

Of Persistence and Pursuit: Unwanted Pursuit Behavior in Indian Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Background: Unwanted pursuit behaviour refers to a range behaviours that are persistent and unwanted targeted towards an individual in order to pursue a romantic relationship. The topic of UPB post the dissolution of a romantic relationship has garnered considerable attention among social scientists and the past decade has seen a rise in the number of researches focused on understanding its predictors. The study was aimed to examine the predictors of UPB with the help of the variables under the Investment Model and Partner-Specific Dependency.

Methodology: The data was collected from 104 young adults (between 20-30 years) who were in ongoing romantic relationship using Rusbult's Investment Model Scale, Rathus and O'Leary's Spouse-Specific Dependency Scale, and Spitzberg and Cupach's Relational Pursuit-Pursuer Short Form.

Results: UPB was found to be commonplace in the current sample with 93% of the total participants reporting that they will engage in at least one form of UPB. Consistent with the findings obtained by previous researches, anxious attachment, under Partner-Specific Dependency, emerged as a significant predictor of UPB.

Conclusion: This study extends on the findings of those obtained by past investigations on the predictors of UPB. Limitations, future scope, and practical implications of the study are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour, Investment Model, Partner-Specific Dependency.

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INTRODUCTION

It is human to pursue the things we love; but, pursuit- especially in the context of pursuing a romantic relationship- does not always follow a well-lit path. Spitzberg and Cupach [1] highlighted the dark side of relational pursuit where the manifestation of such desire and longing take different forms- ranging from the banal to the deviant; from what is considered seemingly endearing to unwelcoming and obsessional. This form of unwelcomed pursuit is termed as 'unwanted pursuit behaviour' (UPB); an umbrella term used for a gamut of behaviours that are persistent, unwanted, and more often than not privacy-violating targeted towards an individual in order to pursue a romantic relationship. These include: behaviours that are somewhat harmless, like leaving unwanted messages, phone calls, or gifts; and behaviours that more severe and induce fear in the target individual, like stalking, threatening, or physically and sexually harming the target [1-2].

Social scientists investigating the occurrence of UPB have largely focused on individuals after their breakup where attempts at reconciliation are often made and met with rejection. Studies identifying the predictors of this phenomenon have consistently highlighted the importance of certain relationship factors: level of satisfaction and commitment, the size of investments made (in terms of time and effort), the perceived

quality of alternatives to the relationship [3-5]; and certain individual factors: personality traits, individual characteristics, and attachment styles [6-7].

Studies have consistently accounted for the robustness of anxious attachment as a predictor of UPB which was seen significantly predicting the occurrence of unwanted pursuit in both heterosexual and homosexual samples [4, 7-9]. De Smet and colleagues [9] also found various other individual characteristics like borderline traits and a past history of delinquent behaviours predicting the perpetration of unwanted pursuit. Drawing from Rusbult's Investment Model, researchers [7], examined its variables: satisfaction, investment size, quality of alternatives, and commitment as predictors of UPB and found that participants with higher investment were seen to be pursuing their ex-partners more than those with lower investment. Investment was also seen to be a positive predictor of aggression in the UPBs.

A vast majority of research understanding the predictors of unwanted pursuit behaviour have been conducted on ex-partners. When considering relationship factors like- level of satisfaction, investment size, quality of alternatives, and level of commitment, as probable predictors of unwanted pursuit, an ex-partner's views on these variables may be biased depending on the nature of the breakup (for e.g. they could be overly negative if they ended on bad terms) or they may not remember what their relationship was like because a considerable amount of time has elapsed since their breakup. In addition to that, no research has focused on dependency as a predictor of UPB. To address this paucity and the general lack of studies conducted on the Indian population, the primary purpose of my study was to understand the prevalence and predictors of unwanted pursuit behaviour among Indian young adults. With a sample of individuals who are in an ongoing relationship, the present study assessed relationship factors and dependency specific to the romantic relationship as predictors of unwanted pursuit; how they relate with the occurrence of UPB if the relationship were to dissolve. While researches studying intimate relationships have often linked dependency to grief, aggression, and restrictive behaviour in partners, it will be interesting to see if there exists a link between dependency and unwanted pursuit behaviours and whether the present study corroborates the findings of previous researches that link relationship factors to unwanted pursuit.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was approved by the mentors at the Department of Clinical Psychology, R.D National College affiliated to the University of Mumbai. It was a small-scale study conducted among a sample of 104 young adults (females = 69, males = 35) between the age of 20-30 years in Mumbai, India. The aim was to study the prevalence and predictors of unwanted pursuit behaviour by focusing on relationship factors like level of satisfaction, perceived quality of alternatives, investment size, and level of commitment as well as partner-specific dependency in terms of anxious attachment, and exclusive and emotional dependency. The participants were recruited by convenience sampling and those participating were required to be in an ongoing relationship with their partner for at least 2 months.

Online postings (posts on Instagram and Facebook) about the study requirements were made and individuals who fit the criteria and were interested in participating were sent the link to the google form. The participants were asked to fill the google form which included information about the study, the consent form, and the scales used in the study. After giving their consent to participate in the study, the participants filled the Investment Model Scale, followed by the Spouse-Specific Dependent Scale, and the Relational Pursuit-Pursuer Short Form. Male participants were asked to specifically follow the link that contained the Men version of Ratus and O'Leary's Spouse-Specific Dependency Scale and female participants were asked to follow the link that contained the Women version of the same. Prior to filling the Relational Pursuit- Pursuer Short Form, participants were asked to read the following:

"For many individuals, breakups are not easy. For this final section of the study, I want you to imagine a hypothetical situation where you and your partner have broken up and are no longer a couple, however you wish to get back together with them. Rate your responses according to how often you will/will not indulge in the following behaviour, towards your partner post-breakup." After the completion of the form, the final page debriefed the participants about the study.

Measures

Investment Model Scale: Rusbult's 37-item (22 global items and 15 facet items) Investment Model Scale was used to assess the level of satisfaction, quality of alternative relationships, investment size, and level of commitment towards the current relationship. The items were scored on a 9-point Likert scale (1= Do Not Agree At All, 9= Agree Completely). Higher scores on the scale are representative of higher levels of relationship satisfaction, perceived quality of relationship alternatives, investment in the relationship and commitment. Alpha values for the subscales were 0.94 for Satisfaction, 0.79 for Quality of Alternatives, 0.81 for Investment, and 0.86 for Commitment [10].

Spouse-Specific Dependency Scale: Ratus and O'Leary's 30-item Spouse-Specific Dependency Scale- Men for male participants and 30-item Spouse-Specific Dependency Scale- Women for female participants was used to measure the level of interpersonal dependency. The scale would generate 3 subscale scores measuring dependency over 3 domains- Anxious Attachment, Exclusive Dependency, and Emotional Dependency. The items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 6= Strongly Agree). Higher scores on the scale are representative of higher levels of Spouse-Specific Dependency and since the present study considers partner-specific dependency, the scores would be indicative of the same. The alpha values for the subscales Anxious Attachment, Exclusive Dependency, and Emotional Dependency for Men were 0.89, 0.89, and 0.84 respectively and for Women, it were 0.88, 0.84, and 0.86, respectively [11].

Relational Pursuit- Pursuer Short Form: Spitzberg and Cupach's (1997) 24-item Relational Pursuit-Pursuer Short Form was used to assess whether the participant would indulge in unwanted pursuit behaviour and the extent to which they would if the relationship with their current partner were to end. The instructions prompted the participants to imagine a hypothetical situation where they are no longer in a relationship with their partner but wish to reconcile with them and were asked which of the following behaviours they would indulge in and then listed 24 behaviours which were to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0= Never, 4= More than five times) [12].

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Using the SPSS Version 25.0 software, descriptive and inferential statistics were computed on the data gathered from the participants. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient analysis and multiple regression analysis were conducted to determine the relationship between the variables and their influence on unwanted pursuit behaviour.

RESULTS

Prevalence of Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour

Unwanted pursuit behaviour was common in the current sample with approximately 93% of the participants reporting that they will indulge in at least one form UPB in order to rekindle their relationship if the relationship with their current partner were to end. Benign forms of unwanted pursuit were more likely to be engaged in (Table 1): leaving unwanted messages, making exaggerated expressions of love, monitoring their behaviour, leaving unwanted gifts, and covertly obtaining their ex-partner's information. Aggressive forms of unwanted pursuit that can be potentially harmful to the target were less likely to be engaged in: physically hurting and endangering the life of their ex-partner, and kidnapping and physically constraining them.

Table 1. Frequency, Mean, and SD of Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour

Unwanted Pursuit Behaviors	Frequency (%)	Mean	SD
Leave Unwanted Gifts	55.8%	1.4	1.4
Leave Unwanted Messages	70.2%	2.1	1.6
Make Exaggerated Expressions of Love	71.2%	1.7	1.4

Following Them Around	41.4%	0.9	1.3
Intrude Uninvited into Interactions	40.4%	0.8	1.2
Invade Personal Space	40.4%	0.7	1.02
Involve Him / Her in Activities In Unwanted Ways	39.4%	0.8	1.2
Invade Personal Property	21.2%	0.4	0.9
Intrude Upon Friends, Family, or Coworkers	41.4%	0.8	1.1
Monitor Their Behavior	68.3%	1.5	1.4
Covertly Obtain Their Private Information	52.9%	1.1	1.3
Physically Restrain Them	22.1%	0.4	0.8
Engage in Regulatory Harassment	8.7%	0.1	0.5
Steal or Damage Their Valued Possessions	4.8%	0.1	0.4
Threaten to Hurt Yourself	17.3%	0.3	0.8
Threaten Others He/She Cares About	7.7%	0.1	0.4
Personally, Threaten Him/Her Verbally	8.7%	0.2	0.5
Leave or Send Threatening Objects	1.9%	0.02	0.1
Show Up At Places in Threatening Ways	3.9%	0.1	0.3
Sexually Coerce Them	6.7%	0.1	0.5
Physically Threaten Them	3.9%	0.12	0.3
Physically Hurt Them	0%	0.0	0.0
Kidnap or Physically Constrain Them	0.9%	0.01	0.1
Physically Endangering His or Her Life	0%	0.0	0.0

Note: The mean ratings on the items are based on the following Likert-type scale: 0 = Never, 1 = one to two times, 2 = three to four times, 3 = four to five times, 4 = more than five times

Figure 1 depicts the mean amount of times male and female participants are likely to engage in UPBs. The difference between the two means is marginal, however, to understand whether this difference was significant, an Independent Samples t-test was computed (Table 2). The t-test yielded a t score of .047 which was found to be insignificant ($P > 0.05$, $df = 102$) indicating that both males and females are equally likely to indulge in unwanted pursuit behaviours.

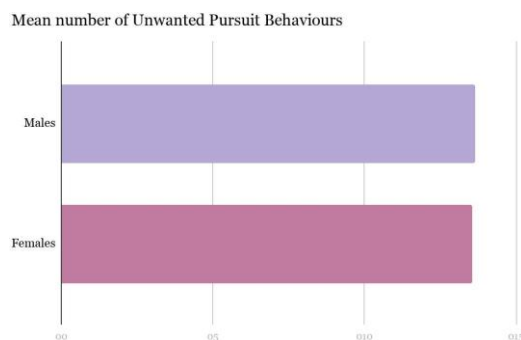


Figure 1: Mean Number of Unwanted Pursuit Behaviours among Males and Females

Correlates of Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour:

The Pearson correlation coefficient values obtained showed a positive correlation between most variables assessed in this study and unwanted pursuit behaviour (Table 2). Partner-specific dependency (anxious attachment, emotional dependency, and exclusive dependency) showed a moderately strong correlation with unwanted pursuit behaviour with its correlation coefficient values ranging from .37 to .41 ($P < .001$). Out of all the Investment model variables assessed, only investment ($r = .36$, $P < .001$) and commitment ($r = .19$, $P < .05$) showed moderate to low positive correlation with unwanted pursuit behaviour.

Table 2: Independent samples t-test for sex differences in the mean number of UPB likely to be engaged in

	Male (N = 35) Mean	Female (N = 69) Mean	t	df
UPB	13.66	13.55	0.047	102

Predictors of Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour

A backward stepwise regression analysis was conducted that found two significant predictors of UPB (Table 4). Investment ($\beta = .20$, $P < .1$) and anxious attachment ($\beta = .30$, $P < .05$) accounted for 19% of the total variance in UPB.

Table 3: Correlations Between the Variables and Unwanted Pursuit Behaviour

Variables		Sig. (1-tailed)
Satisfaction	-0.04	0.35
Quality of Alternatives	-0.14	0.81
Investment Size	0.36***	0.001
Commitment	0.19**	0.03
Anxious Attachment	0.41***	0.001
Exclusive Dependency	0.37***	0.001
Emotional Dependency	0.39***	0.001

*** $p < .001$ (1-tailed), ** $p < .05$ (1-tailed), * $p < .1$ (1-tailed)

Table 4: Regression analysis of predictors of UPB

Model Variables	B	SE B	β	R ²	F
Investment	.19	12.19	0.21	0.11	0.20*
Anxious Attachment			0.27	0.09	0.30**

*** $p < .001$ (1-tailed), ** $p < .05$ (1-tailed), $p < 0.1$ (1-tailed)

DISCUSSION

Unwanted attempts at pursuing an estranged lover are common and understanding what leads to its perpetration is pivotal to finding ways to curb it. Replicating past researches investigating the predictors of UPB, I assessed certain relationships and individual factors as predictors of perpetration of unwanted pursuit. Relationship factors consisted of the Investment Model variables: satisfaction, level of commitment, investment, and quality of alternatives; and individual factors were those focusing mainly on dependency that was partner-specific: anxious attachment, emotional dependency, and exclusive dependency. Although preliminary, the results of the present study support and extend the findings of those conducted in the past

and documents how unwanted forms of pursuit are commonly sought measures when attempts at reconciliation are made.

Individuals with an attachment style of the anxious type are more prone to seeking intimacy and contact with their former partner [13] and those who are insecurely attached to their partners tend to indulge in persistent forms of unwanted pursuit behaviour [2]. The results obtained in the current study reflect this phenomenon, and consistent with past researches as well, anxious attachment was seen to significantly predict the occurrence of UPB [4,7]. Moreover, akin to the observations made by Tassy and Winstead [7], satisfaction was not found to be significantly associated with unwanted pursuit behaviour. However, other Investment Model variables showed a robust relationship with UPB. Investment size and commitment significantly correlated with UPB and investment emerged as a positive predictor of unwanted pursuit.

Individuals who perceive that they have invested a great deal into their relationship and perceive the loss of their relationship as a loss of all the investments they made are more prone to persist in efforts to re-establish their relationship with their former partner [7]. Rusbult's Investment Model Scale's Investment facet items refer to such "investments" as the memories both individuals share in the relationship, the familial and friendship ties established with others while they were in a relationship etc. and the loss of such investments may contribute to the strong need to rekindle the estranged relationship [10].

The findings of this study coincide with those conducted in the past however, one distinct feature of the current research sets it apart and that is the sample used here consists of individuals in an ongoing relationship. Together, these results shed light on a rather intriguing aspect of relationships and relationship pursuit- showing that although aspects like investment and commitment may be a desirable and crucial factor in maintaining a relationship, it can also pose as a risk factor that contributes to the occurrence of persistent and invasive behaviour, in some cases, from either one of the individuals in a relationship if that relationship were to dissolve.

The present study is preliminary and does have certain limitations. The representation of the female population in the current sample was greater than those of the males (66% females) and hence, a more balanced sample with a more or less equal representation of all genders would be conducive to understanding gender differences in the perpetration of unwanted pursuit. The sample size, too, is a rather small and was only limited to individuals living in Mumbai City. A complete understanding of the prevalence and frequency of UPB among Indian young adults would require a greater sample size consisting of individuals from different parts of India.

There is immense scope for future researches and investigations to build on what is already known about unwanted pursuit behaviour and expand our knowledge about the same. Research on unwanted and obsessional forms of pursuit can be advanced by having both partners report their feelings about their relationship and the other's behaviour. The present study rectifies past studies' limitation of having participants reflect on their past relationship and the bias that affects their responses by sampling individuals in an ongoing relationship, however, in order for this to be more effective, a longitudinal study that accounts for what happens after the breakup can be more fruitful. Finally, in order to make the research on UPB more inclusive, individuals with different sexual orientations and genders must also be included in the studies in order to get a better insight on whether or not the membership to a sexual minority group has an effect on the possible occurrence and perpetration of unwanted pursuit.

CONCLUSION

The manifestations of what we understand as "romantic love" displays a rather curious game of ironies and paradoxes. Fuelled by the motivation of desire, love often shows disjunctive forms of pursuit, leading the concept of "love" which is inherently considered beautiful, to a dark alley revealing a somewhat darker aspect of relationship pursuit. The past decade brought with it countless researches and investigations on unwanted pursuit resulting in the enhancement of our knowledge regarding this phenomenon. The current study expanded on these investigations, incorporating the Investment Model variables as well as understanding Partner-Specific Dependency in relation to unwanted pursuit behaviour. It has demonstrated how anxious attachment and high investment in the relationship is linked to unwanted pursuit after breakup.

Finding significant relationships between these variables and UPB, assumptions and contentions can be made on how certain individuals fail to cope with breakups and often indulge in persistent, and often obsessional forms of pursuit in order to re-establish what they lost.

Unwanted pursuit post a breakup is common however, normalising such acts can be detrimental for both parties involved. Understanding what causes unwanted pursuit behaviour can help us strategize and develop interventions for individuals who are more prone to indulging in these acts, by encouraging the development of a secure attachment and helping them cope with relationship loss in a more effective way by finding suitable alternatives to such behaviour and the persistent pursuit of their former partners.

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