

## Applying Theory to Crime: **STALKING**

January is National Stalking Awareness Month, as designated by the U.S. Department of Justice. Although this suggests an unprecedented interest in stalking—including the first-ever national survey sponsored by the National Institute of Justice, a branch of the U.S. Department of Justice (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998)—the number of studies on stalking is still limited. Despite a recent surge in laws to combat stalking passed in virtually every state and the District of Columbia, very little is known about the most common stalkers, how much stalking occurs, and so forth.

To define it, stalking generally refers to threatening or harassing behavior an individual repeatedly engages in (e.g., making harassing phone calls, following a person, leaving numerous messages, continuously appearing at a person's home or place of work). Unfortunately, legal definitions vary from state to state. However, regardless of the definition, there is a strong link between stalking and other forms of violence in intimate relationships (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), with 81% of women who were stalked by a current or former partner also having been physically abused by that person.

Women are significantly more likely to be stalked, with recent estimates showing that females are twice as likely as males to be victimized in this way (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). A recent study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Baum, Catalano, & Rand, 2009)



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concluded that a pattern of decreasing risk for such stalking victimization is evident for persons in higher-income households. This study also showed that a large portion of stalking victims experienced some form of cyberstalking, such as e-mail or text messages, and almost half (46%) of all victims felt fear of not knowing what would happen next. Importantly, more than half of stalking victims lost more than a week of work due to this victimization.

These findings relate to the theories covered in this chapter in the sense that with the advancement of technology and media, there seems to be a certain cultural element that encourages stalking. After all, Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking sites enable the "following" of individuals, and some individuals, given their unstable state,

tend to have problems drawing appropriate lines regarding intrusion into others' lives. Much more study must be done to determine how to discourage and decrease the recent surge in stalking, because the current increase in such cyber-related networking will likely only increase stalking in the near future. For example, a story from 2009 showed how a Bronx man was sentenced to 40 years in prison for international stalking, harassment, and so forth (see the FBI report for this case here: <http://www.fbi.gov/newyork/press-releases/2009/nyfo091609.htm>).

### **THINK ABOUT IT:**

To what extent do you think social media and other modern technologies are increasing the risk for stalking? Do you know people who were stalked this way?

Sources: Baum, K., Catalano, S., & Rand, M. (2009). *Stalking victimization in the United States*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (1998). *Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.