

# Psychological Consequences of Being a Victim of Cyberstalking

**Shaneika Z. Smith, M.S. & Kristine M. Jacquin, Ph.D.**  
School of Psychology



## Introduction

- Cyberstalking is a modern-day issue that comes in many forms. It generally involves using the internet and other electronic methods to harass someone.
- Rensburg (2017) proposed a typology of cyberstalking which includes: vindictive, composed, intimate and collective cyberstalking.

## Clinical Issues

- Cyberstalking is unique in that it does not involve physical contact with victims.
- Because cyberstalking takes place online, with over 70% of cases taking place across state lines, cyberstalking also poses risk of anonymity and ease of access to the victim that traditional stalking does not have.
- Cyberstalking is a crime of power and control, similar to domestic violence (NIJ, 2007). Like any crime, cyberstalking can happen to anyone.
- Not all states have laws making cyberstalking a crime, causing victims to resort to civil court to seek justice.

## Statistics

- In 2005, as a part of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act, Congress included cyberstalking.
- United States Department of Justice statistics show 850,000 American adults will be a target of cyberstalking (Sweeney, 2014). Data show clear patterns of those most adversely affected by the crime.
- Caucasian people are the most likely ethnic group to be targeted for cyberstalking; they are 10 times more likely than other groups to be victimized.
- Age and gender are other defining factors of the victims or cyberstalking.
- A majority of victims are between 18 and 29 years old
- 1 in 6 females will be a victim of cyberstalking (NIJ, 2007).
- Due to the nature of cyberstalking, statistical data is difficult to obtain.

## Research

- A growing body of research examines technology-facilitated harms (including cyberstalking) perpetrated against children and adolescents, but there is little research on cyberstalking against adults (Henry & Powell, 2018).
- Few studies have provided reliable information on the prevalence, perpetration, and victimization surrounding cyberstalking.
- Rensburg (2017) found that young adults who have experienced a form of cyberstalking report a large range of psychological impact such as feelings of stress, hurt, paranoia, insomnia, betrayal, anger, fear, and in some cases even depression.



## Recommendations

- Research is needed in prevalence, perpetration, and victimization, and development of tailored interventions surrounding cyberstalking.
- Also due to the distance and anonymity of this crime research should extend to the consequences of baseless claims and mistaken identity and what it can do to a person accused of cyberstalking.

## Cyberbullying Stories

Jennifer Lawrence was a victim of cyberstalking. Her phone was hacked and nude photos of her were posted online. Lawrence was able to win in court, but she still felt violated. She said "it is a sexual violation. It's disgusting. The law needs to be changed, and we need to change" (Sweeney, 2014).

Amanda Todd was a victim which resulted in her ending her life after years of online "extortion and cyberbullying from a sexual predator as the cause of her depression" (Sweeney, 2014).