

## Repercussions of Betrayal in Romantic Relationships

Mahesh Darolia\* Pragyendu\* Shelly Thakur\* Dinesh Chhabra\*\*

### Abstract

*Betrayal experiences in relationships during the young adult developmental stage may interfere in our ability to trust others and be emotionally available. Letting go of a close one often seems like a difficult thing to do which may exhibit as post relationship tracking and contact by the victim. The current research was planned to explore the relationship among betrayal, difficulties in emotion regulation and post relationship contact and tracking in emerging adults (University students, aged 18- 25 years old) after their most recent break up in the past six months. Betrayal response scale along with Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale was employed to gather data from a sample of 122 students from universities in Delhi. Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour Inventory was used to see what kind of post relationship contact participants indulged into with their partner. Results identified that participants who have faced high intensity betrayal in fact scored high on difficulties in emotion regulation and more often engaged in acts of like contact and tracking.*

**Keywords:** Betrayal, Difficulties in emotional regulation, Stalking, Romantic relationship

### About Author :

### Introduction

Trust and betrayal are intertwined. Indian history, literature and movies are full of instances of betrayal. As said in Sri Guru Granth Sahib “Ta ko dhoka kaha biape ja ko aot tuhari” “betrayal occurs in the closest and trusted relationships. A breach of relationship often ends a relationship and the recovery of the same is contingent on a particular scenario. Betrayal is like a broken agreement in a relation which can take several forms like lying, abusing, cheating, self-centeredness, etc. Betrayal is a choice made by a person who puts the victim in a vulnerable position and induces a feeling that the victim has been wronged and did nothing to deserve betrayal. The violation of trust comes as an unpredictable and sudden act which leaves us in a traumatic state. When betrayal is accepted, the ego adapts to the loss allowing the deprived to search for novel relations, attachments and connections (Sussillo, 2005) but for the betrayed, it is difficult to invest their trust and efforts into someone again. Emerging adults are usually pre-occupied with their romantic connections (Dhariwal, Connolly, Paciello, & Caprara, 2009). Therefore, there are two possibilities in such a scenario, either the

person becomes more open to the risks in their life or completely closes himself/herself off from new attachments. The level of intimacy also matters when acceptance of betrayal is being processed. Traumatic events are the unusual stressors that lie outside the normal human range of catastrophic stressors. Trauma is an overwhelming response after a distressing event which disturbs the ability to cope with stressful events and diminishes their ability to feel full range of emotions.

Several emotions are felt during and after relationships by individuals; love, jealousy, insecurities, protectiveness, hate, disliking, sadness, anger, revenge, rage, etc. Regulation of negative emotions becomes a tedious task especially post break-up, which if not dealt with maturely can contribute towards emotional disorders. A failure in regulation of emotions may result in persisting negative feelings of rage, anxiety, depression and self-harm (Briere & Gil, 1998; Gratz, 2003) which also highlights problem with their cognition. Most forms of psychopathology are underlined by difficulties in emotion regulation (Bradley & Lang, 2000). Anger outbursts may cause emotional dysregulations in relationships

which may take form of shouting or throwing things. Conflicts in relationships lead to decreased level of trust because of which the significant other feels insecure and may feel the need to keep an eye on his/her partner. Small arguments like these destroy relationships slowly and might be a cause of stalking or cyber stalking behaviours. Stalking and cyber stalking behaviours are associated with extreme psychological distress, fear, and physical harm (Dreßing et al., 2014; Amar, 2006; Westrup, Fremouw, Thompson & Lewis, 1999). In response of being stalked some victims may report difficulty in sleeping, changes in eating patterns, hyper vigilance, fear of safety, nightmares and helplessness (The National Centre of Victims of Crime, Cyber stalking, 2004).

A strong desire by the offender to exert power, influence and control over the victim is a striking similarity between offline stalking and online stalking (Pittaro, 2007). If such behaviours are persisted, they can lead to mental and physical harm to the victim even though the enforcing law perceives cyber stalking to be harmless (Pittaro, 2007). Petherick (1999) observe cyber stalking as an agent of offline stalking while Burgess & Baker (2002) define cyber stalking as a phase of overall stalking pattern and uses high-technology tools to stalk.

As per the literature review, emerging adults are the ones that are mostly preoccupied with romantic relationships and may experience traumatic negative emotions because of dissolution of relationships due to betrayal. The present study is relevant, as according to the UN World Happiness report of 2019 India has been ranked 140 out of 156 nations that were included. The happiness index 4.01 is lower than last year's happiness index. Most emerging adult relationships aren't stable or held on mature grounds. Highest complaints of dissatisfaction in relationships as reported by National Commission of Women in 2018-2019 came from Delhi (96), Punjab (95), UP (94) and Haryana (68). Moreover, with advancements in technology and more

availability of resources, unwanted pursuit behaviour may have become more prevalent among young adults.

#### **Hypotheses:**

- H1: Betrayal faced would be significantly varied across the gender.
- H2: Difficulties in emotion regulation faced by males and females would be significantly varies.
- H3: There exists a significant difference between indulgence in PRCT faced by males and females.
- H4: Experiences of betrayal will positively correlate with difficulties in emotion regulation and its sub-dimensions.
- H5: Participants with high score on difficulties in emotional regulation and its sub-dimensions would report more behaviours which necessitate PRCT.
- H6: Higher level of betrayal intensity will be linked to more indulgence in PRCT.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants and Sampling**

A correlational research design was used for the current research. To study the relationship among betrayal, difficulties in emotion regulation and post relationship contact and tracking, data was collected from 122 participants belonging to Delhi, India (Male=52, Female=70) through purposive sampling method. The sample consisted of participants who have dissolved their relationships due to betrayal in the past six months. The age range of participants was 18 years to 25 years. The research was conducted on college students of different universities in Delhi between the given age range. Eligible participants must have been betrayed in a romantic relationship before within the past six months and did not date anyone new after their previous relationship.

## **Tools**

**Betrayal Response Scale (BRS)**, developed by Komolafe (2016) consisting of 29-items, to assess the cognitive, behavioural, emotional, and physiological impacts of betrayal events

and **Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale – Short Form (DERS-SF)**, a self-report measure consisting of 18 items, were taken. The original DERS scale was developed by Gratz & Roemer (2004).

**Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour Inventory (UPBI)** developed by Palarea & Langhinrichsen-Rohling (1998), has 26-items used to measure the full range of unwanted pursuit behaviour.

### Procedure

Data was collected from participants living in Delhi who have faced betrayal in a romantic relationship in the past six months and are currently not dating anyone new, through

online questionnaires. Instructions were clearly mentioned in the questionnaires and responses that fit the criteria of the present research were further analysed. The data was analysed quantitatively.

### RESULTS

The purpose of the current research was to assess the relationship between betrayal in romantic relationships, difficulties in emotion regulation and post relationship contact and tracking. Correlation and independent samples t-test were calculated amongst the variables to examine the contribution of betrayal on difficulties in emotion regulation and PRCT in emerging adults of Delhi.

*The main Effects of Gender on Betrayal, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation and Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour along with their Sub-Dimensions (N=122)*

Dimensions	Male		Female		t value (df=120)
	Mean (n=52)	SD	Mean (n=70)	SD	
Betrayal	59.04	16.09	62.14	17.81	0.97
Difficulties in emotion regulation	47.98	11.15	48.07	13.76	0.03
Non-acceptance of emotional response	9.00	2.61	8.86	3.17	0.26
Difficulty engaging in Goal directed behaviour	8.21	2.85	8.83	3.20	1.10
Impulse control difficulties	7.60	2.65	8.00	3.33	0.71
Lack of Emotional awareness	7.19	3.04	6.00	2.49	2.37**
Limited access to Emotion regulation strategies	8.67	2.58	9.10	3.16	0.79
Lack of Emotional clarity	7.31	3.12	7.29	3.14	0.03
Unwanted pursuit behaviour	21.48	17.44	14.04	15.90	2.45**
Mild stalking	18.02	13.06	12.30	11.56	2.55**
Severe stalking	3.46	7.83	1.74	6.52	1.32

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

*The table indicates that the mean scores of males participant was higher in comparison to female participants on lack of emotional awareness, lack of emotional clarity and mild stalking in unwanted pursuit behaviour. Difference between two groups mean statistically analysis between males and females clearly revealed that male and female participants were significantly vary on lack of emotional awareness ( $M = 7.19$ ,  $SD = 3.04$ ),  $t(120) = 2.37$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; unwanted pursuit behaviour ( $M = 21.48$ ,  $SD = 17.4$ ),  $t(120) = 2.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and mild stalking ( $M = 18.02$ ,  $SD = 13.06$ ),  $t(120) = 2.55$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .*

**Table 2**

Correlation between Betrayal, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation and Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour

Dimensions	Betrayal	Difficulties in emotion regulation	Unwanted pursuit behaviour
Betrayal	1	0.746**	0.307**
Difficulties in emotion regulation	0.746**	1	0.296**
Unwanted pursuit behaviour	0.307**	0.296**	1

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

It was observed that betrayal, difficulties in emotion regulation (DER) and unwanted pursuit behaviour (UPB) show a positive correlation with each other at a significance level of 0.01.

**Table 3**

Interrelationship of Dimensions of DERS with Betrayal and UPB

DERS Dimensions	Betrayal	UPB
Non-acceptance of emotional response	.610**	.221**
Difficulty engaging in goal directed behaviour	.731**	.251**
Impulse control difficulties	.642**	.360**
Lack of emotional awareness	.039	.019
Limited access to Emotion regulation strategies	.633**	.332**
Lack of emotional clarity	.475**	.065

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

A correlational analysis clearly shows that all dimensions of difficulties in emotion regulation scale (DERS) were positively related to betrayal except lack of emotional awareness dimension of DERS, which includes non-acceptance of emotional response ( $r=.61$ ,  $p<.01$ ); difficulty in engaging in goal directed behaviour ( $r=.73$ ,  $p<.01$ ); impulse control difficulties ( $r=.64$ ,  $p<.01$ ); limited access to emotion regulation strategies ( $r=.63$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and lack of emotional clarity ( $r=.47$ ,  $p<.01$ ). UPB also shows a positive correlation with non-acceptance of emotional response ( $r=.22$ ,  $p<.01$ ); difficulty in engaging in goal directed behaviour ( $r=.25$ ,  $p<.01$ ); impulse control difficulties ( $r=.36$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and limited access to emotion regulation strategies ( $r=.33$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

**Table 4**

Correlation of Betrayal and Dimensions of DER with Dimensions of UPBI

L d' rt qdr	L hc rs' kj hmf	Rdudqd rs' kj hmf
Adsq` x` k	-243))	-0/ 6
Mnmacceptance of emotional response	-125))	-0/ 8
Chelbt ksx dmf` f hmf hmf n` kchqdbsd adg` uhnt q	-18/ ))	-/ 76
H ot k re control difficulties	-287))	-045
K` bj ne dl nshnm k` v ` qdnrr	-/ 02	-/ 10
KH hsdc ` bbdrr sn Dl nshnmqdf t k shnmrsq` sdf hkr	-253))	-04/
K` bj ne dl nshnm kblk qsx	-058	,142

\*\*p&lt;.01, \*p&lt;.05

A table shows that a positive correlation of mild stalking behaviour with betrayal ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ ); non-acceptance of emotional response ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ); difficulty engaging in goal directed behaviour ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ); impulse control difficulties ( $r = .38$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and limited access to emotion regulation strategies ( $r = .36$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the current study was to study the association among betrayal in romantic relationships, difficulties in emotion regulation and post relationship contact and tracking.

Male and female participants show significant differences at 0.01 level between males and females only for lack of emotional awareness and mild stalking in unwanted pursuit behaviour thus leading to acceptance of one of our hypotheses that states that there exists a significant difference between indulgence in PRCT faced by males and females. Male participants are statistically associated with lack of emotional awareness and indulging in mild stalking behaviours which include making frequent calls, giving gifts, taking information from friends and

family members, etc. more than female participants. Few researchers provide evidence in accordance with the findings of the current study that males indulge in more stalking behaviours of relatively mild intensity. Ménard and Pincus (2012) explored the sex difference in context of offline/online ORI behaviour in a study, which inferred that male participants were undoubtedly more expected to indulge in both offline and online ORI behaviours. Spitzberg, Cupach, and Ciceraro (2010) studied the gender variation on pursuit behaviours and reported males showed higher level of pursuit behaviour than females. Male participants were more confident than females to participate in face to face communication with the target of pursuit whereas, females showed behaviours like part in observation or checking behaviours similar study conducted by Dennison and Stewart (2006) on physical stalking.

Correlation analysis of Table 2 suggest that more the intensity of betrayal, the more people will face difficulties in regulating their emotions and hence would involve in more unwanted behaviours to establish contact with an ex-partner. Studies also show that various ways in which romantic partners uses different

deceptive techniques on one another, like simple non-disclosure, to misleading statements (Peterson, 1996; Barbee, Cunningham, Druen, and Yankeelov, 1996). Researchers also noted that the very first emotional reactions felt after awareness of being betrayed are pain and hurt (Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998). Linkages between emotional deficits and psychopathology are seen as emotion dysregulation predicted to increase anxiety, aggressive behaviour and eating pathology in one of the studies conducted by McLaughlin and Hoeksema in 2011. After break individuals who have an inclination for or assume an intimacy with the victim carry out ups behaviours involving invasion of someone's physical or symbolic privacy (Cupach and Spitzberg, 1998). Coleman (1997) conducted study on 141 female undergraduate psychology students, reported an relationship between unwanted pursuit behaviours like stalking and verbal as well as physical violence in pre-existing relationships. Difficulties in emotion regulation and PRCT also show a positively significant correlation with each other. As mentioned earlier extreme emotional and psychological distress, fear and physical harm is reported to be associated with stalking and cyber stalking (Amar, 2010).

Tice & Bratslavsky (2000) showed that emotion regulation strategies are used to decrease the intensity of a negative response that might have arisen due to post break up. Cheating and infidelity elicits negative emotions in individuals and behaviours, causes and consequences of betrayal in both older adolescents and adults are seen to be similar (Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988). Recent review of literature has shown common reasons of betrayal in relationships to be permissive attitudes towards cheating (men only), opportunities to cheat, dissatisfaction in their romantic relationship and low level of commitment towards their partner. Lacking emotional clarity invalidation occurs in romantic relationships and this nullification by a romantic partner is a predictive of depression in adults (Leong, Cano, & Johansen, 2011).

Likewise, for unwanted pursuit behaviour, the analysis shows us that unwanted pursuit behaviour increases in an individual when they face difficulties in accepting their psychological responses, engage in goal-oriented behaviour and directing their instincts. A research study conducted by De Smet, Buysee and Brondeel (2011) suggests increased negative affects post relationship break ups were positively associated with increased levels of physical stalking behaviours. This research is in accordance with the findings of the current study. Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr, and Vanni (1998) found 14 emotions to have occurred frequently in the participants after a break up out of which 9 were negative and 5 were positive emotions. They observed that individuals who were left by their partners were more distressed in terms of negative emotions. Study conducted by Cole (2014) focusing on post relationship emotions and obsessive relational intrusion (ORI) in romantic relationships concluded that two categories of online ORI behaviours occur i.e. explicit and overt. Explicit ORI was anticipated by self-efficacy of the ones whose partner dissolved the relationship, just as goal linking when the breakup was self-initiated. Covert ORI was anticipated by reflecting upon all separation initiator like self, partner, or mutual. Results of this study showed that breakup sufferers engaged more in covert online stalking than breakup initiators or in cases of mutual dissolution of a relationship. A recent study focused upon the personality traits of people who get cheated on i.e. breakup sufferers and found that those who were less conscientious had more chances of their partner cheating on them (Mahambrey, 2020).

Analysis of table 4 suggests that increase in mild stalking behaviour is observed when betrayal intensity is high and difficulties in emotion regulation are more. Escalation of non-acceptance of emotional response, difficulty indulging in goal oriented acts, directing instincts difficulties and restricted allowance to emotion regulation strategies is positively

correlated at 0.01 significant level with mild stalking behaviours according to the given table. Correlational analysis with severe stalking on the other hand suggest a positive relationship with betrayal and difficulties in emotion regulation including the dimensions- difficulties in non- acceptance of emotional response, engagement in goal directed behaviour, impulse control, emotional awareness and accessing emotion regulation strategies. A negative correlation is seen between severe stalking and lack of emotional clarity suggesting if a person is not clear about his emotions, he/she wouldn't be motivated enough to show behaviours concerning severe stalking. Motivation is a desire to do something (Kim, 2008) so when an individual will be low on motivation due to his/her lack of emotional clarity, they might not indulge into severe stalking behaviours. Obsessive relational intrusion is seen to vary with severity from frequent calls, to secretive observation, stalking and/or physical harm or threat to the other individual (Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999). A study conducted by Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998 reported about 43-45% of victims threatened by individuals stalking them. .

Therefore, we accept the alternate hypothesis for the present study as experiences of betrayal positively correlates with difficulties in emotion regulation and a high score on difficulties in emotional regulation reports more behaviours which necessitate PRCT. Higher level of betrayal intensity is linked to more indulgence in PRCT.

### Conclusion

The study examined that increase in betrayal intensity faced by individuals post break up leads to difficulties in emotion regulation. If the level of betrayal intensity increases with a significant amount then there is also increment in mild stalking behaviours shown by the romantic partner

The results of the current study also show that major problems an individual face in emotion regulation, more likely are they to involve in PRCT activities. The study might not

be able to shed light on all aspects of romantic relationship betrayal, difficulties in emotion regulation and post relationship contact and tracking because the data obtained was too small which may have affected the result and therefore generalizations can't be made. A better picture of the relationships between the variables can be obtained if the study is conducted on a larger sample. Due to the limitation of time and resources the study is only conducted on individuals from Delhi and NCR regions which narrowed down the study to a restricted area and small population. Other factors like duration of the relationship, personality characteristics of individuals, lifestyle, etc. might affect the intensity of betrayal, difficulties in emotion regulation and PRCT which are not taken into consideration in the present study.

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