

# New study examines victims and cyberstalking

February 12 2013

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(Medical Xpress)—Victims of cyberstalking take more self-protective measures, pay higher out-of-pocket costs to combat the problem and experience greater fear over time than traditional stalking victims, said Matt Nobles of Sam Houston State University.

Nobles, along with Bradford Reynolds of Weber State University, Kathleen Fox of Arizona State University and Bonnie Fisher of the University of Cincinnati, recently published "Protection Against Pursuit: A Conceptual and Empirical Comparison of Cyberstalking and Stalking Victimization Among a National Sample" in *Justice Quarterly*. The study compares the similarities and differences in experiences reported by victims of stalking and cyberstalking.

While a precise definition of cyberstalking is elusive, one common definition is repeated harassment or threats facilitated by technology, including [electronic communication](#) using the Internet, email and social media.

The study found that while victims of both stalking and cyberstalking use many similar self-protective behaviors, a greater proportion of cyberstalking victims reported that they had to take time off; change or quit a job or school; avoid relatives, friends or [holiday celebrations](#); and change their email address when compared to victims of traditional stalking.

The financial costs associated with victimization, which could include

legal fees, property damage, child care costs, moving expenses or a change in phone number, were also much higher for cyberstalking victims, with an average [dollar value](#) of more than \$1,200 spent compared to about \$500 for traditional stalking victims.

Finally, there were interesting differences in how stalking and cyberstalking victims responded to their experiences. Fear at the onset of victimization was related to adopting self-protective behaviors for both groups, but fear over time was associated with adopting more self-protective behaviors for cyberstalking victims only. This suggests that the stalking episode may provoke an immediate reaction for many victims, while the cyberstalking condition tends to build and becomes more severe over time.

The research was based on the 2006 Supplemental Victimization Survey from the National Criminal Crime Victimization Survey, which explored stalking as part of a national sample conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau to identify the extent and characteristics of crime in a given year. The 2006 Supplement was the most current data available for analysis.

In addition to the differential impact on victims, the study also revealed differences between age and gender of cyberstalking versus stalking victims. In cases of stalking, approximately 70 percent of the victims were women, while female victims only represented 58 percent in cyberstalking cases. In addition, the average age for stalking victims in the sample was 40.8 years old, while cyberstalking [victims](#) averaged 38.4 years old.

As an emergent crime type, the cyberstalking study can be used by professionals and state legislatures to better understand the causes and consequences of cyberstalking and how the crime can be addressed in the criminal justice system.

Provided by Sam Houston State University

Citation: New study examines victims and cyberstalking (2013, February 12) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-02-victims-cyberstalking.html>

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