop thoroughly checked by a professional to make sure that there has been no installation of any SpyWare or other program which leaks information of them to the abuser.

These tips below can help counseling a Victim and or Survivor to overcome her fear

Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway

The best method to fight any fear is to take positive action against whatever it is that you are afraid of. This is what courage is all about: to act despite fear.

Educate Yourself

Learn more and more about the object that you are afraid of. Due to the revolution in Information Technology, finding about your rights is not a difficult task.

Affirmations

Use self-affirmations to whatever it is that you fear. Slowly and gradually, it brings back the lost confidence.

Visualization

Positive visualization is projecting an image of yourself overcoming your fears and is a powerful age-old technique to fight anything that disturbs you.

One of my most enlightening realizations is recognizing that "I have nothing to lose".

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