

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: STALKING

Statistics

- 8% of women and 2% of men in the U.S. have been stalked in their lifetime. Tjaden & Thoennes, "Stalking in America," NIJ USDOJ, 1998.
- 31% of women who were stalked by a current or former husband or cohabitating partner were sexually assaulted. Ibid.
- The average duration of stalking is 1.3 years. Mohandie, et.al., "The RECON Typology of Stalking," Journal of Forensic Sciences 51, 2006.
- 78% of stalkers use more than one means of approach. Weapons are use in 1 out of 5 cases. Ibid.
- 31% of women who were stalked by a current or former husband or cohabitating partner were also sexually assaulted by the same partner. US Dept. of Justice, 3rd Report to Congress under Violence Against Women Act, 2001.
- 13.1% of female students on college campuses report having been stalked two to six times a week, for an average duration of 60 days. 10% of the time, they reported that their stalker forced or attempted sexual contact. National Institute of Justice, "The Sexual Victimization of College Women," 2000.

Overview of the Issue

- Most stalkers are former or current intimate partners who use stalking as a way to control or punish their victim. Common behaviors are harassing phone calls and personal visits, surveillance, following and physical intimidation. Some former partners were sexually abusive before the stalking.
- Stalking is not an isolated event, and stalkers are unpredictable. While most are not mentally ill, they engage in a course of deviant activity. Stalkers may be current or ex-partners, people with infatuations or delusional fixations or sadistic predators. It may end in physical or sexual assault or the stalker may simply move on. The victim is never at fault for what the stalker does.
- Anyone can be a victim of stalking. High-risk groups tend to women, people in highly visible jobs, gay men, single people 18-30 and people with a prior history of physical abuse.

What You Can Do

- Believe the victim; do not question the validity of their statements or minimize their experiences.
- Learn about safety precautions and the law. Support the victim in collecting evidence and creating a safety plan. Encourage her/him to make a police report, obtain a Protective Order and seek counseling.

Impact on Victims

- Stalking victims often suffer physical symptoms, such as recurring nightmares, headaches, eating and sleeping problems, use of alcohol or drugs and stress. Psychological symptoms include anxiety, hyper-vigilance, anger, depression, fear and paranoia. Some effects may result from an exacerbation of existing vulnerabilities.
- Victims also face financial and social consequences of lost work or pay, cessation of work or school, relocation, paying for increased security, replacing property and avoiding social activities.
- Victims are deterred from seeking help out of fear of retaliation by the stalker, feelings that no one can or will help them, and a lack of knowledge about stalking laws or safety options.

Quotable

Stalking is a desperate and dangerous effort by one person to control and frighten another. No one, even the stalker, knows how it may end. Don't trivialize what may seem innocuous or merely annoying behavior; it can escalate. For help, call the National Center for Victims of Crime at 1-800-FYI-CALL.