



Stalking

Stalking is a pattern of repeated, unwanted attention, harassment, and contact directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.

Offenders of Stalking

- Current or former intimate partners.
- Dates.
- Family members.
- Non-relative caregivers.
- Acquaintances.
- Strangers.

Offenders of stalking may or may not have prior criminal records and rarely have a mental illness. There is no one psychological or behavioral profile for stalkers.

Common stalking behaviors include but are not limited to:

- Following a person on foot or in a vehicle.
- Appearing at a person's home, business, or other places the victim normally frequents (such as senior centers, places of worship, or medical offices).
- Making harassing or repeated phone calls.
- Leaving written notes, phone messages, e-mails.
- Repeatedly sending unwanted gifts (such as flowers) to the victim.
- Obtaining personal information about the victim without the victim's permission.
- Vandalizing the victim's property (disabling security systems, unscrewing outside lights, disabling vehicles).
- Filing change of address forms at the post office in the victim's name in order to intercept mail.

Stalking in Later Life

A study reviewing data from the National Violence Against Women Survey found that **older adults were almost as likely as younger people to be stalked**. The study also found that women age 55 and older are more likely than men of the same age to be stalked. Most often the stalker is someone known to the victim and often stalking occurs as part of domestic violence in later life.

Many victims who are older or have a disability may not be believed if they report stalking, particularly if the victim has dementia or psychiatric disabilities. Others may not be believed because of the frailty or disability of the stalker.

Effects on Victim

Stalking may affect every part of a victim's life. Many victims talk about the strain of constantly being on alert for the stalker or the next incident.

Other victim reactions include:

- Fear of what the stalker will do.
- Feeling vulnerable and unsafe.
- Not knowing whom to trust.
- Stress, nervousness, anxiety, depression.
- Eating, sleeping issues.
- Hyper-vigilance.
- Frustration or isolation because others do not understand why they are afraid.

Challenges of Working These Cases

Stalking is difficult to recognize, investigate, assess, and prevent for many reasons including the following:

- Stalking is not a single, easily identifiable criminal act like assault, robbery, burglary, and other crimes. Stalking is often a mix of criminal and non-criminal behavior.

- The impact of stalking on the victim—the fear it causes—is a key component of its legal definition. This affects the way the crime must be investigated and proven.
- In the context of domestic violence, investigation of stalking incidents may seem insignificant when physical violence is occurring.
- Stalking may be seen as something that only happens to younger individuals. Therefore, older victims may not be believed and professionals may believe the victims have dementia or mental illness rather than that they are being stalked.
- The stalker may commit criminal acts in different locations and may be under investigation in multiple jurisdictions.