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6 December 2021

The United States Department of Justice defines stalking as a course of repeated conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person fear (DOJ, 1). Further legal principles used to define stalking include nonconsensual communication or any sort of threat, verbal or written. Personally, stalking is difficult to address, especially today with the vast use of social media, people that have never physically met someone could know everything about them. The legal principles used to address stalking behaviors are reasonable but should address stalking within an intimate relationship. Stalking is a common behavior of domestic violence, but if one were to report that their spouse is stalking them, the response may not be swift, or even happen, because one may feel that it is not ‘reasonable’ to fear a spouse from their stalking.

Including couples in an intimate relationship, other victims of stalking are mostly young to middle aged women, or those who have a certain level of attention or fame, whether they were an international star like John Lennon or an upcoming one in Christina Grimmie. In the vast majority, however, stalking victims and perpetrators have a relationship with one another, whether that be a friendship or a professional one. It is significantly more uncommon to be stalked by a stranger rather than someone that is known. In a 1998 study, it is said that 1 in 20 women will be stalked at a point in their lifetime (Hall, 3). In the same study, stalking occurred in a post-intimate relationship 57% of the time and occurred between prior acquaintances 34% of the time. Only 6% of stalking instances were perpetrated by a stranger.

To understand how stalking occurs, it must be understood that stalking differs from harassment as it is harassment that stems from an obsession. A catalyst for stalking behavior is when a woman ends a relationship or declines to get involved with a man (Hall, 9). Stalking behavior could be about power, control, and intimidation, especially when one tries to leave a relationship, stalking may ensue to intimidate their victim as a means of keeping them in the relationship. Other times, perpetrators feel threatened, and use stalking as a revenge mechanism. As for stalking behaviors, typically they include persistent phone calls, or constant calling and hanging up. As the stalking continues, however, behaviors could become more violent as threats could be made or acts of violence like showing up to one’s residence with a firearm. According to respondents from a study, stalking behaviors they were subjected to, but not limited to, were their pets being killed, being held at gun point, and their kids being threatened as well (Hall, 11). These behaviors have, and will, lead to extreme violent acts like sexual assault or murder.

Consequences of stalking include serious psychological damage towards victims. Victims have described being stalked as psychological terrorism (Hall, 22). Lives of stalking victims forever change, they often lose their jobs, some may even change their names, and many times victims go underground, or cut off communication with their loved ones. In some cases, victims will attempt to change their appearance by dyeing their hair or gaining weight to not be recognized. Many victims of stalking reported feeling paranoid in social settings, or easily frightened when alone. As for future relationships, victims of stalking said they are less trusting, and they question their partners motives, which often leads to an end in the relationship

Finally, the internet undoubtably has altered stalking behavior, those that use social media know how easy it is to see how one person lives their life. Cyberstalking is already a significant problem among the internet, as one can pose as a completely different person, and lure someone into having a relationship on the internet. Furthermore, the internet or social media gives stalkers a way to know the place and time someone may be, making their chances of victimization much more likely. For those that have been undoubtably suspected of stalking, they should not have any access to the internet, though it could be unlikely to limit anyone’s use of the web. For victims, they deserve the right to know that they are safe, and the criminal justice system should provide them with the ability to continue their lives as it was before, to the best if their ability.

References

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