

Comparing the effects of stalking versus cyberstalking on victims

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The devastating effects of stalking and cyberstalking – harassing or threatening communication via the Internet – are explored in a new study in the journal *Justice Quarterly*.

Using data from the 2006 Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS), Matt R. Nobles from Sam Houston State University in Texas and his colleagues explore how several aspects of stalking and cyberstalking differ in order to determine the legal and conceptual relationship between the two crimes. They also investigate how victims of both respond to their situations.

Key among their findings is that victims of cyberstalking engage in more 'self-protective' behaviours – such as changing their normal routines or getting a new email address – than victims of stalking. They explain: "Compared to stalking, it is possible that the nature of cyberstalking elicits a very personal violation for its victims, which may elicit more diverse and more frequent protective actions."

"At first glance this may seem counterintuitive given that stalking often involves more immediate physical exposure to offenders and hence to potential danger (e.g. being followed). Considering the ubiquity of technology, however, as well as the amount of exposure people now have to its different forms, it is plausible that contact through this medium is just as personal as, or more personal than, face-to-face contact."

Nobles and his colleagues also explore how technology has changed what they call the 'risk/exposure' profiles for [victims](#), making stalking easier and self-protection harder. They also explain how the 'semi-public' nature of online stalking influences victim behaviour: "In a stalking case, the contact between perpetrator and victim may be largely restricted to one-on-one encounters (e.g. phone calls, following and spying), that are endured or dismissed by the victim, who may

second guess the instinct to take more serious protective action. In a cyberstalking case, especially one involving social media as an instrument of communication, the presence of inappropriate or embarrassing content cannot be as easily overlooked because it is instantly visible to others close to the victim, including peers and family."

They conclude: "The use of technology in the cyberstalking case, therefore, may be simultaneously more harmful to the victim's psychological well-being and reputation, thus more decisive in spurring quicker self-protective action."

With data suggesting that between 8 and 12% of women and 2 and 4% of men will experience stalking at some point in their lives and electronic communication becoming increasingly common, the seriousness of cyberstalking cannot be underestimated.

This article is essential reading for anyone with an interest in criminal justice, stalking theory, how technology can change lives – and in the case of cyberstalking at least, ruin them too.

More information: Matt R. Nobles, Bradford W. Reynolds, Kathleen A. Fox & Bonnie S. Fisher, "Protection Against Pursuit: A Conceptual and Empirical Comparison of Cyberstalking and Stalking Victimization Among a National Sample," *Justice Quarterly*, Volume 31, Issue 6, 2014, [DOI: 10.1080/07418825.2012.723030](https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2012.723030).

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