

## Largest-ever National Study on Stalking a Wake-up Call, Says National Victim Advocacy Group

A major national study on stalking, released on January 13, 2009, by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), serves as a wake-up call about a serious and often misunderstood crime, says the National Center for Victims of Crime, the nation's leading resource and advocacy organization for crime victims and founder of the Stalking Resource Center. *Stalking Victimization in the United States*, the largest collection of data on stalking prevalence and behavior to date, found that 3.4 million persons identified themselves as victims of stalking in a 12-month period. This figure, which represents an increase of 2 million victims per year over the findings of a key 1998 study,<sup>1</sup> suggests the urgent need for a more comprehensive response to the crime.

“This groundbreaking report shows the vast scope of stalking and the devastating impact of the crime,” said Mary Lou Leary, executive director of the National Center for Victims of Crime. “It also sheds light on some previously unexplored aspects of stalking, such as the use of technology to stalk.” More than one in four victims reported that stalkers had used technology, such as e-mail or instant messaging, to follow and harass them, and one in 13 said stalkers had used electronic devices to intrude on their lives. One in seven victims reported having moved to protect themselves. About 130,000 victims reported having been fired or asked to leave their job because of the stalking, and about 1 in 8 lost time from work because they feared for their safety or were taking step (such as seeking a protection order) to protect themselves.

The Stalking Resource Center (SRC) has been working since 2000 to solve the kinds of problems raised by this report. The SRC's mission is to raise national awareness about stalking and to foster multidisciplinary responses to the crime in local communities throughout the nation. “This extensive survey confirms what we have always known about stalking,” said SRC Director Michelle Garcia. “That an alarming number of Americans are being victimized and we must do more to keep victims safe and hold offenders accountable.”

To tackle these problems, the National Center recommends a three-pronged approach: improved and greater responses to victims, stronger legislation, and greater public awareness about the crime:”

- **Improved and greater responses to victims:** Law enforcement, prosecutors, community corrections officers, victim service providers and other community stakeholders can work to create stronger, multidisciplinary, community responses to victims that reflect the particular difficulties with policing and prosecuting stalking cases and keeping victims safe. Coordinated community responses should be developed to share information, to document stalking incidents, assess risk, build cases, and prevent harm to victims. Communities can expand victim services (e.g., crisis intervention, safety planning, counseling, legal advocacy) to help victims stay safe and cope with stalking-related trauma. Professionals in all these fields can benefit from training on the ever-changing nature of stalking, new research, and new laws to combat the crime.
- **Stronger legislation:** Stalkers often devastate victims' lives and “get away” with their crimes because arrest or prosecution is unlikely. Rapidly evolving technology used by stalkers often outpaces state laws, and many state laws fail to address the many forms of stalking. The standard of proof required by many state statutes is so high that securing convictions is almost impossible. The National Center recommends that

states classify stalking as a felony, conveying that stalking is dangerous and holding offenders accountable for their crimes. Currently, less than a third of states classify a first stalking offense as a felony.

- **Greater public awareness:** Although outreach and training by the Stalking Resource Center has reached millions of Americans with information and resources, much work remains. Even victims may not recognize that stalking is a crime and that resources are in place to help them. The more the public knows about stalking, the better the chances to stop stalking and hold offenders accountable.

*“Stalking Victimization in the United States*, a major advance in the battle against stalking, is a wake-up call and a summons to action,” said Mary Lou Leary. “By applying the lessons of this landmark study, states and localities can better protect victims, deter stalkers, and improve the safety of our communities.”

For more information about stalking, visit [www.ncvc.org/src](http://www.ncvc.org/src) and <http://www.stalkingawarenessmonth.org> or call (202) 467-8700.

*The National Center for Victims of Crime is dedicated to forging a national commitment to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. The National Center’s toll-free Helpline, 1-800-FYI-CALL, offers supportive counseling, practical information about crime and victimization, and referrals to local community resources, as well as skilled advocacy in the criminal justice and social service systems.*

<sup>1</sup> P. Tjaden and N. Thoennes, *Stalking in America* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1998).

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