

THE OBSESSIVE PERSECUTION: ILLNESS OR CRIME?

Enza Maierà¹ & Chiara Mandaglio²

¹Psichiatra servizio Salute mentale, Trebisacce (Cs), Italy

²Psicologa Trebisacce, Trebisacce (Cs), Italy

SUMMARY

The risk of a psychiatric treatment of Stalking can be avoided by starting to examine socio-cultural aspects in which the phenomenon of stalking and violent behavior develop. The results of research programs and study in psychiatry are closely related to the study of the dynamics of socio-environmental factors that often act as contributing factors. It is certain that stalking is a disease of relationship, communication and emotional dependence. It also concerns any kind of relationship, men-women, men-men; women-women; adults-children; adults-disabilities, etc.

Key words: socio-cultural aspects – relationship – communication – emotional dependence – mental disorders – personal interactions – genesis – events – Psychopathology Stalker – obsessive – persecuzion – crime – illness

* * * * *

SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS

Starting from statistical elements, it is necessary to analyze especially the phenomenon of stalking and violent behavior against women (Basaglia 2006).

The outside world, personal interactions, and mental disorders

Today in all orientations of contemporary psychiatry the role of personal interactions in the genesis and evolution of mental disorders is verified and studied with much more sophisticated scientific methods. The works of the great psychopathologists of the first half of the twentieth century talk about the problem of the relationship between personal interactions and mental disorders. We can recall the contributions of Jaspers, Kretschmer, Schneider; these contributions are based on the ability to make acute psychological reconstructions about the role that events take compared to the existential journey of the subject, negative or positive. To take one example, Jaspers's remark about the crisis that "must not necessarily appear acutely as a catastrophe, but it can progress silently, seemingly unobtrusively accomplished forever in a decisive way"; equally acute is Kretschmer's remark about "key events", a well-chosen expression used to talk about those events, often related to interpersonal relationships, which are particularly important because they are "sharp as a razor" (Schneider), that hit a weak point, a conflictual area of the interior life of the subject.

Freud underestimates the external reality and hence interpersonal relationships in the genesis of mental disorders and in the etiology of neurosis; he specified that in different proportion for each person there are simultaneously present factors related to internal conflicts (intrapersonal) and of factors related to the frustrations (interpersonal):

- The most recent developments of psychoanalysis have also attributed a great importance to inter-

personal relationships, both of early childhood and adulthood, regarding the preservation or disruption of mental equilibrium (Pazzagli 1993);

- Harry Stack Sullivan was the psychiatrist who has attributed much importance to interpersonal relationships; he considered psychiatry not as the study of mental disorders, but as "the study of processes that involve people and that take place between people (Sullivan 1961).

The field of psychiatry is the field of interpersonal relations, in each situation in which these relationships are present.

Starting from what has been said before, some considerations are necessary in a nutshell:

- in the area of interpersonal interactions there can be present some events that have negative effects on psychic equilibrium;
- these effects depend not only on the characteristics of the event, but also on the meaning that it assumes for the subject; this meaning depends also on premature interpersonal relationships - in any case belonging to the past - which have been interiorised;
- the quality of current interpersonal relationships increases or decreases the subject's ability to deal with difficult or even traumatic situations.

Even though psychoanalytic theories underline childhood experiences, Pazzagli et al. point out that "premature memory signs change according to new experiences, or with access to a new development model, obtaining a new meaning and efficacy" (Pazzagli 1987).

In other words, a new experience brings a lot of meanings, which can be favorable or unfavorable, and that can still induce the individual to revise his past experiences, the current ones, the image of himself and of his future.

In the Manual of Mental Hygiene Frighi states "the heuristic wealth implied in the concept of social support. It should certainly be situated in the stress-

illness model as a variable of paramount importance” (Frighi 1984).

The biopsychosocial model in psychiatry – proposed by Engel in 1977 – let us understand and deal with the events in their complexity; as Bartolomeo said (XIII-XIV century), "insanity is sometimes caused by the pressures of the soul, by business, troubles, sorrow, hard study, as well as by fear; other times insanity is caused by the bite of a dog or other animals, sometimes it is caused by food gone bad or by a too strong wine. The symptoms and signs of insanity are different, as well as the causes.

Some subjects cry, others jump and injure themselves and the others; others hide away.

STALKING

Stalking is a complex phenomenon, multifactorial and multidisciplinary; it has to be analyzed in its social, medical, cultural and legal aspects.

The interest of psychiatry in Stalking is increasing in the field of psychopathology, both for what concerns the motivations and the opportunities of therapeutic intervention for stalkers, and for what concerns the psychological impact or psychopathological consequences of the treatment of victims. Psychopathology deals with the phenomenon of stalking when the stalker's behaviours become persistent and when these behaviours cause emotional stress in the victim with an impact on victim's social and private life.

Definition - forms and features

The word Stalking comes from the English verb to stalk. The meaning of this verb expresses the real psychological state of the victim whose life is always spied and disturbed by intrusive acts of stalker.

This is a list of the features of stalking that can be used to identify this phenomenon from the clinical point of view:

- orderliness and repetition of the stalker's persecutory actions;
- Programming which is deliberate and conscious;
- Persecution and obsessive teasing;
- Strong and often violent intrusiveness;
- The effects of the phenomenon on personal, social and working life.

Let us consider stalking as a crime that requires legal protection and police intervention, a non-homogeneous complex psychopathology, psychiatry worthy of attention, but also a social phenomenon worthy of study and research from sociology and anthropology.

Differential Analysis

- The genesis resides in an altered reading of the report and in a distorted communication implemented by the Stalker.

- The reasons are many and minimally have a relationship with severe psychopathology.
- The scenario of Stalking.
- Protagonists: the Stalker's presentation which is disturbed and disturbing- and the victim.

Who is the stalker?

The Stalker is a subject who searches for a relationship and/or direct contact in an obsessive way. Sometimes, the stalker is moved by anger or revenge for abandonment.

However, the Stalker puts in place an tracking obsessive tracking aimed at the recovery of that part of himself (as identified in the victim), without which his identity is disintegrated, or to "get that relationship", to satisfy his insatiable and tormented narcissism. This attitude and behavior of the inevitable Stalker results in a charge of harassment and an intolerable threat that destroys the lives of those who are the victim.

Psychopathology of the Stalker

The presence of a psychopathological picture reflects only 10% of the population, which shows the complexity of the phenomenon. Except in cases of overt psychopathology and well-classifiable in psychiatric disorders, the Stalker definitely has detectable pathology and Communication the relationship or emotional dependency that is frequently found in various personality disorders. Most of the Stalkers, suffering from mental disorders, suffers from depression or addiction to substance abuse, passive-aggressive personality disorder, borderline, narcissistic, antisocial or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

In the most serious cases we are dealing with cases of psychosis or schizophrenia. The profile of Stalker has several points in common with that of the person suffering from emotional dependency. It is in the presence, in most cases, of a weak personality who, for fear of being abandoned, perhaps to past traumatic childhood experiences, binds to someone obsessively. Referring to the theory of Bowlby, in the Stalker there is the presence of a pattern of insecure attachment in which the other becomes necessary for its existence: the relationship becomes for him a form of a relationship which reassures compared to the possibility of total loss which is perceived as intolerable. In a psychology of this kind, there is, in fact, a form of insecure attachment which can trigger anxieties related to abandonment, since the absence of the other is considered a threat of annihilation of the self.

Rarely does the stalker have a severe psychopathology (loss of contact with reality), seven times out of ten the organization of the personality is *Bordeline*. The emotion that distinguishes it is fear.

Acknowledgements: None.

Conflict of interest: None to declare.

References

1. *Botta N: Mobbing, stress e diritti violati. Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2003.*
2. *Dipartimento per i Diritti e le Pari Opportunità-II Rapporto nazionale-Rete Antiviolenza tra le città Urban-Italia 2006 a cura di Alberta Basaglia, Maria Rosa Lotti, Maura Misiti, Vittoria Tola.*
3. *Frigli L: Manuale di Igiene Mentale. Bulzoni, Roma, 1984.*
4. *Lattanzi M, 2007 www.criminalmente.it*
5. *Infrasca R: Donne e depressione. Bruno Mondadori.*
6. *Lattanzi M psicologo e psicoterapeuta, coordina il Centro Presunti Autori-Unità Analisi Psico Comportamentale dell' Osservatorio Nazionale sullo Stalking www.stalking.it*
7. *Pancheri P, Biondi M: Cap. 13 Trattato Italiano di Psichiatria ed. Masson, 1993.*
8. *Pazzagli A, Vetrone G, Pallanti S: Cap. 5 Trattato Italiano di Psichiatria ed. Masson, 1993.*
9. *Pazzagli A, Pallanti S, Faravelli C: Mondo esterno e mondo interno, "life event" e significato. Prospettive psico-analitiche nel lavoro istituzionale 1987; 5:83-94.*
10. *Sullivan HS: La moderna concezione della psichiatria. Feltrinelli, Milano, 1961.*

Correspondence:

Dr. ssa Enza Maierà
Mental Health Department
Via Kennedy, 87075 Trebisacce (CS), Italy
E-mail: maieraenza@libero.it