Understanding Stalking –
A Review of Stalking Dynamics & Stats

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Stalking Resource Center
National Center for Victims of Crime

Defining Stalking

Behavioral

Statute

The Stalking Resource Center is a program of the National Center for Victims of Crime. The mission of the Stalking Resource Center is to enhance the ability of professionals, organizations, and systems to effectively respond to stalking. The Stalking Resource Center envisions a future in which the criminal justice system and its many allied community partners will effectively collaborate and respond to stalking, improve victim safety and well-being, and hold offenders accountable.

The Stalking Resource Center provides training, technical assistance, and resource materials for professionals working with and responding to stalking victims and offenders.

Understanding Stalking – Fear

Fear is a difficult aspect of the crime:

- Subjective
- People don’t admit to being fearful
- People react differently to fear
- May be difficult to understand

A pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.

Context is critical!
Understanding Stalking – Fear

Something may be frightening for the victim but not to you.

Stalking behaviors often have specific meaning that is only understood between offender & victim.

Stalking criminalizes otherwise non-criminal behavior.

Harassment & Stalking

Harassment

Stalking

Florida Stalking Statue

- A person who willfully, maliciously, and repeatedly follows, harasses, or cyberstalks another person commits the offense of stalking, a misdemeanor of the first degree.

Statutes

Federal

State

- District of Columbia & U.S. Territories

Tribal Codes

UCMJ

Title IX

Clery Act

Prevalence of Stalking

7.5 million stalked in 1 year in U.S.

- By gender
  - 4% of women
  - 2% of men

- Lifetime
  - More than 1 in 7 women
  - 1 in 18 men

- The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2011
Stalker Tactics
- Sent unwanted emails, instant messages, & messages through social media
- Left strange or threatening items
- Left victim unwanted cards, letters, flowers, or presents
- Sneaked into victim’s car/ home; did things to scare
- Watched, followed, or spied on victim
- Left unwanted text or voice messages
- Made unwanted telephone calls & hang-ups
- Approached victim/showed up places where victim was

Use of Technology to Stalk
- Phones – calls, SMS, MMS
- Fax machines
- Cameras
- Global Positioning Systems (GPS)
- Location based services
- Computers
- Spyware
- Email & IM
- Social networking sites
- Assistive technologies

Stalking and Other Crimes
- Among stalking cases...
  - 24% involve property damage
  - 21% involve a direct attack on the victim
  - 15% involve an attack on another person or pet
- Identity theft
  - Charged items to credit card
  - Took money from accounts
  - Opened/closed accounts

Stalking & Other Criminal Activities
- Threatening to commit suicide
- Threatening while driving a car
- Creating a disturbance at a home
- Unwanted contact because offender was hanging around
- Threatening to kill family members
- Threatening to kill victim
- Breaking into a house
- Tampering with a car
- Stealing items from homes, cars, and businesses
- Threatening to hurt family members
- Threatening to hurt victim
- Creating a workplace disturbance
- Breaking into a business
- Threatening to report to CPS or other authorities if demands are not met
- Threatening to report to police for things that didn’t occur
- Breaking into a car

Stalking Dynamics
- 18 – 24 year olds experience the highest rates of stalking
- Women are more likely to experience stalking
- Most offenders are male
- The majority of victims know the offender

Victim Offender Relationship
- Current/Former intimate partner
- Acquaintance
- Stranger
- Family member
- Person of authority

Intimate Partner Stalkers - More Likely To:

- Physically approach victim
- Be insulting, interfering and threatening
- Re-offend
- Use weapons
- Escalate behaviors quickly

The RECON Typology of Stalking, Mohandie et al (2006)

Intimate Partner Stalking Risk

- More separation attempts than victims of intimate partner violence alone

  * Logan et al, Stalking victimization on the context of intimate partner violence (2007)

Intimate partner stalkers are more likely to assault third parties than non-intimate stalkers

  * Sheridan and Davies Criminal Behavior and Mental Health, (2001)

Increased Danger

- More Dangerous Times for Victims
  - Separation
  - Protective order served
  - Criminal arrest
  - Offender's loss of job or other significant life events
  - Multiple incidents in a short period of time – quantity & escalation

Increased Danger

- More Dangerous Offenders
  - History of substance abuse, mental illness
  - Actual pursuit
  - Possession and/or fascination with weapons
  - Vandalism, arson
  - Emotional outbursts and rage
  - History of violating POs
  - Threats of murder/murder-suicide

Lethality Risks

- Femicide by intimate partner
  - At LEAST 1 episode of stalking within year prior to murder

  * 76%

- Attempted femicide by intimate partner
  - At LEAST 1 episode of stalking within year prior to murder.

  * 85%

Greater indicator of potential lethality than either behavior alone

Physical Abuse + Stalking

* McFarlane et al. Stalking and Intimate Partner Femicide, (1999)
Why Do They Stalk?

- Seeking affection
- Power & control
- Rejection
- Obsession
- Planning to commit a crime
- Because they can

The Social Normalization of Stalking

- Stalking = love and affection
- Persistence pays off
- Stalker is a kind and decent person who is simply misunderstood

Reporting to Law Enforcement

37% of male stalking victims
41% of female stalking victims

Reasons For Not Reporting

- Feared the perpetrator/afraid of reprisals
- Couldn't identify offender/lacked evidence
- Thought police wouldn't think it was important or would be ineffective
- Not clear a crime occurred
- Reported to another official
- Private or personal matter
- Thought it a minor incident (minimization)

Reporting

By the time victims report to police, the stalking behavior has been well established and... victim-initiated countermeasures have failed.

Stalking is one of the few crimes where early intervention can prevent violence and death.

Stalking is Rarely Charged

Only 5% to 16% of stalking cases are charged as stalking when police have all the information they need to charge.


Charging

- Important for building the stalking case
  - For now and the future
- Charging stalking results in either:
  - Stopping the stalking
  - Being able to build a better case if stalking continues
- Increased plea bargaining options, sentencing options, including enhanced penalties in some situations and jurisdictions

Resources for Victims

- Are You Being Stalked? (Brochure for Victims)
- Stalking Questions and Answers
- Stalking Incident Behavior Log
- Safety Plan Guidelines
- Cyberstalking: Dangers on the Information Superhighway
- Ten Things You Should Know About Stalking

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