

Stalking in Texas

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Executive Summary

Stalking is not new behavior, but it has only been in the last sixteen years that every state and the federal government have passed laws making it a crime. This crime involves deliberate, repeated, unwanted, and fear-inducing acts on the part of one person toward another, usually in a relationship context of some kind. Stalking is not an easy crime to investigate. To those unfamiliar with the dynamics of this behavior, many stalking incidents may be seen merely as disagreements between intimates.

Even before legislation was enacted to address this behavior, public awareness of this crime had increased as a result of news accounts of persons who had been so victimized. It has been estimated that one in 12 women and one in 45 men in this country will be stalked at least once in their lifetimes. This report presents information on stalking victimization among Texas residents.

The data for this report came from a telephone survey of a random sample of Texas residents. Over 700 adult residents were queried about their experiences with stalking. They were asked if in the last 24 months they had experienced any of 19 stalking behaviors. Surprisingly, 18.26% of the respondents (n=128) reported being stalked during that time period. The significant findings from this study are summarized below.

- 128 victims reported 453 stalking incidents in the past 24 months.
- The 2 most frequently reported stalking acts were receiving repeated phone calls, and having things stolen from the victim.
- Stalking victims are most likely to be under 35 years of age.
- Asian residents showed the highest rate of victimization, followed by Hispanics.
- Stalking victims are most likely to be single/never married, but separated/divorced residents were the second most likely to be stalked.
- Men (16%) and women (19.9%) were about equally likely to be stalked, which is contrary to what has been reported elsewhere.
- The average number of stalking incidents per victim was 3.5. This number did not differ by gender of victim.
- Over 75% of stalking victims reported at least one adverse emotional effect. The most common effect was anger, followed by loss of sleep.
- Stalking victims are likely to be acquainted with the offender (57%). The most commonly reported relationship with the offender was a male acquaintance (26%). This was true for both men and women.
- Stalking is often preceded by violence between the victim and offender. Of those who previously knew the offender, 61.6% reported prior violence by the offender. This suggests that stalkers are often motivated by possessiveness and control issues.
- Among the victims who had some idea why they were targeted (75%), the most common reason given was jealousy on the part of the offender.
- Only 43% of victims reported the incidents to the police.

Based on these findings, recommendations were made about the need for continuing educational efforts for the public and for people who work with victims of this crime. The importance of victim input in investigating this crime was underscored, as were suggestions for thoroughly investigating reports of stalking and the provision of support services for victims.

Understanding the Crime of Stalking

Stalking is unique as a kind of crime. Before 1990, there were no criminal stalking laws in the U.S. However, all 50 states and the federal government have since passed some form of anti-stalking legislation.¹ The purpose of this report is to present findings from a survey conducted by the Crime Victims' Institute regarding stalking victimization in Texas. Because stalking legislation is fairly new, little information is available about the context in which this crime occurs, and its effect on victims. The following information is designed to explore the nature of stalking that occurs among Texas residents. It is hoped that this will contribute to an important dialogue about how to better meet the needs of these victims.

The seriousness of stalking is underscored in a number of ways. It is estimated that one in 12 women and one in 45 men are stalked at least once in their lifetime. That translates into one million women and nearly a half million men being stalked in this country every year.² Most stalking occurs at the hands of current or former intimate partners and begins before the relationship ends and is often associated with domestic violence.³ Many stalking victims were also abused emotionally and/or physically by the stalker. Male victims are as likely to be stalked by a stranger as by an acquaintance. As Tjaden and Thoennes observed, the context for this is unclear.⁴ Homosexual men may be at a higher risk for stalking than heterosexual men. In other cases, the stalker may be motivated by antipathy toward homosexuals. Among heterosexual men, a stalker may be the current or former partner of the person they are dating.

In a study of women who were murdered by intimate partners, it was discovered that 76% of those victims had been stalked by the perpetrator.⁵

What is Stalking?

Although stalking laws have only recently been enacted, stalking behaviors have existed for centuries. Spitzberg (2002) provides a basic definition of stalking:

Stalking occurs when a person is pursued or harassed in an intentional, ongoing, unwanted, and fear-inducing manner" (p. 262).⁶

This broad definition is open to a variety of interpretations, and indeed, state laws reflect differing views on what constitutes criminal stalking behavior. Most stalking laws require that to qualify as a stalker, the person must make a credible threat of violence against the victim or the victim's family. Stalking behaviors can include:

- Repeatedly receiving angry and threatening emails, notes, or letters;
- Repeatedly receiving unwanted emails, notes, or letters that were apologetic and/or expressed love for the person;
- Repeatedly receiving unwanted phone calls from the same person that are angry or threatening;
- Repeatedly receiving unwanted phone calls from the same person that were apologetic and/or expressed love for the person;
- Repeatedly calling the victim and then either hanging up when the phone is answered or saying nothing;
- Being watched when the victim is at home;
- Being followed when the victim is out in public;
- Repeatedly showing up unexpectedly at the victim's home, work, or at a public place;
- Coming to the home or workplace of the victim and creating a disturbance;
- Threatening to kill the victim;
- Threatening to hurt or kill members of the victim's family;
- Tampering with a victim's vehicle;
- Threatening the victim while he or she is driving;
- Breaking into the victim's house, car, or business;
- Stealing things from the victim's house, car, or business;
- Destroying some of the victim's possessions;
- Threatening to report the victim to the police for something he or she did not do;
- Threatening to commit suicide if the victim does not do as the stalker asks;

- Threatening to report the victim to child protective services, immigration, or other authorities if he or she does not do something the stalker wants them to do.

These behaviors are the items included in the survey used for this project.

In addition to the above list, GPS technology now enables would-be stalkers to monitor a victim's phone conversations and movements about town (via GPS tracking devices).⁷ For as little as \$5.99 per month, a person can turn a cell phone into a surveillance device which will track when the target person leaves home, where he or she travels, and at what speed. Stalkers can also buy surveillance software and hardware for as little as \$30.00 and can easily track a victim's every move on a computer. In an interesting new twist, a judge recently ruled that bitter blogs constitute online stalking.⁸

Stalking differs from other types of crime in two ways: it involves repeated victimization of the same person, and it is at least partly defined by its impact on the victim.⁹ In other words, a stalker knowingly engages in conduct that is designed to instill fear in the victim.

In Texas, three primary circumstances must be present for a behavior to be considered a stalking offense:

1. The offender must know, or reasonably believe the victim will perceive the behavior as threatening.
2. The behavior must cause the victim or a member of the victim's family to fear injury or damage to property.
3. The behavior would cause a reasonable person to have these fears.¹⁰

Although many behaviors may be thought of as stalking, they only meet the stalking threshold when fear is intended and present. However, if the behavior does not meet the level of stalking, it may fall under the harassment laws in Texas. Harassment in Texas involves many of the same actions identified in the stalking statute. However, harassment is limited to actions that an offender may not reasonably believe cause fear for the victim's safety. Instead, the intention is to, "harass, annoy, alarm, abuse, torment, or embarrass another."¹¹ Making a terroristic threat is similar to stalking except that there is no requirement that the offense occurs on more than one occasion.¹²

Effects of Stalking

Stalking can affect every part of a person's life. Many victims experience financial loss.¹³ Others quit their jobs or stop attending school. Still others choose to relocate and avoid social activities.^{14, 15, 16} The psychological effects of stalking can also be daunting. Understandably, many victims were more easily frightened and paranoid, less outgoing and assertive. Many experience heightened anxiety, sleep problems, and appetite suppression.¹⁷

Types of Stalking

Some researchers have attempted to define a typology of stalking behavior. Two broad categories of stalking were identified based on interviews with offenders.¹⁸ Their "RECON (relationship and context-based)" typology separates non-stranger and stranger stalking. The former category may include former intimate partners, employment-related relationships, or acquaintances. The latter category may involve the stalking of public figures or stalking by a stranger.

Spitzberg (2002) introduced a stalking typology based on a review of previous stalking research. From the literature, he derived seven broad categories of stalking:

1. *HYPERINTIMACY* - acts such as persistent contacts by media (phone, email, etc.), attempts at intensifying a relationship, and other acts with the intent to show affection to the victim
2. *PURSUIT, PROXIMITY, and SURVEILLANCE*- acts that allow the offender to keep in close proximity of the victim
3. *INVASION*- actions such as breaking into the victim's home and/or theft of the victim's property
4. *PROXIMITY, PURSUIT/INTRUSION* - obtaining information that is used to harass a victim from a third party source
5. *INTIMIDATION and HARASSMENT* - acts intended to invoke fear in the victim (probably the most common type)
6. *COERCION and CONSTRAINT* - using forceful methods to restrict the actions of the victim, the most extreme form being kidnapping

7. **AGGRESSION** – often listed as a separate category, but involves the use of verbal and physical intimidation, threats, or actual harm to the victim¹⁹

Many stalkers use more than one of these category types, and their behavior may escalate quickly to more serious acts.²⁰

Characteristics of Victims

The most common stalking scenario is that of the female victim stalked by a former or current intimate partner.^{21,22} Although it is well established that females are typically the victims, research has not yet established firm conclusions on characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, and age. Melton cites past research suggesting that there are few racial/ethnic differences in stalking prevalence among female victims.²³ However, compared to all other races/ethnicities, American Indians and Alaskan Natives were more likely to report stalking. In addition, Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) found that just over half of all stalking victims were between 18 and 29 years of age.²⁴ Although it seems clear that most stalking victims are female, further research is needed to examine other differences between victims and non-victims.

Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) found that over half (53%) of stalking victims reported the incidents to the police.²⁵ Women were slightly more likely to report (54.6%) than men (47.7%). There is some evidence that stalking reports to the police have increased since the passage of anti-stalking legislation. Those who did not report stalking incidents most often said it was not a police matter, there was nothing the police could do, or they feared reprisals from the offender if they reported it.

Methodology

Data for this report comes from a supplemental stalking victimization section of the annual Crime Victims' Institute Telephone Victimization Survey-2006. Each year, the Crime Victims' Institute prepares a telephone survey to be administered to a random sample of Texas residents. The Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M University conducted the survey during the spring of 2006. Using Internet computer-assisted telephone interviewing (iCATI) technology, the PPRI obtained a sample of 701 adult residents of Texas. Although the sample is not representative of all Texas residents, the iCATI system utilized random-digit dialing to ensure that all Texas residents with residential telephone numbers had equal probability of being contacted.

Characteristics of Respondents

Figures 1 - 6 displays general demographic information for the entire sample. Overall, respondents were more likely to be female, white, married, and have at least some college education. The average age for the sample is 45.5 years. Despite efforts by survey administrators to obtain a sample representative of all adult Texans, this sample contains a disproportionate number of females and older respondents. However, other characteristics of the sample are roughly comparable to the Texas population.

Stalking Victimization Experiences

Respondents were asked a number of questions about their experiences with stalking. As a lead-in, interviewers provided the following definition of stalking to each respondent:

Stalking refers to deliberate but unwanted acts by a person to get your attention because he or she wants to have a relationship with you, has a relationship with you, or assumes there is a relationship with you when there is not.

Respondents were asked if they experienced a number of stalking behaviors over the past 24 months (listed above). Based on these items, 128 respondents reported experiencing at least one form of stalking behavior. Although this measure of stalking does not perfectly match the definitions noted earlier, it is a reasonable alternative to the narrow legal concept of stalking. Table 2 displays the frequencies for each individual type of stalking victimization as well as the percentage of respondents who reported each event out of the 128 victims. These victims reported a total of 453 stalking incidents, suggesting a pattern of repeated acts designed to instill fear.

The most common stalking experience reported was receiving repeated phone calls from the same person when that person either said nothing or hung up the phone when it was answered. This occurred in 6.5% of

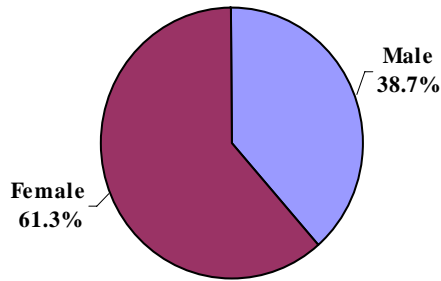


Figure 1. Gender of Respondents

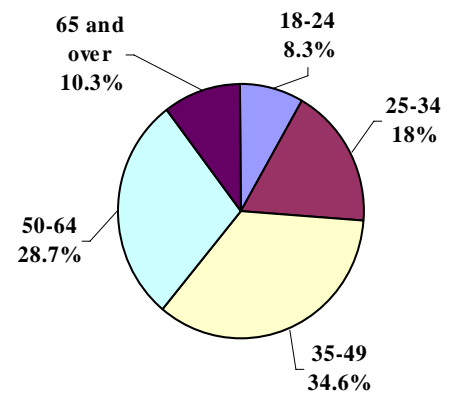


Figure 2. Age of Respondents

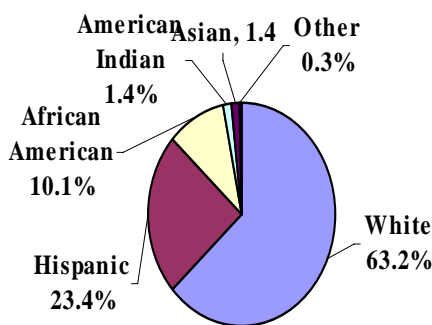


Figure 3. Race/Ethnicity of Respondents

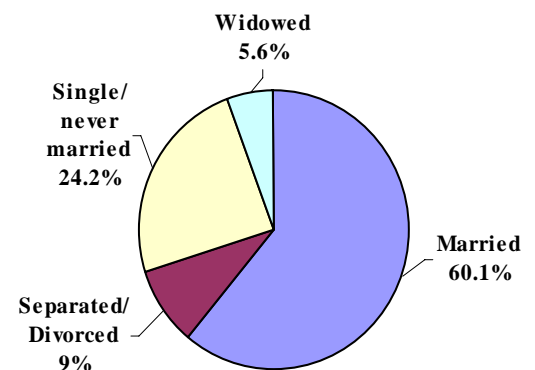


Figure 4. Marital Status of Respondents

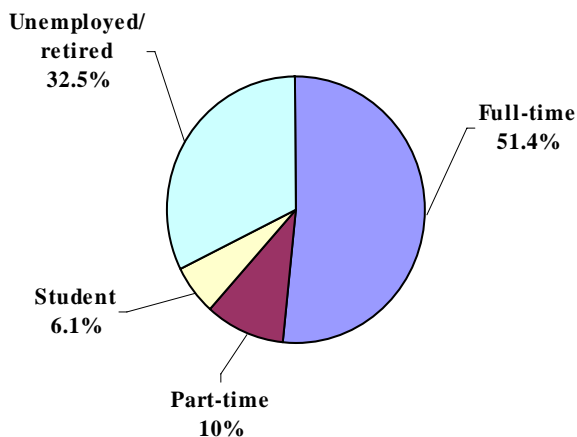


Figure 5. Employment Status of Respondents

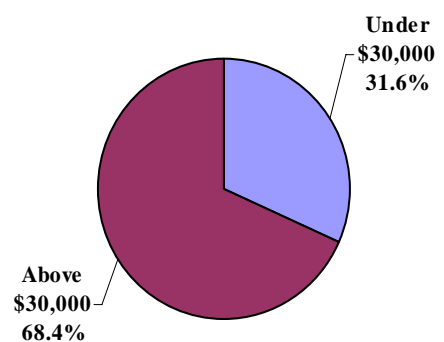


Figure 6. Income of Respondents

the entire sample of respondents, and in 35.2% of those who reported stalking victimization. The second most prevalent experience was having things stolen from the house, car, or business (6.3% of the entire sample and 34.4% of victims). More frequent occurrences were repeated unwanted phone calls that were threatening (4.7% and 25.8%); being spied on at home (4.4% and 24.2%); tampering with the victim's vehicle (4.2% and 22.7%); unwanted contact with the offender because he/she waited around outside home or work (3.9% 21.1%); and having a house, car, or business broken into (3.9% 21.1%).

Table 1. Frequencies of Individual Stalking Experiences

Act	Frequency	% of Victims	% of Respondents
Repeated angry and threatening emails, notes, and letters	17	13.3	2.4
Repeated unwanted emails, notes, and letters that were apologetic/expressing love	13	10.2	1.9
Three or more unwanted calls from the same person that were angry/threatening	33	25.8	4.7
Three or more unwanted calls from the same person that were apologetic/expressed love	26	20.3	3.7
Repeated phone calls from the same person who hung up or said nothing when answered	45	35.2	6.5
Spied on at home	31	24.2	4.4
Followed or spied on while in public	24	18.8	3.4
Unwanted contact because someone was waiting around outside the home, work, etc.	27	21.1	3.9
Person came to the home or work place and created a disturbance	26	20.3	3.7
Threatened to hurt or kill	16	12.5	2.3
Threatened to hurt or kill family members	11	9	1.6
Car was tampered with	29	22.7	4.2
Threatened while driving a car	15	11.7	2.2
Broke into the house, car, or business	27	21.1	3.9
Stole items from the house, car or business	44	34.4	6.3
Destroyed possessions	26	20.3	3.7
Threatened to report respondent to police for something that did not occur	21	16.4	3
Threatened to commit suicide	9	7	1.3
Threatened to report respondent to CPS or other authorities if demands were not met	13	10.2	1.9
Total of all occurrences	453		

Respondents reporting any stalking experiences were then compared to all others participating in the survey based on demographic characteristics (Figures 7-12) . Respondents who were female, single (never married), between 18 and 24 years of age, students, Asian, and who made less than \$30,000 per year, were more likely to have been stalked than those in other categories. However, statistically significant differences in stalking victimization were only found for the following categories:

1. *AGE*

There is a clear trend indicating that as age increases, the likelihood of stalking victimization decreases. Over 60% of all respondents who were between 18 and 34 years of age reported being stalked. This is consistent with previous research based on a national sample.²⁶

2. *RACE/ETHNICITY*

Although Asians are more likely than all other racial/ethnic groups to experience stalking (4 out of 6 respondents), Hispanics are significantly more likely than whites, African Americans, and Native Americans to be victimized.

3. *MARITAL STATUS*

Those who have never been married are more likely to experience stalking. Persons who are separated/divorced are the second mostly likely to be victimized.

4. *EMPLOYMENT STATUS*

Students are more likely to be victimized than all other employment categories, but this may be indicative of the age of students. Indeed, part-time employees are more likely to be victimized than full-time employees as well as those who are not employed, providing support that the employment differences may be due to age.

5. *INCOME*

Persons who make less than \$30,000 per year are more likely to be stalked than those making more than that. This may be related to the relatively young age of these victims.

Interestingly, among all survey respondents (N=701) there was no meaningful difference in the likelihood that men (16%) or women (19.9%) were stalked. This is in contrast to the findings of pervious research.²⁷

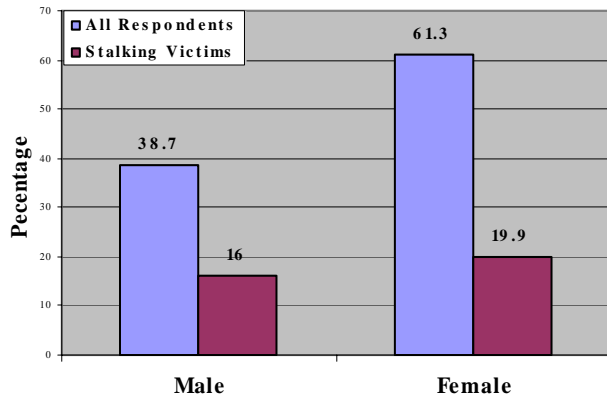


Figure 7. Percentage of Victims in each Gender Group

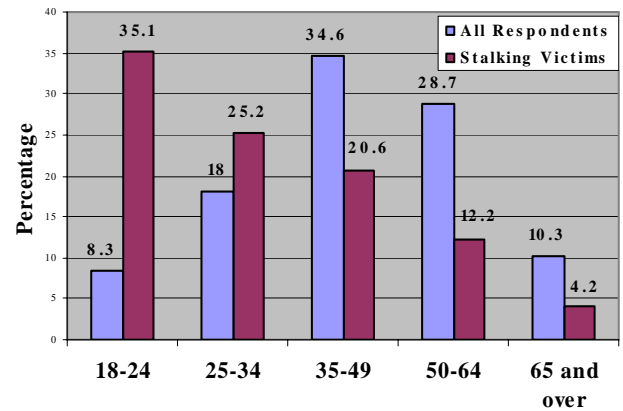


Figure 8. Percentage of Victims in each Age Group

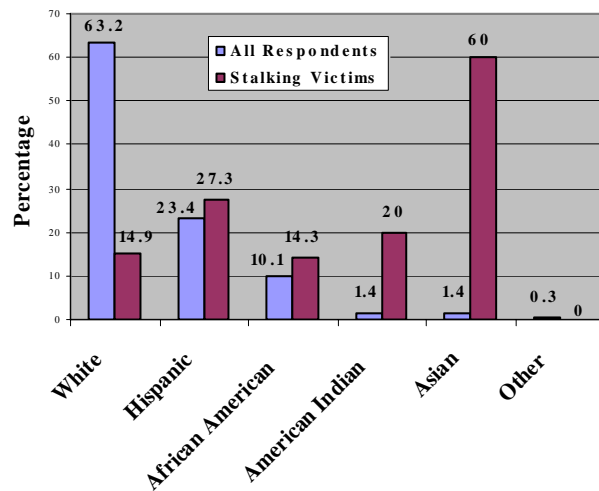


Figure 9. Percentage of Victims in each Race/Ethnicity Group

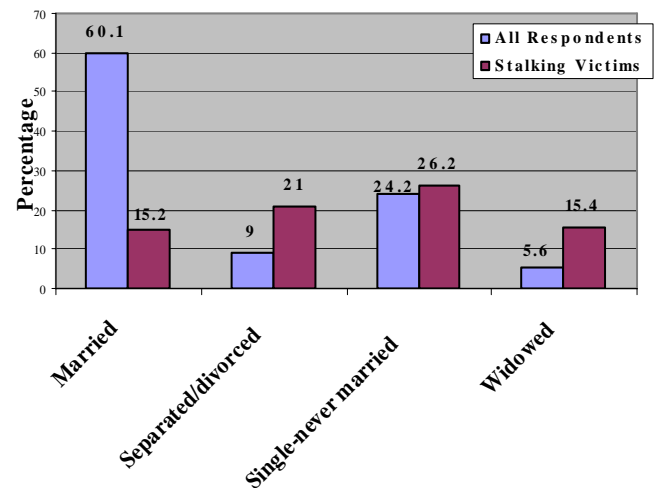


Figure 10. Percentage of Victims in each Marital Group

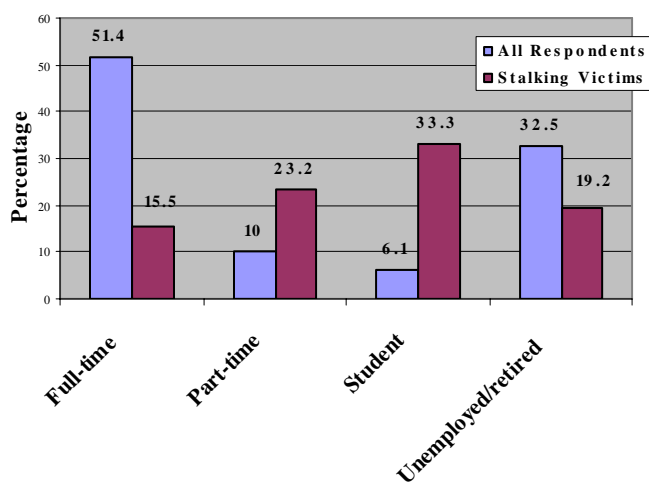


Figure 11. Percentage of Victims in each Employment Group

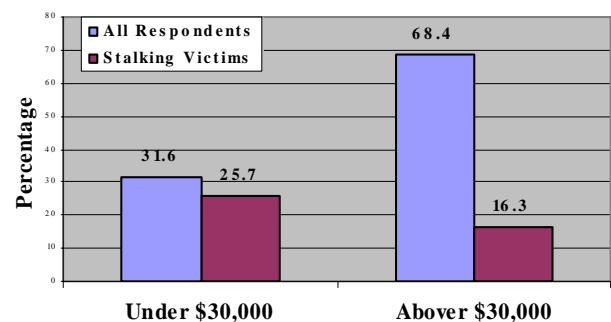


Figure 12. Percentage of Victims in each Income Group

Although it is useful to compare individuals based on whether or not they experienced any stalking victimization, it has limitations. There may also be differences between those who experienced multiple forms of stalking victimizations and those who only experienced one or two forms of stalking. Table 3 shows the number of respondents who reported different counts of victimization experiences. Although most respondents reported experiencing one or two types of stalking, a substantial number reported three or more victimizations. The mean number of stalking incidents among victims was 3.5, which is in line with the legal definition of stalking in Texas as acts which occur on more than one occasion.

Table 2. Number of different types of stalking experiences

# of Incidents	# of Respondents	% of Respondents (n=128)
1	48	37.5
2	26	20.3
3	13	10.2
4	8	6.3
5	6	4.7
6	3	2.3
7	5	3.9
8	5	3.9
9	4	3.1
10	3	2.3
11	2	1.7
12	2	1.7
13	1	.8
17	2	1.7
Total	128	

Statistical tests were performed to see if there were any differences in the characteristics of persons who experienced varying numbers of stalking experiences. To do this, victims who experienced only one stalking incident were compared with those who experienced two or more incidents. A second analysis compared those victims who experienced up to two incidents with those who experienced three or more.

Although there were not major differences among categories of marital status when comparing those with one victimization experience to those with two or more, some differences were noted in the second comparison measure. Respondents who were separated or divorced were more likely to experience three or more types of victimization than other marital status groups. However, respondents who were single/never married were more likely to report at least one victimization experience than were those who were separated/divorced.

There were no significant differences among the other demographic characteristics between those who experienced one or two types of stalking and those who experienced multiple forms of stalking. Particularly surprising is the absence of gender differences in stalking experiences. No significant differences were found between males and females with respect to the number of stalking behaviors experienced.

Emotional Reactions to Stalking Victimization

As with other forms of personal victimization, stalking may cause emotional and/or personal problems for victims. For this study, respondents were asked if they experienced emotional problems as the result of being stalked (Figure 7). Of the 128 respondents who reported being stalked, 75.6% reported at least one adverse emotional effect. The most common reaction was anger (58.6%), followed by loss of sleep (29.7%), lack of concentration (26.7%), fear of being alone (25%), and feelings of helplessness (24.2%).

As noted above, males and females were about equally likely to experience stalking, but is it the case that females are more likely to suffer adverse emotional reactions than are males? As can be seen from Figure 8, males and females are about equally likely to experience some emotional reaction to stalking. However, females reported more symptoms than males did. Over 25% of female victims reported experiencing at least six or more emotional symptoms out of the nine problems listed. Fewer than 5% of male victims were similarly affected. Thus, it appears that females are more adversely affected by stalking than are males. This may reflect a heightened sense of vulnerability on the part of females when the stalker is a male.

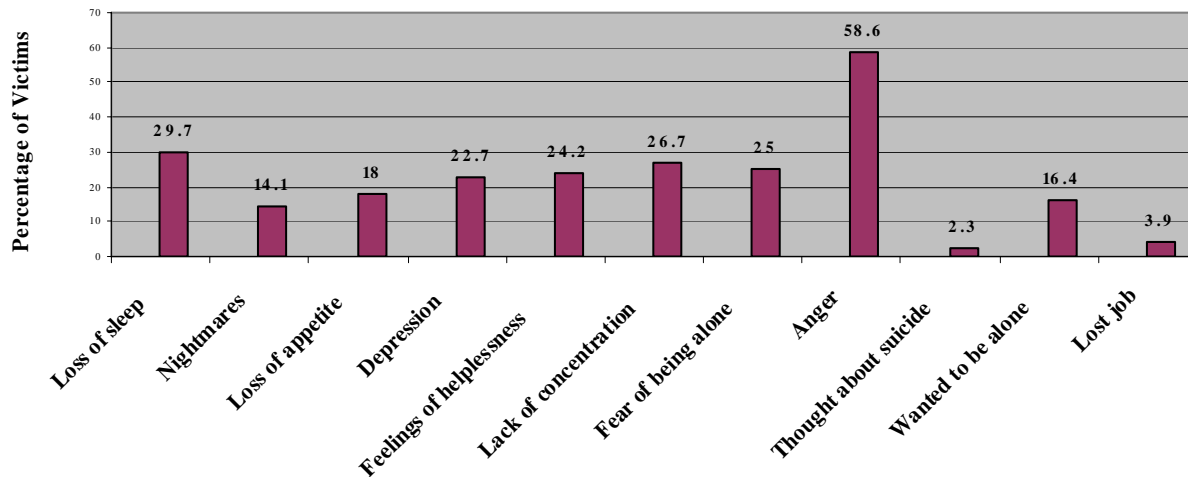


Figure 13. Emotional Reactions to Stalking Victimization*

* Of the 128 respondents reporting a stalking victimization, 93 (75.6%) reported at least one emotional reaction.

Note: Percentages total more than 100 due to some victims reporting more than one emotional reaction.

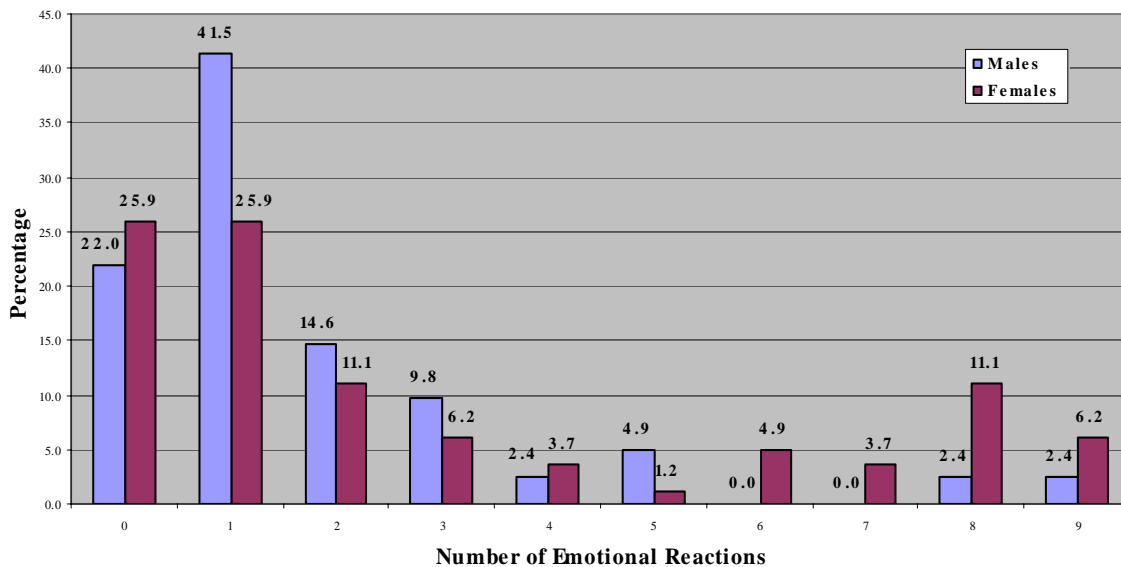


Figure 14. Number of Emotional Responses by Gender

Victim Relationship to the Stalker

Respondents were asked about their prior relationship with the stalker in order to obtain information on precursors to stalking. Overall, 57% of respondents reported knowing the person who stalked them prior to victimization. Of those who knew their stalker, a variety of different types of relationships were reported (Figure 15). The most common relationship was male acquaintance (26%). None of the other categories of relation-

ship exceeded 11% of the victims. Interestingly, almost half of the male victims (47%) who answered the question about their relationship with the stalker identified a male as the perpetrator. This compares to 58.7% of female victims who were stalked by a male. These results are lower than that reported by Tjaden & Thoennes (1998).²⁸

Disregarding gender, it seems that stalking is most likely to occur between two persons who are acquainted with one another. When comparing the gender of stalkers, spouses or ex-spouses, coworkers, and acquaintances are more likely to be male. This suggests that females are more likely to know their stalkers while males are more likely to be stalked by persons who are not as well known to them.

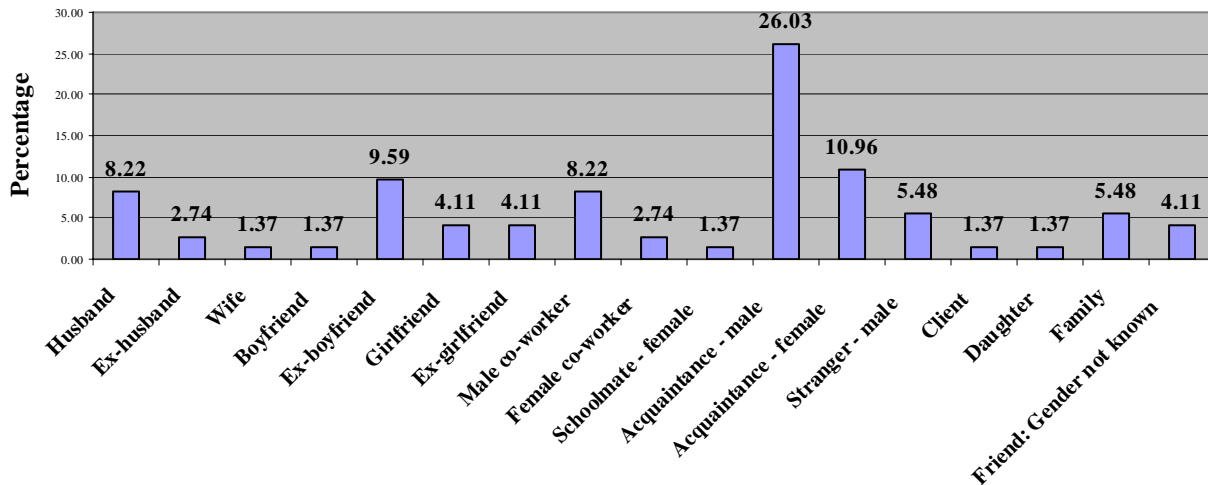


Figure 15. Relationship to stalker (n=73)

Stalking and other Forms of Victimization

Respondents were also asked if they experienced any violent behavior by the stalker before the stalking began (Figure 16). Of those who previously knew their stalker, 61.6% reported experiencing some form of violence with the perpetrator before stalking began. This is lower than the 81% of victims reported in previous research.²⁹ The most common experience of the victims in this study were threats of harm (46.6%), followed by pushing/shoving (27.4%). Additionally, approximately 25% of respondents claimed that their stalker had prevented them from leaving an area on at least one occasion. These results indicate that when the victim knows the offender, violence is a common precursor to stalking. They further suggest that when stalking occurs in intimate relationships, controlling and emotionally abusive behavior are common even before the actual stalking begins.

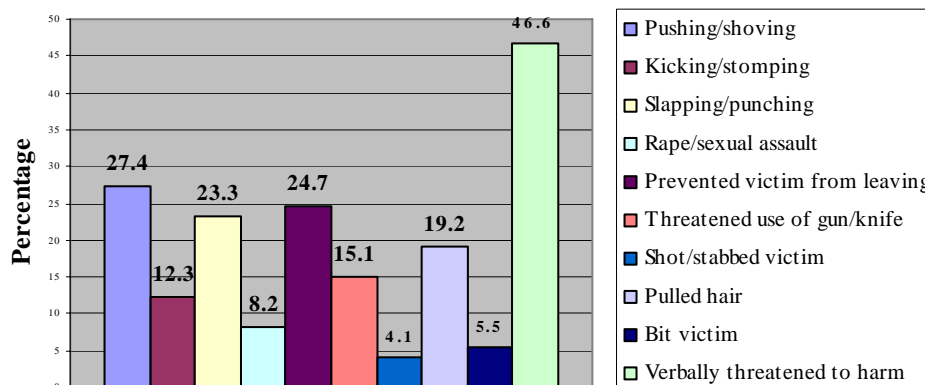


Figure 16. Violent actions by stalker toward the victim before stalking began*

* Of the 73 stalking victims who previously knew their stalker, 45 (61.6%) reported at least one of the experiences in Figure 16, and 27 reported more than one of the items.

Note: Percentages total more than 100 due to some victims reporting more than one occurrence.

Stalking victims who previously knew their stalker were likely to have had abusive pre-stalking experiences. In addition to stalking, respondents were also asked if they had been a victim of other violent offenses over the past 24 months that did not involve stalking. These offenses were:

- Attacked or threatened with a gun or knife
- Attacked or threatened with some other object
- Attacked by having something thrown (e.g., rock or bottle)
- Attacked by punching, biting, kicking, slapping, etc.
- Forced sex against victim's will
- Being prevented from leaving a place after a threatening or violent incident occurred
- Attacked with a vehicle while attempting to leave

The results indicated that 19.5% of stalking victims were also victims of at least one other violent crime, while only 4.2% of those who had not been victims of stalking reported being a victim of violent crime. This shows that stalking victims are significantly more likely to experience recurring victimization than is true for people in general.

Reasons for Stalking

It is important to know why a person would resort to stalking. Respondents in this study were asked why they thought they were stalked. Figure 17 shows the percentages for the reasons victims identified. The results include all respondents reporting stalking victimization who had some idea why they were stalked (75%). Both male and female victims were most likely to report being stalked because of "jealousy" (21.1% of all victims). This was followed by financial reasons (17.2%), but was most applicable to female victims. Additionally, 15.6% of respondents report that they were stalked as a scare tactic to get them to do something. Slightly more males than females gave this as a reason for being stalked. Possessiveness and manipulation were the reasons given by 14.8% of all victims, but this was much more common among female (20%) than male victims (4.6%). Attempting to get back together with the victim was the reason given for stalking by 11.7% of the victims who had some idea why they were victimized. Males were slightly more likely to report this as a reason (22.8%) than were women (11.7%). It is not clear if this finding for males reflects the stalker's desire to get back with the male victim or with the person the male victim was seeing at the time. Finally, 10.9% of the victims thought the motivation for the stalking was to get back at (i.e., punish) the victim for leaving him/her.

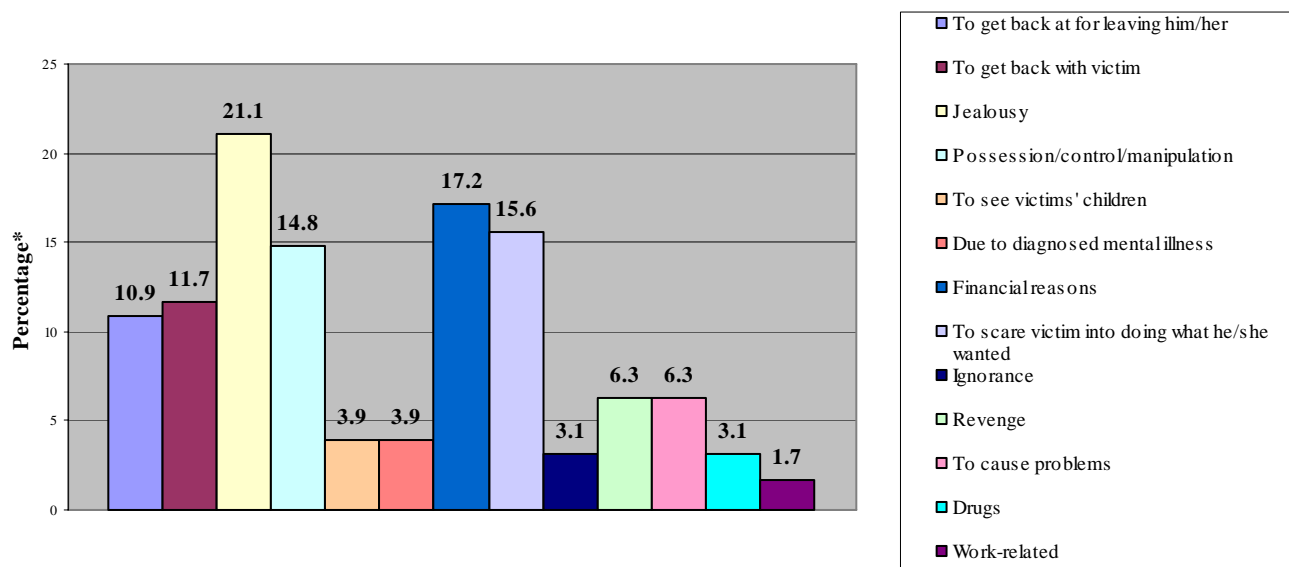


Figure 17. Reasons for stalking behavior from the victims' perspective

* Thirty two, or 25% of all stalking victims reported they did not know why they were stalked.

Reporting to Police and Police Response

Of those who were stalked, 43% reported the incident(s) to the police. This reporting percentage is similar to that reported in earlier research.³⁰ Interestingly, approximately 23% of respondents stated that their stalker had been arrested prior to the onset of the stalking incidents for similar, domestic, or other offenses. However, because 41% of victims did not know if the person who stalked them had been arrested before, it is likely that considerably more than 23% of offenders had been arrested before victims reported the crime to the authorities. Of those who contacted the police, 38.2% called the police once, 21.8% called twice, 9.1% called three times, and 30.9% called four or more times. Most victims (60%) reported that they met with the police once or twice, 12.7% stated they met with the police three times, and 20% of respondents met the police four or more times. Of the respondents who called the police, only 20% reported that the stalker was arrested. However, most of the victims who reported the incidents to the police (63.6%) stated they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the police response to their situation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Stalking is a serious social problem in Texas. The fact that 18.2% of the respondents who completed the interview for the 2006 Annual Victimization Survey reported this kind of victimization underscores the scope of the problem. Furthermore, the fact that stalking is now a crime in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and within the federal system reflects heightened awareness to the dangers posed by stalking behavior. However, stalking may often be overlooked by those responsible for protecting the public.

Education

Many victims may not realize the extent to which stalking behavior can endanger them. An ongoing public information campaign is necessary to alert victims to early signs of stalking and the importance of reporting such behavior.

Many stalkers may not be aware that their behavior is criminal. They may mistakenly believe that since they have had a relationship with the victim, their behavior will not be questioned. Offenders need to be clearly informed that stalking behavior is grounds for arrest. When probable cause exists, stalking offenders should be arrested.

Law enforcement personnel and prosecutors need specialized training on identifying, investigating, and prosecuting cases of stalking.

Predictors

Unlike most crimes, stalking is not always easily identifiable. Like domestic violence, it may be perceived as part of everyday courtship and intimate relationships. However, when a person engages in repeated conduct that is designed to instill fear in a victim, it is incumbent upon the police and prosecutors to identify these cases before they take a deadly turn. Prior sexual intimacy with the victim, previous criminal convictions, and substance abuse are among the strongest predictors of violence by stalkers. Law enforcement personnel and district attorneys need specific training in identifying this kind of crime and the steps necessary to protect victims.

Victim Input

To assist authorities in pursuing stalking offenders, victims need to be carefully questioned about other related incidents that have occurred with the offender, which could provide evidence for a pattern of malicious activity. Victims' input is also needed throughout the investigation to alert the authorities of the offender's ongoing threatening and controlling behavior. Victims should be told how to save copies of voicemails, email, and written communications by the offenders. When possible, victims should be encouraged to photograph the stalker or any evidence that he or she has been around the victim. This should only be done when it is safe to

do so.

Investigation

Because stalking is an ongoing pattern of behavior instead of a single act, as is true of most crimes, it is more difficult to investigate. To the uninitiated it may not be clear that one action on the part of the offender is related to a series of others. Further complicating an investigation are cases in which the behavior occurs in different jurisdictions. These characteristics underscore the importance of obtaining ongoing input from victims and collaborating with other stakeholders (e.g., other law enforcement agencies, victim advocates, employers) in investigating this crime. Investigation should include determining whether the offender is stalking a victim by using advanced technology and GPS surveillance techniques.

The National Center for Victims of Crime has developed a model stalking protocol for law enforcement agencies (2004), which provides guidance for agencies in implementing programs that better protect victims and enhance prosecution of offenders.³¹

Law enforcement personnel and prosecutors need to coordinate services in order to build an effective case against the offender. In some jurisdictions a single prosecutor handles all of the stalking cases.

Support Services

Victims should be referred community agencies which can provide ongoing support and assist victims in protecting themselves. Among the services which may be helpful to victims are domestic violence centers, mental health treatment centers, and faith-based services. Victims should be encouraged to alert family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers about what is happening to them and provide a description of the stalker. Victim advocates can reinforce the importance of victims recording all stalking incidents. They can assist victims with thinking through the pros and cons of getting a protective order.

Even though it may at times be difficult to identify stalking incidents, early detection and intervention are necessary to protect victims from potentially escalating violence. Toward that end educational efforts should be directed at informing both victims and offenders that such experiences are unacceptable. Persons who come into contact with these victims also need specialized training in assisting and protecting them.

Endnotes

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Mission Statement

The Mission of the Crime Victims' Institute is to

- Conduct research to examine the impact of crime on victims of all ages in order to promote a better understanding of victimization
- Improve services to victims
- Assist victims of crime by giving them a voice
- Inform victim-related policymaking at the state and local levels.

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