

### Research Article

## Stalking and Acid Attack- Connected Gendered Crimes

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### Article History

Received: 24.07.2026

Accepted: 13.08.2026

Published: 18.09.2026

DOI: 10.61336/cjmr.1603.90

**Abstract:** Stalking and acid attacks are two separate crimes and concepts that occasionally cross in the actual world and criminal justice system, according to the current circumstances about the crime and the research that has been conducted and made available. This essay also illustrates the dearth of research on Acid Attack incidents that are reported nationwide and how intimately and unavoidably they are connected to stalking because, in nearly every instance, the perpetrator has been or is now acquainted with the victim of the crime. In the vast majority of cases, the perpetrator has persistently made advances toward the victim, who is typically a woman or girl, which she has rejected. There have also been instances where the perpetrator has attempted to rekindle a relationship with his former partner or spouse. These examples undoubtedly constitute stalking as defined by both the new and old laws. In many instances, the less serious crime of stalking frequently precedes more serious crimes like rape, sexual assault and even acid attacks. The act of stalking is illegal and can be committed in both directions. Like many other crimes, stalking should be divided into simple and aggravated forms. If the victim reports a need for safety or if the stalking has reached an aggravated level, these reports should be addressed and the culmination of the offence with a larger crime should not be postponed. It would imply that stalking should be viewed as a more serious offence and that its higher and more persistent stages should be immediately made non-bailable. This would allow acid attack offences to be either gradually contained or labelled with dangerous consequences at every stage of the crime and planning.

**Keywords:** Stalking, Acid Attacks, Criminal Justice, Gender-Based Violence, Sexual Harassment, Victim Safety, Aggravated Stalking, Criminal Law

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## INTRODUCTION

It was said in a report submitted to the supreme court of India that a well-planned act of violence carried out by getting access to the acid first, carrying it with themselves and then going on to stalk the victim before splashing the acid is called Acid Violence. Stalking and acid assaults are two different crimes and concepts that may intersect in the actual world and criminal justice system, according to the current situation of the crime and the research that has been done and made public. This essay also illustrates the dearth of research on acid attack cases that are reported nationwide and how closely and unavoidably they are connected to stalking offences because, in nearly every instance, the perpetrator was someone the victim knew or was acquainted with. In the vast majority of cases, the victim typically a woman or girl has rejected and rejected the perpetrator's persistent advances. In other cases, the perpetrator has attempted to rekindle his relationship with his former spouse or partner. The crime of stalking as defined by both the new and old laws is undoubtedly involved in these cases. These causes and instances of acid attacks undoubtedly need the perpetrator to follow the victim, keep a watch on them, or make constant attempts to establish contact. According to statistics, there are additional causes of acid attacks, such as marital issues, family property, etc. which, as a minority, permits the offence of acid attack to be kept apart from stalking. The literature that is currently available on acid attacks demonstrates that the crime has been thoroughly examined, defined and explained by earlier researchers. It is practically codified as a concept in books and research papers and it is further enhanced by analyses of cases that are occasionally decided in relation to acid attacks. In a similar vein, stalking has been absorbed in the Indian legal system

and is eligible as a distinct crime in India, despite being inspired by foreign nations and adapted in India because to the crime's pervasiveness and essential presence as a component of larger crimes. However, it may be discovered, clarified and perhaps emphasized in this study that there is a strong connection between stalking and acid attacks. In numerous instances, the less serious crime of stalking frequently precedes more serious crimes including rape, sexual assault and even acid attacks. The act of stalking is illegal and can be committed in both directions. It can either take the high road to a more serious offense like rape, acid attack, or assault of a sexual nature, or it can terminate in a dead end of merely stalking. Today according to the new law and The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). If it's still a bailable offence, stalking situations that will grow into more serious crimes in the future won't be stopped and the perpetrator won't even be put in jail for safety reasons. Newspaper articles describe how a stalker followed a victim for two years with the intention of throwing acid, but actually did so after two years of stalking. In this case, the acid attack might have been avoided if the stalking had been reported or punished within that time frame because it was deemed serious enough to warrant taking preventive action. It might not be feasible to apprehend the stalker in order to prevent more acts at this time. In accordance with the Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code, Stalking is defined as "following, contacting, or attempting to contact a person persistently despite their clear indication of disinterest or through any other means of communication, causing fear or distress in the victim." [1,2], Section 78 of the recently proposed Bhartiya Nayaya Sanhita provides a more detailed explanation.

Any man who:

- Follows a woman and contacts, or attempts to contact such woman to foster personal interaction repeatedly despite a clear indication of disinterest by such woman
- Monitors the use by a woman of the internet, e-mail or any other form of electronic communication
- commits the offence of stalking

Provided that such conduct shall not amount to stalking if the man who pursued it proves that:

- It was pursued for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime and the man accused of stalking had been entrusted with the responsibility of prevention and detection of crime by the State
- It was pursued under any law or to comply with any condition or requirement imposed by any person under any law
- In the particular circumstances such conduct was reasonable and justified

Whoever commits the offence of stalking shall be punished on first conviction with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine; and be punished on a second or subsequent conviction, with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years and shall also be liable to fine [3,4]."

### **The Problem**

Every night as Priya returned home from work, she was being pursued along the dark street. In addition to the more isolated and dimly lit spots, Robin would frequently converse with strangers in the office parking lot, outside the stores she frequented and occasionally in the building's lift. Because of the clear threat, Priya filed a formal complaint for stalking against Robin. He was taken into custody. Priya was attacked with acid that burnt her arms and a portion of her face the day Robin was released from custody on bond. For what reason was he granted bail?

### **Legal Declarations**

In order to prevent victims from suffering in silence, the state and law making bodies should prioritise encouraging the victim to have a word with their loved ones and report stalking offences to the police. Additionally, the police should keep an eye out for possible stalkers and take care to avoid upsetting victims by refraining from asking unwanted questions. In the famous legal matter of Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan [5], the Supreme Court addressed the issue of sexually harassing someone at work. This decision is read in conjunction with a landmark decision in the legal matter of "Apparel Export Promotion Council v. A.K. Chopra" [6], which held rightly that every episode of sexual harassment at workplace directly translated to a trespass of the fundamental rights of female employees as outlined in Indian Constitution articles 14, 19 and 21, thereby adding to the body of case law on the subject of service law. In the 2012 case of "Inspector General of Police v. S. Samuthiram" [7], the Supreme Court issued eight guidelines to prevent eve teasing. The Court discussed the importance of responding to the complaints of witnesses and victims of eve teasing in public places, such as movie theatres, schools and public transportation. at the Priya Matoo Case [8], one of the most well-known rape and stalking cases, a young law student was killed at her house in Vasant Kunj, Delhi, after being stalked by Mr. Santosh Singh, the son of a retired IPS officer. The RK Puram and Vasant Kunj police stations have received multiple

complaints about the offender. On January 23, 1996 Santosh killed Mattoo after sexually abusing her while she was at home by herself. The case then got transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation in 1996. The Supreme Court reversed the high court's decision to execute him in December 2010 and instead sentenced him to life in prison. Even though this is a very old case, it is evident that the entire charade of continuously pursuing the girl could not be considered an offence in and of itself. Things would be different if the stalking could be reported and put into action. In the case of *Shri Deu Bajji Bodake v. The State of Maharashtra* [9], of 2016, the Bombay High Court looked into a suicide case. It was claimed by the victim that her death was caused by the accused's continuing harassment and stalking in the State of Maharashtra. The accused would persistently pursue her at work and insist on marriage. The High Court decided that Section 354D charges should have been brought in addition to the charge of aiding and abetting suicide.

### **The Impact**

Although the repercussions of stalking vary from victim to victim, they are frequently extreme and mentally traumatising for a majority of victims who lack emotional fortitude. Many victims suffer from mental health conditions that cause them to feel helpless, irrationally angry, apprehensive and stressed most of the time. Along with experiencing long-term feelings from even intimate relationships, they may also lose faith in others, which can lead to anxiety, bipolar disorders and other mental health problems in addition to ongoing tension and rage.

Most of the time, the victims start carrying guns or other weapons for self-defense, move, change jobs and create secret phone numbers. According to a report titled "Victims of Stalking in India: A Study of Girl College Students in Tirunelveli City" [10], victims experience the following consequences. Fifty percent of respondents indicated they experienced no bodily effect at all. Half (50%) of the respondents reported having a physical influence, while 70% reported feeling it. Anger was the most frequent emotional reaction to stalking (19.3%).

### **How Stalking Invariably Precedes Acid Attack**

**Incident 1:** On the 1st of February of the year 2022, one Sajid Altaf Rather, a resident of the city of Srinagar, used an underage to help him splash acid on a woman who was 24 years old at the location of Hawal in the Old City neighborhood of Srinagar after his marriage proposal was turned down by her. The woman's face was severely burnt and she even became deprived of eyesight in one eye. Jawad Ahmed, the senior sessions judge in Srinagar, found Rather liable and punished him with a sentence of life imprisonment under Sections 326 A (Voluntarily causing of Grievous Damage by use of Acid) and 34 (Common Intention) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The bone on the right side of her head was revealed due to the impact of the caustic substance. The nose, eyes and face were all badly injured. "The scars still exist after 23 procedures," the decision says. The accused, a former salesperson for a medical supply company, had seen the woman's itinerary, according to the investigation.

### **Incident 2**

Nagesh Babu, who had contemplated attacking the 25-year-old woman in 2020 but decided against it, attacked her with acid on April 28 after she refused his advances. Nagesh Babu had known the victim for a duration of seven whole years and was actively pursuing her, but she had consistently rejected him. It was found in the investigation that he had been monitoring her covertly for years. Additionally, it was shown in the inquiry that he had been thinking about striking her with a corrosive substance in the year 2020. Police Commissioner Kamal Pant claims that despite having acid at the time, he did not carry out the crime.

### **Incident 3**

According to authorities, a 23-year-old stalker attacked three women, ages 17 to 19, at a government pre-university campus in the Dakshina Kannada region of Karnataka on Monday, suffering burn injuries.

### **Incident 4**

A Chennai college-going by the name of Sathya Priya was killed by a stalker. Her story is well-known and horrifying: a man who is obsessed with a young woman follows and harasses her for months. Despite filing a police report, the offender is set free on bond. After he continues to commit crimes and a second complaint had been filed, a "compromise" was reached at between the families. On October 13, Sathya Priya gathered courage and confronted the man who had been pursuing her to a metro station. One train is about to approach when he pushes her onto the rails. But the story of macho privileges, immunity from punishment and backward social attitudes and negligent enforcement of serious crimes doesn't change if you replace Chennai with any other city. The vulnerability that stalking throws on women, particularly those in positions of authority, by interfering with their lives, careers and freedom of movement is shown by an earlier story of a serving official of the judiciary in the Hamirpur district of Uttar Pradesh, being the victim of stalking. And these days, it usually results in a fatal assault, acid attack, or rape. One stalker incident is reported in India every 57 minutes, according to the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) 2021 Crime in India data. There has been a

14% increase from 2017, when reports of 22 cases per day (or one every hour) were made. The crime rate, or the number of stalking incidents per one lakh women, increased from 1.3 in 2017 to 1.4 in 2021. According to experts, stalking is so widespread in India that it is near about coming to be considered as "teasing" or inappropriate actions rather than an offense and official statistics are drastically underreported. They mostly attribute this to the stigma, the police's unwillingness to report anything and their fear of retaliation. Almost every stalker case, including Sathya Priya's, has these components. The dalits right activist and lawyer, Manjula Pradeep clarified that perpetrators are encouraged to carry out more extreme types of violence, particularly if the victim is a member of a marginalized socioeconomic or religious community. This is a result of the family, community and law enforcement organizations failing to respond to allegations of stalking.

#### **Incident 5**

A 32-year-old man was taken into custody in Malad for allegedly attempting to extort a woman and her mother by threatening to attack them with acid. The police said that after the victim turned down the accused's advances, he became furious. The accused, Abhijeet Singh, resides in Malad and works as a sales professional for a private bank in the Andheri branch, according to the Crime Branch of Mumbai Police, which is conducting an inquiry. The accused first became acquainted with the 30-year-old complainant, who works at the same bank's Kandivali branch, while on business trips. In January, he proposed to her, but she refused. A 38-year-old man has been taken into custody for harassing a little girl in Mumbai's Bhoiwada neighborhood and threatening to attack her with acid, according to a police officer on Monday. The 14-year-old girl was being stalked by the offender, Dashrath Ashok Ramane, between August 6 and August 28. According to a Bhoiwada police station official, he also made repeated attempts to approach her and harassed her. The student was followed by the accused on August 28 before he grabbed her hand. The official claimed that he threatened to attack her with acid when she protested.

#### **Incident 6**

A man was sentenced with six years of imprisonment for allegedly stalking a female driving instructor, who lived in constant fear of being attacked with acid. Maksood Sadiq, 47, first contacted the victim in 2016 when he arranged for his wife to take driving lessons. Sadiq soon began sending more personal and frequent messages, refusing to stop even when asked. When the defendant's wife passed her driving test in 2017, the unsolicited communications came back; Sadiq sent romantic Bollywood songs and said he liked the victim. Over the course of the following two years, the defendant's behaviour intensified and continued, routinely bombarding the victim with unsolicited calls and texts. Despite many attempts to stop, the defendant persisted until the victim got in touch with his wife, at which point he took a little pause. Sadiq began attending the victim's driving lessons several times a week after she stopped getting calls from him. He would pull up next to her, watch her and only leave when she turned around. In April 2021, the victim saw Sadiq in a neighboring car while driving on Talbot Street in Nottingham. He glared at her and began screaming for her to stop and speak to him. After witnessing Sadiq, the victim was so concerned for her safety that she was afraid to call the police. Sadiq had the audacity to contact Nottinghamshire Police on July 10, 2022 and he was arrested that same day. He was freed on bond with instructions to avoid the victim after providing a mute interview. An interim stalking protection order was also put into place in September 2022 to provide the victim more security. Sadiq was required to give officials access to his cell phone so they could examine it and to reveal any phone numbers or social media profiles. The victim told the officers that she was worried that Sadiq's actions would make her the subject of an acid assault. Sadiq, of Prestwood Drive, Nottingham, pleaded guilty to one count of Section 4A stalking involving serious alarm and distress when he appeared at Nottingham Crown Court on July 26. In addition, he received a two-year prison sentence with a two-year suspension. Sadiq was also subject to a five-year restraining order that prohibits him from speaking to the victim. Sadiq was mandated to fulfill 150 hours of unpaid labor, participate in 25 days of rehabilitation exercises and give the victim £500 in compensation plus a victim surcharge of £100.

The NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) statistics plainly show how things have turned out for the Indian subcontinent in this regard. According to data from the home ministry's division, acid attacks rose from a pitiful 9% in 2014 to 22% in 2015. According to data, "Attempts to acid attack" decreased by 11% (from 52 to 46). Only in 2014 did the NCRB begin to categorize acid attacks as a distinct crime. It's fascinating to observe that there has been an increase in stalker incidents during this time. As a result, it is plausible to draw the conclusion that stalker incidents most likely occurred prior to the attacks. All hands point to the notion that stalking and acid attacks are associated in a nation where the incidence of stalking and acid attack cases is rising. Over the same time period, the number of stalking instances increased by 33%, from 4,699 to 6,266.

According to this research from the Acid Survivors Foundation India, a Kolkata-based organization that assists victims of acid attacks, stalking frequently results in some kind of harassment, assault, or violence as well as acid assaults in the majority of cases. According to a statement made by the government on February 3, 2017, the ministry of child and development gave Rs 200 crore to all states and union territories in 2016 as compensation to victims of

violence and acid assaults. The friend didn't know where the victim lived, so he looked up her address, which made the abuse worse. He also called her several times on different numbers, several of which were blocked. In February, the police received a 999-call stating that Friend had visited a friend of the victim's in Chatham. While asking for the victim's address, he was seen pulling what appeared to be a machete-like weapon from his trousers and brandishing it.

He was also heard screaming that he would burn the victim's face with acid and murder her. He was taken into custody that same day, but he later posted bail as the police gathered evidence. He was detained once more in March after continuing to send threatening SMS to everyone, including the victim. A 51-year-old Woodstock Road friend was charged with carrying a knife in public and stalking with the intention of causing serious fear or anxiety. "Duncan Friend subjected his victim to unrelenting harassment and intimidation and his actions have significantly affected her everyday life," stated investigator Holly Felstead. "The friend has caused her friends and relatives a great deal of distress, anxiety and concern in addition to the victim.

### **Why Laws Don't Work**

Stalking is illegal under Section 354-D of IPC. It is said in this provision that it is prohibited by the law for a man to keep an eye on a woman and continuously make efforts to have a personal relationship with her, even if she shows obvious signals of disinterest. Additionally, he has the ability to keep an eye on how she uses her e-mail and communication tools. The section had been added to the IPC by the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 [11]. So as to quicken the trial process and stiffen the penalties for sexual offences, the Justice Verma Committee, which had been formed in response to the 2012 gang rape in Nirbhaya, proposed this amendment to the criminal code. However, it is still a crime for which bail is available. This is true even though stalking is an obsessive behaviour and reports indicate that once the offender is released, it usually resumes with twice the intensity. A range of legal issues, including ambiguous terminology, the ease of obtaining bail, incorrect implementation and the lack of gender neutrality, were discussed with us by legal professionals. It is shown in the police responses that they don't consider Stalking to be a serious, potentially fatal crime. In the case of Sathya Priya, the police detained Sathish under Section 75 of the Tamil Nadu City Police Act, [12], which deals with drunk or vulgar behaviour in public places. Station bail was granted to Sathish the same day following which he was arrested. Another common police response to stalking is the tendency to demand a "compromise" or an unofficial guarantee of altered behaviour from the harasser. After two years of persistent threats, a Western-Delhi adolescent had been knifed by her stalker in July 2022. Even after a complaint from the mother's side, no action was taken by the police except taking an undertaking.

The following is the penalty for stalking, according Section 78 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS):

- A first conviction carries a upper limit punishment of three years in jail and a fine
- A further conviction carries a maximum five-year sentence of imprisonment and a fine

### **It Shall Not Be Bailable**

First, Section 354D of the IPC permits bail for stalking. Pradeep, a Dalit rights activist, explained that many stalkers attack their victims in retaliation, arguing against the crime being categorized as one that is amenable to bail. Several Indian states, have reported attacks and continued harassment as reprisal over the years. Stalking should not be eligible for bail, according to Debarati Halder, the founder of the Center for Cyber Victim Counselling. This is because stalking is a behavior related crime that often involves crimes like sexual violence, unethical hacking in case of internet-based stalking. Halder claims that when stalking leads to horrible crimes, the Code of Criminal Procedure is adhered to. If there is no bail for one of the reported offences, there is no bail for the other. Criminologist Jaishankar claims that the Indian laws pertaining to stalking are ambiguous and provide the police a lot of discretion in order to prevent crime. For instance, pursuing someone with the goal of halting or identifying criminal conduct won't be considered stalking. Additionally, it states that if someone is chasing you for violating any law or for complying with any demands or conditions imposed on you by someone else under any law, it won't be deemed stalking. As a result, it is simple for police officers and ministers to violate the law. Jaishankar claims that the Indian laws concerning stalking are riddled with uncertainties. For instance, it's not entirely apparent what constitutes an unambiguous signaling of disinterest" or when to use it. The IPC defines stalking in a way that is gender-specific. Professor Halder added, "It fails to acknowledge that stalking is not just a male behaviour and that men, transgender people and other gender minorities can also become victims of stalking." In February 2018, the Supreme Court dismissed the Public Interest Litigation, which sought to make rape and sexual harassment laws gender neutral. The court ruled that the parliament was in charge of changing the legislation. The Indian Penal Code should have explicit sections about acid assaults and stalking of women, coupled with harsh punishments for both crimes, according to the National Commission for Women (NCW) [13].

## **CONCLUSION**

In India, stalking is a very common crime that carries a minimum sentence of three years in prison. As previously said, it can be carried out physically or via different electronic media channels. Many Indian women, working professionals,

housewives and students are routinely stalked without even realising it and not just by men. In addition, many women and girls avoid leaving their houses because they dread being harassed and harassment and stalking are rarely regarded as serious offences. In order to avoid attracting unsolicited attention from the stalkers, the women must dress so-called "modestly," visit the residences before dusk and keep professional and limited ties with coworkers. According to the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), stalking is bailable for the first conviction but not for future ones. The basic idea of stalking can be investigated through this paper and it is suggested that stalking should be divided into simple and aggravated forms, just like many other offences. If the victim reports a need for safety or if the stalking has reached an aggravated level, these reports should be addressed and the culmination of the offence with a larger crime should not be waited upon. This essay will demonstrate how stalking frequently stays unreported until it becomes a serious crime because it is an unseen component of serious crimes like acid attacks. Therefore, it is suggested in this paper that stalking should be divided into three categories, similar to other offences like hurt, grievous hurt and hurt with a dangerous weapon. The third type of stalking, which resembles a serious offence like rape, murder, or acid attack, should always be treated differently and be a non-bailable offence.

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