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## **Fear of Crime and Victimization: Retracing Women's Risk Perceptions in Private Spaces in the Urban city of Kolkata**

By Piyali Sur<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

This article uses qualitative methodology to explore women's fear of crime in intimate relations, an area until now uncharted. The rich scholarship on fear of crime has exclusively dealt with fear of crime on the streets, ignoring the threat of crime within private spaces. The study conducted in Kolkata, capital of West Bengal, India, demonstrates that for women there is a sexualization of risk whereby women participants express their overwhelming fear of sexual harm in public spaces and deny any kind of fear of crime in private spaces. The article argues that women recast the meanings of danger and risk in their public and private lives when they express their fear of crime in intimate relations. I argue that the acknowledgement and naming of the harm women encounter in intimate relations make women reconstruct the notions and perceptions of risk in intimate relations as they realize that their intimates are dangerous and the life with them is risky. Other women participants experiencing harm in intimate relations do not define them as serious, as they are affected by dominant stereotypes. Treating the harm as 'not serious' makes them deny their fears in the private realm.

*Keywords:* fear of crime; hegemonic discourses; reframing of risk; intimate risk

### **Introduction**

Feminist social scientists have demonstrated that women's subjective experience of 'being at risk', their notions of danger and safety are constructed by dominant social and political discourses. Risks for women are overwhelmingly sexualized by the discourses and are constituted as occurring in the public sphere. While the focus is on 'dangerous stranger' and how women can keep themselves safe out in the 'public' from rape, institutional discourses are silent regarding the harm and risk that women may face in intimate relations. Surprisingly, despite feminists' claims that institutional discourses on women's safety and risk ignore the danger women face in intimate relations, there is not a single study to explore women's conceptions of risk and fear of victimization from intimates within the private realm.

In studies on fear of crime, the overriding concern has been to tap women's fear of crime committed by strangers in public spaces (Gordon and Riger 1989; Madriz 1997; Koskela 1999; Mehta and Bondi 1999). Women in every study conducted on fear of crime have revealed fearing assault by people they don't know, away from home, at night, termed as the gender-fear paradox. Women's fear of crime has been described as paradoxical asserting that though women are more afraid of stranger victimization, they are at a greater risk of being sexually assaulted in a private space by someone they know.

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The need is to explore whether the paradox is the result of how survey methodology has been constructed, as no research so far has tapped women's fear of crime in private, a serious omission keeping in mind the domestic nature of a vast majority of criminal acts which women encounter and which may affect women's fear of crime. Feminist(s) scholarship (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Kelly 1988; Stanko 1990) has demonstrated that violence, danger and risk lie not only in the streets but in the sanctity of home and hence it is vital to explore women's personal private lives as women's oppression is rooted in their private lives.

This article examines women's fear of crime in the private realm, their perceptions of risk and the nature of their fear of crime within intimate relations. The article focuses on women's reconstruction of notions of risk and danger, that is, the processes by which they realize the potentiality of threat in intimate relations. I have also attempted to explore whether acknowledgement of threat and fear from intimates have any bearing on women's experience and articulation of fear of crime within public spaces.

In this study conducted in Kolkata<sup>2</sup>, the capital of West Bengal, India, the most common expression of fear of crime was fear of strangers in public spaces and the denial of fear of crime in private spaces. This makes me argue that women are affected by dominant discourses of risk and safety that construct risk for women as sexual, overwhelmingly occurring in the public sphere. This body of literature argues that dominant discourses surrounding women's "safety" reinforce the public/private split which keeps most of the violence women experience intensely privatized, and significantly overemphasize the threat posed by violent male strangers (Stanko 1990; Haskell and Randall 1998; Hengehold 2000; Campbell 2005). I advance the thesis that women participants recast the meanings of danger and risk in their public and private lives when they acknowledge and express their fear of crime in intimate relations. I argue that the acknowledgement and naming of the harm women encounter in intimate relations make women reconstruct the notions and perceptions of risk in intimate relations. They draw on the dominant discourse but also counter it by defining intimates as more threatening than strangers. The mental, physical, and/or sexual harm they suffer at the hands of their intimates makes them counter the dominant discourse on women's safety. Women realize that the "potential for danger is locked in" with them (Stanko 1990: 30). As Kelly (1988) suggested the need is to recognize and name the harm women face in intimate relations. When women are unable to treat the violations they face in intimate relations as serious, they marginalize the threat and deny fear in private spaces.

### Conceptualizing Fear

In this article I have used Radar's (2005) conceptualization of fear of crime as a multidimensional construct with three components including an emotive component (fear of crime), cognitive component (perceived risk) and a behavioral component (constrained behaviors). I have conceptualized *fear of crime as a state of experience about the possibility of the infliction of harm involving behavioral adjustments*. In fear there is a perception that harm may be inflicted which is called the perceived risk and feelings of fear about those judgments and engagement in avoidance or protection measures. Hence,

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<sup>2</sup> Kolkata is the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal. It is located in the eastern part of India on the east bank of river Hooghly.

fear of crime has an emotive component, a cognitive component and a behavioral component that can operate side by side, where neither of the components is dependent on the other but all are involved in a complex relationship (Radar 2004; 2005). Individuals may feel the actual emotion of fear, assess cognitively their victimization risk, and take protective measures and avoidance tactics.

### **Definition of Crime**

The present study will not use a legalistic definition of crime. I will take the definition of crime developed by the critical theorists Henry and Milovanovic (1996) in *constitutive criminology* as the ‘power to deny others’. People in relations taken to be ‘crimes’ are in relations of inequality. My study defines crime as the power to harm others. According to Henry and Milovanovic, crimes are nothing less than moments in the expression of power, such that those who are subjected to the encounters, are denied their worth...Crime then is the power to deny others their ability to make a difference (1996: 116).

As crime is the exercise of power over others, the denial of others’ right to make a difference, a lot of what is experienced by women in family life from emotional torment to physical beating are crimes. The present work will define a victim as a human subject who experiences “harms of reduction” and “harms of repression” (103). Harms of reduction refer to situations when an offended party experiences some immediate loss or injury because of the action of others. Harms of repression refer to situations when power is used to restrict future potential human aspirations or desired standing. The concepts of harm will be used to bring a wide range of hidden crimes into the centre of the agenda and reveal how certain harms far from being condemned and criminalized, are legitimized through the activities of various legal and social institutions (Muncie 1999). For instance, crimes like sexual harassment, marital rape and so on- have been trivialized by law enforcement agencies.

### **Methodological Parameters**

The present study has used a qualitative interpretative approach (Denzin and Lincoln 2008) to explore women’s subjective perceptions of their risk and fear of victimization. The primary methods followed were narrative interviewing method and open- ended in-depth interview as my main intention was to look at women’s experiences and standpoints. Women in paid jobs in the urban city of Kolkata were the unit of analysis for the present study. 50 women working in both organized and unorganized sectors were interviewed. In the organized sector, women working in both government sectors and private sectors were interviewed. The sample was diverse where age, education and income are considered. The average age of the respondents was 35 years. The youngest participant was 20 and the oldest was 55. 12 participants were unmarried, 33 were married, 2 were deserted and 3 were divorced. The education of the participants ranged from high levels of education to illiteracy. 1 participant had a doctorate degree, 18 had post-graduation degree, 18 participants had acquired bachelors degree, 3 participants had studied till secondary and higher secondary, 5 participants had received some amount of formal education, 5 had received no formal education. The participants had a monthly

household income of less than rupees<sup>3</sup> 4000 to more than rupees 60,000. The 50 women interviewed for this study were selected through a snow-ball<sup>4</sup> method.

In narrative interviewing I had a very few broad questions about the topic of inquiry which produced narrative accounts (Riessman 1993). The interview asked broad questions in the areas related to the research objectives. After the interviews were completed, I transcribed them verbatim. For both narratives and in-depth interviews I followed thematic<sup>5</sup> approaches and coded them.

I grouped the participants' answers by questions and then developed both descriptive and then analytic codes so that themes could emerge from the data. Coding and re-coding enabled me to identify themes (Gibbs 2007).

## Findings

### Sexualization of Risk and Denial of Fear in the Private Sphere

In this study, for the majority of women participants the whole conception of fear of crime rested on the notion of sexual harm from strangers in public spaces. Women participants narrated in an uninhibited manner the nature of their fear of crime in public but denied experiencing any kind of fear in intimate relations. They made a sharp division between public and private, while strangers in public spaces were perceived as potential sources of danger, the private, a sphere of intimacy to women participants was constructed as a source of "ontological security."<sup>6</sup> The researcher's questions on fear of crime in intimate relations were judged as violating the very principle of thrust on which the intimate bonds was based. This exemplifies that women are affected by institutional discourses that hold the private space as a safe haven for women. On the other hand women learn to fear a dark strange public place. The narratives below indicate that fear of crime is significantly fear of rape and a denial of any kind of risk in private. This was expressed by Sushmita, a cashier by profession:

It is rape. When I return from office the streets become desolate. I walk very fast. I don't look anywhere, catch my breath and rush. I don't make any eye contacts, walk on the middle of the footpath. Then rape is the uppermost thing in my mind. In private I have a nice relation with my in-laws and husband. I have not faced anything.

Nandita, working as an Assistant Manager in a software company, expressed her fear of crime solely as fear of rape and discounted any kind of potentiality of risk from intimates. Her narrative below indicates that stranger rape exists as a virtual threat in women's lives.

<sup>3</sup> Rupee is the official currency of Republic of India where Rupee 1 is 0.02 dollar.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to a form of sampling in which, first, a few subjects are found who have the required qualities. After finishing their interview, they are asked to recommend the names of other people whom they know to have the same relevant qualities. In this manner, the researcher accumulates more and more respondents by using each respondent as a source of new names for the sample.

<sup>5</sup> Gibbs defines themes as a recurring issue or an idea either derived from prior theory or from participants' experiences that emerges during analysis of qualitative data. It can be used to establish a code with which text can be coded.

<sup>6</sup> Giddens refers to ontological security as a sense of order in regard to an individual's experiences. He contends that the foundation of ontological security is trust.

The possibility of getting touched in public itself is fear provoking. But my greatest fear is of getting raped. Whenever I return through desolate roads I have this fear. I usually rush then. There is no greater crime than rape. It destroys one physically and emotionally. But I don't feel any kind of risk at home. My family is very liberal. It is very seldom that my husband has got angry which has made me fearful.

Women in relation to specific contexts in public did fear emotively as is indicated in the narratives by feeling the emotion of fear in public and denying fear in intimate relations. Women did fear cognitively by assessing their risk of sexual victimization at the hands of strangers to be high in public after dark. Along with doing fear emotively and cognitively, women did fear behaviorally by taking up avoidance measures and protective measures. Sushmita and Nandita tried to reach home fast when late. The most common avoidance behavior was to avoid going alone to public spaces at night. The protective measures engaged in by the participants were choosing a safe public transport, going out with friends to movie halls, restaurants and other places of recreation, using private cars when late. Women participants in this study expressed that they constrained their mobility, self-expression and social experience or engaged in behavioral fear to lower their chances of victimization. The following narrative will indicate the emotive, cognitive and behavioral components of fear in the context of public spaces.

I feel scared to wait for a public transport after coming out late from office. I never wait for a bus beyond ten minutes after dark. I then feel my body exists for other's pleasure and gaze. I feel cars slowing down. I just get up in any approaching bus.

Here, Anaya, a journalist does fear emotively by feeling the emotion of fear. She discusses how she does fear behaviorally by getting up in any approaching bus, and feels that will reduce her victimization risk (cognitive fear).

Though most of the women participants spoke of risk solely in terms of stranger danger and denied experiencing fear of crime in intimate relationships, many of them monitored their behavior or constrained their choices to avoid friction in intimate relations. Women participants in intimate relations did not acknowledge emotive fear to others as their subjectivities were structured by dominant discourses that assume women's safety in intimate relations but their narratives indicate that they did behavioral fear. It may imply that these women have restricted themselves, leading a controlled existence to such an extent that the scope to feel the emotion of fear did not arise for them. Here the women participants did not express feeling the emotion fear as they might have felt that it is inappropriate to talk about the emotion of fear in intimate relations to a researcher. However, they expressed that they engaged in behavioral constraints to avoid potential psychological harm in intimate relations and did behavioral fear. The narratives of the women illustrate that women restrained themselves from entering into arguments with their husbands and, did not engage in activities that their husbands disliked. For instance, Savita, a marketing coordinator felt if she completed all her wifely duties, kept to her limits by abiding family norms and asked for permission when required there was nothing to fear. She claimed,

I am working, looking after my child, husband, in-laws and they are very happy. If I do anything I ask for permission, otherwise I feel uncomfortable. What is the harm in asking for permission? We have a big joint family and decisions are taken mostly by my father-in-law. I know my limits and keep to my limits. For instance I cannot party and come home late.

Here, Savita denied feeling fear in intimate relations but did fear behaviorally and cognitively. She engaged in behavioral constraints like not partying and coming home late. This she felt would lower her chances of probable marital disputes within the extended family, thus engaging in doing cognitive fear. Most of the married women said that the major familial decisions were taken by their husbands and that they did not have the courage to challenge the decisions or give their own opinion. Submission to authority was not forced on the women from outside, but obedience generated by fear, came from inside. However, all these women participants denied having any fear of harm in private. Basabi, working as a secretary in a private firm expressed that at home her relation with her in-laws was very positive because she shared responsibilities. She denied having any fear at home but admitted that she felt uncomfortable if she did anything without taking permission at home. She said,

I take permission because they like it. For instance my father-in-law likes me to wear sari<sup>7</sup>. If I have to wear salwar<sup>8</sup> I ask his permission, I would feel very uncomfortable to do anything without taking permission.

Women participants like Basabi do not even admit to themselves that they constrain their life choices, social expressions for fear in intimate relations. For instance, her dress code was determined by the likes of her father-in-law. She later expressed the dominant role of her husband in their marital relationship. She said,

My husband is very dominant. I do what he wants me to do. I don't go against his wishes. Whatever decision he takes regarding family and son, I listen to it. I have to restraint myself to avoid tension in the family.

Amita working as a clerk in the public sector declined having any kind of fear in intimate relations but expressed that she had to abide by her husband's wishes to save herself from any kind of mental harm. Amita could not acknowledge to herself that she felt the threat of psychological harm from her husband on many occasions and was unaware that she did behavioral fear. She gave a recent example of how she let her husband dominate her:

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<sup>7</sup> Sari is a traditional Indian dress which can be worn in many ways.

<sup>8</sup> Salwar kameez is a popular attire for women in India. This dress evolved as a comfortable and respectable garment for women in Kashmir and Punjab, but is now immensely popular in all regions of India. Salwars are pyjama like trousers drawn tightly in at the waists and ankles. Over the salwars women wear a long and loose dress called kameez

My husband's decision prevails. I wanted to buy a new flat with my money but he is against this purchase. I know the control he can have over me in the house owned by him will not be possible in the flat purchased through my money. Every time I have initiated a discussion on this subject there is so much tension at home that I have abandoned the topic altogether.

Women restricted themselves to a dress code approved by their in-laws. Otherwise they expressed it would lead to unnecessary tension at home. Rina with a lower class background, working in a beauty parlour and Savita, a chartered accountant from an affluent background expressed the same restrictions at home and their discomfort in breaking the norms.

I have to wear a sari. I cannot go against familial norms and feel tense that my in-laws may call me names if I don't wear a sari. I always wear a sari as it is a family custom. I would feel uncomfortable and apprehensive if I wore something else.

Several women in this study restricted physical mobility outside their homes by not going to their natal homes, not participating in public-based leisure activities or coming home late. Women's mobility outside the home was scrutinized and regulated as female sexuality had to be controlled to maintain family honour. Jutika, a flight attendant expressed that she was not allowed to visit her mother, a widow, who stayed alone.

My husband does not want me to keep in touch with my family. My mother is a widow who lives alone. I don't go to visit her, otherwise he will shout at me, throw things around.

Jutika avoided her mother's home to keep her husband content. Otherwise she feared he would cause her verbal harm.

The narratives indicate that women participants in intimate relations did fear by managing the emotion of fear to the extent of denying it. The denial of fear reflects that women's subjectivities are shaped by dominant familial discourse that naturalize and normalize the hierarchical power relations within the family. However, they did fear behaviorally by engaging in behavioral constraints, feeling that such constraints would diminish their chances of psychological harm in intimate relations.

### **Women's Reframing of Risk and Fear within the Private Realm**

Though the image of danger was always associated with strangers, public places and public situations for majority of women participants, a few of the participants reframed the notions of risk and danger by defining known and intimates as constituting danger as well. Women participants did not deny their fear of crime in intimate relations but did fear emotively by feeling fear. The women who felt risk and expressed fear in intimate relations were those who were battered by their intimates, had survived rape from their acquaintances, and were sexually molested in office. They had different conceptions about what and who constitutes risk to them. Naming and acknowledging to oneself that the incidents encountered in intimate relations constituted harm made women



aware of the potential risks in private. They drew on the dominant discourse on risk and safety, and countered it also, by challenging that risk only lies in the public sphere, and home is cushioned from it. They drew the meanings of their experiences from marginal discourses that made them perceive intimates as equally or more dangerous than strangers, thus adding another layer to their sense of risk. For instance, Shruti an assistant manager, in a private firm felt that she is at risk from both known and unknown men after she was sexually harassed by her senior colleague. This was expressed by her in the following terms:

When I was young I used to think uneducated men from the slums who are alcoholic are dangerous. Now I think any guy, known or unknown will try to get close. After the sexual harassment incident from my colleague where I had simply no role to play I believe any known person in my workplace or anywhere else may cause me harm.

Shruti before the incident of sexual harassment defined a lower class male stranger as a potential offender. Then she discussed how the incident of sexual harassment from an acquaintance in office made her realize that she is at risk from known men too. In this study two women participants who had experienced attempted rape by known men constructed themselves at risk from both known and unknown men. That they were on the verge of getting raped, presented the threat of rape before them as more of a possibility. Sharmishtha encountered rape attempt by her friend's husband defined any man, both intimate and unknown as dangerous. She said:

I feel insecure in this patriarchal society. In the streets you don't know when it can happen. You always have to be cautious, not wear outlandish clothes, not be outside after dark. But it can also happen from known men in private. I had known my friend's husband for 11 years. He had caught hold of me and had tried to rape me at his place. That day god had saved me. I am still frightened whenever I see him on the road. You cannot say from where risk may strike you. It can come from known men like your relatives, friend's fathers, husbands as well as from unknown men.

Sharmishtha, a teacher, realized after the violent incident of attempted rape from a known person that rape is not committed only by strangers. She felt that she is more at risk of sexual assault from men known to her as she interacts with them regularly. The safety discourse that instructs women to take precautions with regard to strangers, making them feel vulnerable in public fell through in her case.

Shipra, a survivor of attempted rape at her own house from a known person, expressed that she felt afraid whenever her male friends wanted to come to her house when she was alone. She expressed:

Before the incident of attempted rape, male friends were welcome at my place even when I was alone. Now I feel tense when they want to come over. I avoid them as I feel traumatized after the incident.

The cultural beliefs about dangerousness hence got shattered for the women participants when they encountered attempted rape by acquaintances. The women drew from the dominant discourse on rape and constructed themselves at risk from unknown men, but they added another layer to their sense of insecurity and perceived known men also as potential rapists.

Here I would like to highlight that it was only those women who were able to name their experiences as attempted rape or as emotional, sexual or physical harm in intimate relations<sup>9</sup>, expressed greater fears in private realm or had different perceptions of situations and people held as risky. They felt that their greatest source of danger is from “insiders”. Given the structured nature of discourses, the acknowledgement and naming of harm in intimate relations has great transgressive potential to disrupt the maintenance and reproduction of dominant discourses as well as curtail their sphere of influence. These women disrupted the discourse that ‘home’ signals safety and protection as is explicitly stated in Suparna’s narrative working as a functional head in a private hospital.

Women are victimized much more inside the house which goes unaddressed and there is no police complaint or diary. If some measure was taken to stop crime inside the home then outside women can handle themselves.

Suparna’s narrative disrupted the dominant discourse that danger for women lie outside the home. Her acknowledgement of women’s victimization within home had transgressive potential. She named and described the experiences she faced in intimate relations as mental violence and marital rape, perceived risks in intimate relations, and was fearful within the private realm. Her acknowledgement of what she faced in intimate relations as violence is demonstrated in her narrative.

What I face is mental violence, physical violence is not everything. I don’t segregate mental torture from violence. After marriage I felt that he has objections about my work, how I move about and interact in public. Many would have succumbed to this pressure and would not have felt like doing anything outside.

Suparna’s naming of the marital sex she experienced as rape was “transgressive to the extent that it presumes objects antithetical to the dominant discourse” (Alcoff and Gray 1993: 268). That Suparna was able to name the coercive sexual act performed by her husband as rape can be understood from her narrative.

It is the unwillingness of the whole act. Men have always used it as a tool when there is difference of opinion. Men feel when you can rule a female in bed, you are ruling her. I have always felt men should see whether his partner is willing or not. Everyday you are getting raped inside by the same person who is hygienic and so you feel you are not being raped. But to me it is rape.

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<sup>9</sup> Kelly argues that women fail to acknowledge their experiences as crimes as predominant cultural meanings define them as not serious. Dominant discourse on crime is not congruent with women’s experiences which act as an impediment to acknowledge and label certain harms as crime. Further away the woman’s experience is from the limited definition offered by the stereotype, the most likely that she will not define and acknowledge it as crime. She argues that women must define the incident first as lying outside normal, acceptable behavior and, second, as abusive. Kelly is attentive to language and notes that by naming forms of sexual violence, one can make them visible, unacceptable and problematic.

The moment I am not willing to perform, not willing to accept you physically or mentally, it is rape.

Suparna was able to bring into consciousness the potentiality of harm in intimate relations. Her naming of marital sex as lying outside normal, acceptable behaviour and hence as abusive or rape made her aware of her victimization and its potentiality in intimate relations. Similarly Anuradha, an airhostess defined the harm she encountered from her husband as physical violence. As she was affected by the dominant discourse that husband is a woman's natural protector she tried to grapple with the fact that she was physically beaten by her husband.

Husband is someone you lookup to, he is your companion, your protector, your best friend. My husband is an alcoholic, drinks the whole day, does not care about work. He accuses me and whenever I try explaining he hits me.

Women are able to acknowledge the potentiality of harm from intimates when they do not distance themselves from the labels that define the incidents as crime. For instance Jutika, a flight attendant, felt the verbal silence in her marriage as abusive. That her husband ignored her, did not take any interest in her and their daughter, neglected her sexual desires, engaged in extramarital relations and was verbally abusive made her perceive potential harm from her husband.

Every moment I feel deprived of sex, love and warmth. He has no mental attachment towards me. I feel very insulted and cheated. Within one year of marriage he had an affair. He came and told me it was a mistake. How can one make such a big mistake within a year of marriage? It means he did not have any attachment towards me. Before marriage the love and affection he showed were all lies. He just cannot be trusted.

Women expressed risk in relation to their husbands as they did not trust them. In Indian society marriage is perceived to provide security, fulfillment and identity to women. Patriarchal discourse constructs husbands as 'natural' protectors of women on whom women should economically and emotionally depend, while the male stranger is defined as potentially aggressive and dangerous. In these cases the men who were constructed as women's protectors posed the greatest danger to them. This was expressed by Kalpana who worked as a domestic help in other peoples' houses.

My husband is not nice. He cannot be trusted. As long as I have money his behaviour is nice. As soon as it finishes he starts beating me. He is a bad person. He can do anything. He can sell his daughters, may bring men at night to my room. These things have not happened but I cannot rule them out. If my own man drinks and beats me how will I believe others?

Kalpana did not trust her husband and perceived any kind of risk from him. She expressed that her sense of risk was based on her lack of trust on her husband. Her fear of male strangers was accentuated by her lack of trust in her husband. The narrative of

Sraboni, a domestic help also reveals that when women fail to invest trust on their husbands they can no longer manage their 'ontological security'.

The man whom I loved and married, became mother of his two children, wanted me to become a prostitute. He used to beat me, did not give me any money to buy food so that I would feel pressurized to become one. He could do anything. What further harm could he have done?

When the material reality of women participants was in conflict with the dominant discourse of safety, they could disrupt it. Here I do not intend to imply that dominant discourses of safety did not structure the subjectivities of women participants but that women's naming of acts as violence in intimate relations had transgressive potentials whereby they perceived risks more from intimates than strangers. For these women there is a reconstruction of meanings about risk as they draw from the dominant discourse. This becomes evident in Suparna's narrative.

It is not that there is no fear outside. In public it is the fear of sexual abuse. But outside I feel I can handle it.

The same theme was narrated by Anuradha, a flight attendant.

I live with a physically violent man. I feel outside violence I can handle but not what I face from my husband.

Though these women participants were afraid in public spaces, women felt confident about their ability to handle danger in public.

### **Nature of Fear in Intimate Relations**

Women participants feared 'harms of repression' and 'harms of reduction' in their marital homes. The harms feared occurred along many dimensions beyond the physical, to include psychological or emotional; material or economic; social or identity; moral or ethical. A fear of mental harm was expressed by women participants, especially by those who had taken up paid work in face of family's disapproval. As Durga confided "I am scared of my in-laws and what comments they will make." Women feared that their in-laws might create a situation where they would be compelled to resign from their jobs. This fear was more intensely felt by women from lower socioeconomic groups who knew the value of their incomes. This illustrates how women are judged in accordance with the dominant familial discourse that constructs women as wives and mothers. Traditional family beliefs expect daughter-in-laws to take the total responsibility of household chores, caring of children and in-laws. Women participants were conceived to have deviated from their 'feminine', 'natural' roles due to their taking up of paid work outside the home. Women participants took on themselves the extra load of housework for fear of mental abuse. For instance, Durga, a 37 year old research associate, tried to balance home and work, felt extremely scared if she got caught up with work and was half an hour late in coming back home.

I try to finish work by 4 p.m. because of the fear that I will be held up in traffic and will reach home late. From work I rush straight to the kitchen to prepare food for the family. I cannot take rest. I do the entire housework or otherwise I will be stopped from going out on the pretext that I don't do housework. If I am even half an hour late I have goose bumps. The faces of my in-laws, especially my mother-in-law's and her body language scare me badly. I avoid workshops, seminars as I will get late. If I am late by an hour I fear they will insult me for a month.

Durga expressed emotive fear and did fear behaviorally by taking on herself all the burden of housework as she felt that it would protect her from facing any kind of mental harm.

The fear of being forced out of their marital homes was experienced by women from all income groups. The loss of marital home signified different things to different women. For women participants from higher income groups, the fear was of losing the luxurious life style that husband's income ensured and to which the women participants had become accustomed. This was expressed by Smarita and Nupur, both social workers by profession and coming from affluent families.

My mother-in-law might do anything. My relationship with my husband gets strained at times because of her. I fear if he drives me out of home I will not be able to maintain the same standard of living with my sole income. How will I live alone? I am dependent on him financially and for security reasons. I live with this fear that where will I go if I am thrown out of the house. My meager earnings won't fetch me a shelter. I have no connection with my parents and relatives as I have married against their wishes. I come from a rich and reputed family and look at my condition now.

Women participants of lower socioeconomic groups articulated the fear in terms of losing a shelter and having no place to go as they knew their parents would never accept them back. The threat was expressed by women as 'where would I go?' For instance the fear of homelessness is explicitly spelled out in Rina's narrative.

I will have to live on the streets if thrown out. My brothers are married and they won't take me back. My mother-in-law and brother-in-laws cannot tolerate that I am earning and have become less dependent on them. My husband won't go against his blood.

Women feared sexual disloyalty, desertion by their husbands. The criticisms of women's physical appearance, of their physicality by their husbands made women fear desertion by them for sexual pleasure elsewhere. This fear was expressed by women participants from all income groups. For instance Jutika, a flight attendant coming from a very affluent family and living in a posh apartment narrated:

He boasts about his parents and demeans me; that I am a simple graduate. He criticizes me physically, that I am fat and unattractive. I don't know now

whether he is involved with any other woman. I don't know what he does, where he goes. I feel so insecure at the very thought that he may leave me.

Rekha and Bulu, both maid servants with meager earnings and whose husbands did not have any stable income narrated the same fear of desertion by their husbands:

There is always the fear that he will leave me. There have been times when he did not return for days, staying at the house of another woman.

I fear that he will leave me for another woman. He beats me mercilessly, goes to other women but I feel I will meet with worse fate if I live alone in this slum.

Here we can again see that living alone without a male protector, no matter how abusive he was, exacerbated participants' fear. The emotive fear of desertion was so strong that women did not resist their husbands when their husbands verbally abused them or were disloyal towards them. Women did fear behaviorally by restraining themselves, feeling that it would save them from being deserted. This fear was felt irrespective of the participant's socio-economic position. Though they were oppressed by their husbands, who had illicit affairs with other women and sought sexual satisfaction elsewhere they still felt that having their husbands protected them from harm and outside intrusion. This highlights that women perceive their sexuality as under threat without a male protector. Female sexuality gains legitimacy only within the context of marriage and in cases of divorce and desertion, marriage as the legitimizing unit is undone, making the sexuality of divorced or deserted women as 'unattached' and available for all. This shows how female sexuality is "ensconced in layers of meaning" (Niranjana 2001: 69). Separation or desertion draws "attention to the centrality of marriage for a woman's identity, as well as to the complex negotiations women must undertake to overcome the continuing stigma associated with living outside the norm of marital life" (Mand 2005: 410)

The unpredictability of physical violence was the most feared aspect as the danger of experiencing abuse was always a part of these women's lives. Anuradha an air-hostess by profession said,

I have become his punching bag. Whenever he returns home I feel terrorized that something will happen.

Similarly, in the case of Rini, a nurse, unpredictability of violence in her marital relationship was the most feared aspect.

Whenever my husband returned home I wondered what will happen, how will he react? I remained afraid as he used to threaten me on every occasion.

Women participants like Anuradha, Rini did fear behaviorally by restraining themselves like not engaging in arguments with their husbands, not doing things which their husbands disliked like mixing with male friends, coming home late, not doing

housework and resisting sexual intercourse. Women became like the inmates of the panopticon, self-policing subjects, with selves committed to a relentless self-surveillance. Women in abusive relationships feared that their children and other family members would come to know about their strained relationship with their partners. Women were afraid that their children would get emotionally affected by being exposed to constant parental conflict and unhealthy family situations. Suparna and Anuradha expressed emotive fear regarding their children:

I fear many things if I resist. Firstly, I fear that my child will become aware of our strained relationship. Secondly, others will come to know about it.

I will be sending my daughter to a hostel so that she does not witness our marital tensions, his shouting.

Suparna did fear behaviorally by not resisting the mental, sexual harm inflicted on her by her husband lest her child and other family members come to know about their strained marital relation. Anuradha did fear behaviorally by planning to send her daughter to a boarding house.

Women participants feared that the emotional and physical harm they encountered would affect their job performance. They described being constantly fearful that they would lose their jobs, that their abuser would come to the workplace, that someone at work would discover what was happening to them at home. Suparna, operational head of a private hospital feared that as her husband did not like her involvement in her job, he would show up in office and create problems for her.

My husband does not like my involvement with my job. I love my job because it has given me something which nobody could give, that is identity. I fear that he will come to my office and create problems or will call up my boss who fortunately happens to be a woman.

Women participants from lower income groups were more afraid of the consequences of physical violence rather than violence per se. As they were the sole earning members of the family, they feared that physical impairment due to the physical violence inflicted on them would render them unfit for work. Kalpana, working in other people's homes as domestic help said:

"If he beats me and breaks my hand how will I work? Who will then feed me and look after my daughters?"

Women participants who had left their abusive husbands remained terrorized in public spaces, afraid of being stalked by their ex-husbands, then kidnapped and killed. This indicates that for these women participants freedom from abuse did not mean freedom from fear of abuse. Mekhala and Chandrani, both social workers expressed fear of their ex-husbands:

On the streets I always fear that he is following me. I feel terrorized. He can kidnap me, kill me or sell me. I always come back home before dark, or if late somebody is there with me.

In public I always fear that my abusive ex-husband will kidnap me and may do something to me and my daughter. Either I or my parents pick her up from school, don't allow her to play in parks.

Mekhala and Chandrani expressed their emotive fear of being kidnapped by their ex-husbands and did fear by engaging in behavioral constraints like not being in public alone after dark, and taking protective measures for the child.

### **Being Courageous in Public Spaces**

Women who acknowledged their fear in intimate relations expressed courage in the public sphere. Women like Suparna, Durga and a few others were paralyzed by fear of crime from intimates in domestic realm but they engaged in assertive physical resistance in public spaces. With intimates the women managed harm through extreme self-restraint but they dealt boldly with "stranger danger" (Haskell and Randell 1998) by asserting themselves and reclaiming the public space for themselves. Suparna, operational head of a private hospital claimed that she failed to resist in private sphere but physically resisted in public spaces.

The resistance I can't give to my husband I can give outside. For instance once I was followed on the street by a man who kept asking me that whether I will go with him. I said I will go. While he was taken aback I caught hold of his hand and dragged him to the police van. In front of the police I started beating him.

Durga, a old research associate similarly expressed how in public spaces she has always resisted but could not in private.

I think a woman who gets mentally harassed and afraid in the private sphere can fight back the outsiders. Outside I have always resisted.

The narratives of Suparna, Durga document that those women participants who did fear in private spaces showed courage in public.

### **Conclusions**

Though, today fear of crime is one of the most researched topics in contemporary criminology in the United States and Britain, the focus has predominately been on fear of crime in public spaces, ignoring the fear of crime within intimate relations. The findings from extant research studies suggest that, consistent with popular over-representations of "stranger danger," most women report fear of sexual assault in specific places and situations in public. This study, on the contrary found women doing fear emotively, cognitively and behaviorally within intimate relations. However, consistent with other researches, in this study also the majority of women participants more readily expressed



how they did fear in public spaces. This indicates that women's subjectivities are structured by discourses that construct risk as occurring in public spaces, generating from the random acts of strangers. Moreover, women found it easier to manage their fears if they associated risk with 'other' people and places. Risk was predominately sexual for the woman participants because a woman is her body, which if violated would pollute the body and spoil family honor. Women's worst fear was the fear of getting raped by strangers. Women found it difficult to articulate their fears in intimate relations and for some there was a strong denial of fear within the private realm. This indicates that women's subjectivities structured by social and cultural dispositions responded as socially expected. Women denied fearing their intimates, as they felt intimates are people on whom they can rely on. The construction of intimates as sources of ontological security got shattered when women could name and acknowledge their own victimization in familial relations. The narratives of Shruti, Sharmishtha, Shipra demonstrate that women redefined risk when they experienced sexual harm from known men. Suparna, Juthika, Kalpana's acknowledgement of the harm they faced in intimate relations made them realize the potentiality of victimization in intimate relations. They felt that the threat of crime and the possibility of getting harmed came from the people they were intimately related with and not from some faceless stranger in public. They described how they did fear emotively, cognitively and behaviorally in private. These women no longer talked about risk in terms of potential harm inflicted on their bodies and sexualities by strangers in public but in terms of risk emanating from intimates.

Women in intimate relations feared desertion from their husbands, forceful eviction from their marital homes, unpredictable physical abuse from their husbands, the impact of abuse upon their job performance, the possibility of physical impairment, stalking and kidnapping by ex-partners.

Women doing fear in intimate relations showed courage in public spaces. They complied with the forces of oppression in the private realm but resisted fear in public spaces through not letting fear restrict their social mobility, social experience and by fighting back.

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