

Stalking is a form of violence that most often happens to women. It is known as “criminal harassment” in criminal law. According to Section 264 of the *Criminal Code of Canada*, criminal harassment can involve repeatedly following, communicating with, watching, and/or threatening a person either directly or through someone a person knows. A person being stalked must fear for their own safety or the safety of someone they know in order for charges to be laid.

General Stalking Information

In 1999, three-quarters of people who were stalked were women. (Statistics Canada, 2000, *The Daily*, 29 November)

9 out of 10 stalkers are men. (Department of Justice Canada, 2003, *Criminal Harassment*, <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/harassment.html>)

Stalking offences commonly include threats, harassing phone calls, assault, and mischief. (Karen Hackett, 2002, “Criminal Harassment”, *Juristat*, Vol. 20, No. 11, p.1)

Online stalking is known as cyberstalking, and it can occur through chat rooms, message boards, and email. Although there is little research on the topic, evidence suggests that women are primary targets for cyberstalking, just as they are most vulnerable to other kinds of stalking. (Karen Hackett, 2002, “Criminal Harassment”, *Juristat*, Vol. 20, No. 11, p.11)

Stalking can create feelings of intense and prolonged fear, including an increasing fear of the escalation of the stalking conduct. It often gives those being stalked a feeling of helplessness and lack of control. (Department of Justice Canada, 2004, *A Handbook for Police and Crown Prosecutors on Criminal Harassment*, p.3)

Stalking and Women Partners

56% of women who reported being stalked were stalked by current or former partners. (Karen Hackett, 2002, “Criminal Harassment”, *Juristat*, Vol. 20, No. 11, p. 8)

Studies estimate that 50% of women who experience domestic violence also experience stalking. (M.B. Mechanic et al., 2000, “Intimate Partner Violence and Stalking Behaviour: Exploration of Patterns and Correlates in a Sample of Acutely Battered Women”, *Violence and Victims*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 55-72)

Ex-intimate partner stalking is considered the most dangerous form of stalking. (R.E. Palarea *et al.*, 1999, “The Dangerous Nature of Intimate Relationship Stalking: Threats, Violence, and Associated Risk Factors”, *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, Vol. 17, p. 269-283)

There were nine stalking-related murders in Canada between 1997 and 1999 - in each case, a woman was killed by a recently separated partner. (Karen Hackett, 2002, “Criminal Harassment”, *Juristat*, Vol. 20, No. 11, p. 1)

Stalking and Aboriginal Women

Although there is little research on the subject, a U.S. study found that Aboriginal women reported experiences of being stalked more often than women from other ethno-racial backgrounds. (Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, 1998, “Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey”, National Institute of Justice Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Research in Brief, p. 15)

Stalking and Young Women

Rates of stalking are highest for young women, which is consistent with patterns of other kinds of violence against women; 58% of stalking survivors are under 34 years old. (Statistics Canada, 2004, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, p. 9, 15)

In a study of undergraduate women who were survivors of stalking, researchers found an elevated level of stress, depression, and other reactions that mirrored symptoms of post-traumatic stress. (D. Westrup *et al.*, 1999, “The Psychological Impact of Stalking on Female Undergraduates”, Journal of Forensic Science, Vol. 44, p. 554-557)

Stalking and Work

People experiencing stalking are usually followed, watched, or contacted at their place of work and homes. (Rebecca Kong, 1996 “Criminal Harassment”, Juristat, Vol. 16, p. 12)

In Australian research, 35% of stalking survivors reported being stalked by their coworkers, clients, or patients.

The same research found that 53% of stalking survivors reported decreasing or stopping attendance at work or school. Some may have stopped working for fear of their stalkers appearing at their workplaces. (M. Pathe and P.E. Mullen, 1997, “The Impact of Stalkers on Their Victims”, The British Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 170, p. 12-17.

A person being stalked by their former partner has a limited ability to get to work because the stalker’s behaviour can limit their movement. The stalking can extend to the workplace itself, making it into an unsafe location for the person being stalked. (Karen M. Abrams and Gail Robinson, 2002, “Brief Communication: Occupational Effects of Stalking”, The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 47, p. 468-472)

The same study referred to above described the mental health effects of stalking: forgetfulness, fatigue, lowered concentration, and disorganization. These can cause a person being stalked to lose employment and as a result, lose income, security, and status.

Stalking and Rural Women

Women living in rural areas are less able to hide from abusers because of the small size of their communities and a lack of privacy. As such, these women are particularly vulnerable to being stalked and harassed by abusers. (Yasmine Jiwani, 1998, Rural Women and Violence: A Study of Two Communities in British Columbia, <http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/articles/rural08.htm>)

Stalking and the Legal System

Just over one-half of stalking cases involving a partner resulted in police laying charges, a lower percentage than other cases of spousal violence. (Statistics Canada, 2003, "Family Violence", The Daily, 23 June, p. 10)

In Canada, 51% of criminal harassment charges that are stand-alone charges end up being stayed or withdrawn. (Karen Hackett, 2002, "Criminal Harassment", Juristat, Vol. 20, No. 11, p.1)

Convicted stalkers received a prison sentence of over 6 months in only 4% of criminal harassment cases. (Statistics Canada, 2004, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, p. 58)

Stalking Dynamics

A U.S. study of stalking survivors found that 21% of those interviewed felt they were stalked because of the stalker's desire to exert control over them. 20% felt the stalker wanted to keep them in a relationship, and 16% said the stalker wanted to scare them.

The same study found that on average, incidents of stalking last for 1.8 years. (Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, 1998, "Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey", National Institute of Justice Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Research in Brief, p.8)