

Crime Victims' Institute tracks the state of stalking in Texas

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According to a 2010 survey by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an estimated 1.4 million women in Texas experience stalking during their lifetimes. Despite recent laws adopted in the state to protect stalking victims, little information is available about the crime or policies and procedures to aid the criminal justice system, according to a report from the Crime Victims' Institute (CVI).

According to CDC estimates, 15.6 percent of the female population in Texas will experience stalking, slightly less than the 16.2 percent national average of female victims. Little information is available in Texas for male victims of stalking, although nationally, 5.2 percent of men experience the crime. More data is needed to ensure that Texas laws and policies are addressing the issue, CVI said.

"Stalking in Texas – 2014" is the first in a series of reports that will be issued by CVI on this crime. The next study will examine the perceptions of campus police on stalking cases, which are most prominent among college-aged women and are required to be reported under the new Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act of 2013 (Campus SaVE).

Stalking is generally defined as a course of conduct directed at a specific person that causes fear. It may include efforts to harass, annoy, alarm, abuse, torment or embarrass an individual by using obscene communication, threatening bodily harm, falsely reporting another person's death or injury, or repeatedly calling by phone or sending

electronic messages. These communications can be directed at the victims, their families or households, or partners.

Texas has laws against stalking, which makes it a second or third degree felony depending on the number of offenses. In 2011, the state passed laws allowing victims to file protective orders against perpetrators of the crime and, in 2012, Texas was one of 12 states to allow stalking charges to be processed through civil courts to compel financial compensation for victims.

According to research based on a national survey, nearly half of all stalking victims experience at least one unwanted contact per week, with nearly one-quarter reporting harassment on a daily basis. The majority of victims express that the stalking behaviors have occurred for more than six months, with more than one in ten victims reporting occurrences for more than five years. More than half of stalking victims express fear for themselves, their children or other family members, and victims frequently miss work for fear of being stalked.

Research also indicates that stalking victims experience various economic, social, physical and mental difficulties as a result of this crime, including increased anxiety, flashbacks and nightmares, suicidal ruminations, and [post-traumatic stress disorder](#).

More than one out of every four [victims](#) report being stalked via electronic devices or through the Internet, including cordless and cell phones, email, GPS systems, online databases, and cameras. The most common forms of cyberstalking were email, video and digital cameras, listening devices/bugs, and instant messenger.

Stalking presents unique challenges in the [criminal justice](#) system because there generally isn't much evidence to investigate, law enforcement must rely heavily on the victim to investigate and collect

evidence and, when stalking occurs after a romantic relationship, it often become a battle of "he said" vs. "she said." As a result, a 2003 study found that most stalking cases are dismissed by authorities.

To address these issues, the Crime Victims' Institute recommends that Texas needs to increase data collection and reporting on stalking and also to keep track of stalking protective orders.

More information: The full report is available at www.crimevictimsinstitute.org/...e=cat&input=Stalking%20Series

Provided by Sam Houston State University

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