



Facts Regarding Cyberstalking & the Exploitation of Children on the Internet

Violence in the workplace accounted for nearly twenty percent of all violent crime in the early to late 1990's¹. Fifteen percent of workplace homicides are a direct result of stalking². Stalking is distressing, terrifying and impacts every aspect of a victim's life. Victims feel as though they are "mentally raped". They are afraid to go to public places. They become afraid to go to work. Their entire lives are disrupted. Victims of stalking ultimately become so terrified that they may refuse to leave their homes and won't even open their blinds. They are afraid to leave their car where it can't be seen. This paralyzing fear extends to other members of the family. The concept of normal daily living ceases to exist for these victims, to the point where sleeping and eating become challenging tasks.

Stalking is the most damaging form of victimization that a person, and their family, can endure. No other crime known to man is repeated over a prolonged period of time causing the devastating and detrimental consequences to its victim as stalking.

Stalking usually begins with an attempt by one individual to become romantically involved with another. Of the 600 or so cases of stalking reported each day to Cyberangels, about one-fourth involve workplace issues. When the stalker is rebuffed, the rejection causes intense anger. The actions of the stalker become terrorizing. A victim's tires may be slashed, a pet might be injured or killed and the home in which the victim lives is always being watched. Often times a victim's friends and family are watched and investigated. Unwanted communications won't cease. The stalker is always lurking, following the victim to his or her place of employment, day care, grocery store, friend's or family member's house. The behavior of the stalker becomes criminal. Often times, the anger escalates to a point where he/she physically assaults the victim. The victim's injuries may be so extensive that death is the result.

CYBERSTALKING

Cyberstalking is the use of electronic communications to harass and threaten an individual. The Internet, because of the anonymity it affords, is an attractive means for performing fraudulent scams, child exploitation and cyberstalking. Online harassment and threats may be a prelude to more serious behaviors, which can ultimately lead to physical violence. The cyberstalker can leave threatening messages without being physically present or engage others to harass victim. The following are examples of actual cyberstalking incidents:

Example 1. An honors graduate from the University of San Diego terrorized five female university students over the Internet for more than a year. The victims received hundreds of violent and threatening e-mails, sometimes receiving four or five messages a day. The graduate student, who has entered a guilty plea and faces

¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2001. Violence in the Workplace, 1993-1999. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.)

² Smock & Kuennen 2002

up to six years in prison, told police he committed the crimes because he thought the women were laughing at him and causing others to ridicule him. In fact, the victims had never met him.³

Cyberstalking is not just about sexual misfits:

Example 2. An employee who felt he had been passed over for a promotion to CEO launched into a calculated fury of identity theft-based harassment. Slowly but surely, the middle-aged middle manager started generating interoffice e-mails among co-workers, noting every time the CEO was late for a meeting or left work early. He'd drop notes making it clear that the CEO was being watched, commenting on the particular tie he had on that day or something that was said in a meeting. Eventually, the notes escalated and the stalker threatened to manufacture a fictitious pedophilia addiction in the CEO and expose it before the company.⁴

A comparison between online and offline stalking reveals both similarities and differences. In many cases, the stalker had a romantic interest, known or unknown, to the victim. Stranger stalking occurs in both the real and cyber worlds. Most of the victims are women and most of the stalkers are men. In both worlds, the stalker is motivated by a desire to control. Unlike the offline world, electronic communications makes it very easy to stalk and use 3rd parties to threaten the victim. Offline stalkers tend to be geographically close; whereas, cyberstalkers could be in another hemisphere or in the next office cubicle. Thus the perpetrator could be known to the victim but the victim doesn't even know who the stalker is. This online element adds another dimension of fear to the already terrified individual.

A report prepared in 1999 by the Department of Justice on offline stalking revealed that 1 in 12 women were/would be victims of stalking within their lifetimes. That is approximately 8.2 million people. Men on the other hand, have or will experience stalking in smaller numbers; 1 out of every 45 men. In the preceding 12 months of the study, 1% of the women studied had been stalked, while .4% of the men had been stalked. At present there hasn't been a thorough study prepared to evaluate the numbers of online stalking. Most of the data collected is anecdotal, coming from law enforcement and victim's rights agencies. In Los Angeles, 20% of the 600 stalking cases involved electronic communications. In New York, 40% of its stalking cases involved electronic communications. Many states throughout the country don't have stalking task forces, so it is difficult to track. But, in those states that do have such task forces, electronic communications clearly have had an impact on the caseload. The numbers of cyberstalking cases is suggested to be rather large considering that 80 million adults are online. Even if only a very small fraction of the cases have a cyber element, it is still a significant number of victims. The scope of the problem can be better appreciated by reading the following study undertaken by researchers at the University of Cincinnati:

..., as part of a large study on sexual victimization of college women, researchers at the University of Cincinnati conducted a national telephone survey of 4,446 randomly selected women

³ Reno, Attorney General Janet. Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry. A Report from the Attorney General to the Vice President. August 1999. page 4.

⁴ MSNBC Published on ZDNet News. Cyberstalking Rears its Head in the Workplace. April 24, 2001

attending two- and four-year institutions of higher education. The survey was conducted during the 1996-97 academic year. In this survey, a stalking incident was defined as a case in which a respondent answered positively when asked if someone had "repeatedly followed you, watched you, phoned, written, e-mailed, or communicated with you in other ways that seemed obsessive and made you afraid or concerned for your safety." The study found that 581 women (13.1 percent) were stalked and reported a total of 696 stalking incidents; the latter figure exceeds the number of victims because 15 percent of the women experienced more than one case of stalking during the survey period. Of these 696 stalking incidents, 166 (24.7 percent) involved e-mail. Thus, 25 percent of stalking incidents among college women could be classified as involving cyberstalking.⁵

Empirical data clearly indicates that cyberstalking is occurring at epidemic proportions. To date, we lack definitive and exacting measures that assist us in determining the pervasiveness of this crime. We do, however, have substantial data from a variety of sources that help us to determine the pervasiveness of these crimes. The magnitude of Offline stalking has been well documented in a recent study completed by the National Violence Against Women.⁶

- 1) It can be calculated that in a single year 984,000 and 36,000 men will be victims of stalking.
 - a) 1 in 12 women and 1 in 45 men are stalked throughout their lifetime.
 - b) Total population of women and men (1988) was 98,400,000 and 90,000,000 respectively
- 2) Potential exists for vast numbers of people, using the Internet to be stalked.
 - a) Stalking for many reasons – lack of training by law enforcement and victim related reasons – is under reported.
 - b) In police departments that have an anti-stalking unit, Internet related communications were involved 20% of the time.
 - c) In 1999, 80 million people were online in the United States.⁷
- 3) College students may be victims of stalking at alarming rates, yet it is never reported.
 - a) The overall percentage was significantly higher than the national average (13.1% compared to the National average of 1%). Of these, 25% involved electronic communications.⁸

⁵ Reno, Attorney General Janet. Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry. A Report from the Attorney General to the Vice President. August 1999. page 6.

⁶ Tjaden, Patricia and Nancy Thoennes. Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. US Department of Justice. April 1988. page 3.

⁷ Reno, Attorney General Janet. Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry. A Report from the Attorney General to the Vice President. August 1999. page 6.

⁸ Reno, Attorney General Janet. Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry. A Report from the Attorney General to the Vice President. August 1999. page 6.

- 4) The stalker population is quite large.
 - a) The stalker population in the United States is estimated to be 200,000.⁹
- 5) Evidence suggests that the Internet, because it protects the anonymity of the stalker, entices would-be stalkers to become energized.
- 6) Online stalkers can utilize third parties to harass and terrorize their victims.

The number of stalking incidents is epidemic with hundreds of thousands of adults becoming stalking victims each year. Cyberstalking is a relatively new challenge for law enforcement. But because we know that Cyberstalking has led to offline incidents of violent crimes, it needs to be taken seriously and should not be ignored. The challenges presented to law enforcement are large in scope. Often times, law enforcement lacks the necessary training to apprehend and prosecute cyberstalkers. Geographical jurisdictional issues make it difficult for law enforcement to investigate.

Lack of knowledge by law enforcement has complicated the issue. Because many police departments don't have procedures in place to handle cyberstalking, victims have often been neglected. In some cases, victims were advised to come back if they became threatened offline. In other cases, victims were told to turn off their computers as if that would make the problem magically disappear. While some law enforcement agencies are responding aggressively, others are not fully aware of the problem and lack the expertise and resources to pursue cyberstalking cases.¹⁰

Recommendations in the report titled, Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry, were made suggesting that law enforcement needs to be educated on the serious nature of offline and online stalking. Computer crime units should be established throughout the country. Another recommendation was that law enforcement agencies should share information with other law enforcement agencies, making it easier to catch criminals that stretch across geographic boundaries. In the same publication, The US Attorney General made several recommendations to the Internet and electronic communications industry. It was suggested that contact information of the various ISPs be updated and given to the law enforcement community to make it easier to catch stalkers. Also, ISPs should develop tools that empower individuals to protect themselves. Materials and tools for law enforcement use should be developed. ISPs should establish and enforce policies that prohibit cyberstalking.

Recommendations were also made on how to better assist the victim. Victim service advocates should be trained on Internet technology. They should become familiar and trained on tactics used by cyberstalkers. Adequate response to victims should include discussions with appropriate medical professionals, school support teams, employers, mental health providers and day care providers. The agencies

⁹ Aftab, Parry. "An Intro to Cyberstalking". Cyberangels.org. <http://www.cyberangels.org> page 2.

¹⁰ Reno, Attorney General Janet. Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry. A Report from the Attorney General to the Vice President. August 1999. page 7.

that deal with victims could be the catalyst for awareness to "...form partnerships among law enforcement, prosecution, the judiciary, the medical community and other community allies to address the specific safety needs of cyberstalking victims and hold offenders accountable for their actions."¹¹

Cyberstalking exacerbates the already existing and challenging problem associated with stalking. Stalkers are motivated by their desire to exert control over their victims. Cyberstalking, at first glance appears to be more "benign" because there is no physical contact. Quite to the contrary; the fact that the victim doesn't know where the individual is, what he looks like, where he lives, is extremely distressing. "The ease of use and non-confrontational, impersonal, and sometimes anonymous nature of Internet communications may remove disincentives to cyberstalking. Put another way, whereas a potential stalker may be unwilling or unable to confront a victim in person or on the telephone, he or she may have little hesitation sending harassing or threatening electronic communications to a victim."¹²

CHILD PREDATION

Like cyberstalking adults, the anonymity of the Internet is a fertile ground for child predators. Before the Internet, pedophiles were lonely and hunted individuals. "Child pornography was pretty much eradicated in the 1980s. With the advent of the Internet it exploded."¹³ Networks of child abusers are now proliferating around the world. Because of the ease of communication, sharing of information and anonymity that the Internet provides global rings of child abusers are sprouting up everywhere. The numbers of exploited children are increasing at exponential rates. For example, in the year 2001, 1,700 Italians were arrested which led to subsequent arrests of individuals in eight other countries. In another case, a website of child pornography with a Tajikistan address was being hosted on a computer physically located in Massachusetts. The Wonderland case involved thirteen countries, including the United States. Seized computer files had over 750,000 images of child pornography. The 1,263 victims were all pre-pubescent. In another case, called the Apollo Ring, the Dutch police found 200 victims. Some of the children were as young as 3 months old and were subjected to sexually explicit acts¹⁴.

The stories are horrific. The salacious need for this type of material has grown because the Internet creates such an easy method for transmitting and receiving these images from any personal or company provided computer. The suppliers are providing a commodity. This commodity is exploited children. These merchants are always in need of fresh new debasing material to sell. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to lure an innocent child. ISPs offer community forums for children to gather and post information. Also online, children can find clubs, games, activities chat rooms and web spaces that appeal to every interest of a child. Pedophiles lurk in places where children gravitate. Anonymity enables predators to change personas to be whoever or whatever will attract an innocent child.

¹¹ Reno, Attorney General Janet. Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry. A Report from the Attorney General to the Vice President. August 1999. page18.

¹² Reno, Attorney General Janet. Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry. A Report from the Attorney General to the Vice President. August 1999. page 3.

¹³ Nordland, Rod and Bartholet, Jeffrey. "The Web's Dark Secret", Newsweek March 19,2001. page46.

¹⁴

In June 2000, a very detailed and comprehensive report was completed on the exploitation of youth on the Internet titled, "Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation's Youth." This study sampled 1,501 youth, ages 10 and 17. The results of the study are horrific, revealing the magnitude of ongoing child exploitation. The study interviewed youth that were "regular" online users. The study focused on three specific areas of victimizations:

1. Unwanted Exposure
2. Harassment
3. Sexual Solicitations

Unwanted Exposure is defined as coming into contact with sexual images that appeared when youth weren't seeking it. The results indicate that 25% of the youth experienced such an event. The majority of cases occurred when they were searching an innocuous word and the result was a pornographic website. Of the 25% that experienced such an occurrence, 6% found the material to be very disturbing.

Harassment online was defined as threatening or abusive behavior directed toward a youth. The threats were expressed in terms of harming or assaulting the child directly or one of his/her family members or friends. Anonymity creates a veil of security. People find it very easy to say things online that they wouldn't normally say face to face. In this group, 6% of the children experienced harassment. The online activities where these exchanges occurred were in chat rooms, Instant Messenger and e-mails. The statistics are very telling. In this form of attack, 24% of the children lived near each other and 28% knew each other. Two-thirds of the perpetrators were juveniles. This form of attack is found to be extremely distressing to children. Unlike a traditional playground that is constantly monitored, the virtual playground doesn't have any monitors. Children, because they often know the perpetrator, take this distressing fear into school with them. At times these online altercations blend into the offline world and an altercation erupts on school property.

Sexual solicitations and approaches were defined as unwanted online enticements to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk. The questions were also designed to determine if the solicitations were made by an adult. The solicitations were then categorized by general or aggressive. Aggressive solicitations were characterized by the relationship transitioning from an online relationship to an offline relationship - telephone calls, packages in the mail, or requests for a physical meeting. The results of the study were astounding. Nineteen percent of all the children received a general solicitation. Three percent of the children received an aggressive solicitation of which 10% had been asked to physically meet. Most of these situations developed from chat room exchanges. Children experience both great amounts of fear and distress from these contacts. As one would expect, the aggressive contacts created more anxiety for the children.

Upon extrapolating the data, it becomes evidently clear that the victimization of children online is going to lead to many, many more tragedies. In September of 1997, Sam Manzie murdered Eddie Werner. Sam Manzie had been sexually assaulted by someone he met in the chat room. This occurred at a time when most people didn't have an idea about the potential hazards of the Internet. Sam Manzie's parents had pleaded with the judge to help them with their son, prior to the murder of Eddie. They knew something was wrong but didn't know what it was or how to find out. In a similar case, a 13 year old from Pennsylvania was abducted by

someone she met online. Tragedy was averted by someone who identified her from a webcam picture, in which she was revealed to be strapped to a bed. Her life was saved, but she is permanently damaged and emotionally scarred; her innocence lost forever. In June of 2000, there were 23.81 million children using the Internet that were regular online users.

- 6 million children experienced unwanted exposure
- 1.5 million were very distressed by what they saw
- Nearly 1.5 million children were harassed
 - 500,000 were very distressed
- Nearly 5 million children were sexually solicited
- 910,000 were aggressively solicited (migrated into the offline world)

This comprehensive study identified various items that help us to better understand what is occurring within the interactive modes of the Internet. Popular rhetoric would have one believe that the negative side of the Internet focuses on the proliferation of sexual images. Though a component of that does exist, what has been clearly pointed out is that the Internet is being used to express hostility and anger.