

# Scripps Howard News Service

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## About 1 in 20 Americans Stalked, Study Says

By Lee Bowman

Nearly 5 percent of adults in a national survey reported having been stalked at some point, translating to an at-risk pool of more than 7 million women and 2 million men in the United States.

Most stalkers aren't strangers, according to the study's lead researcher, Kathleen Basile, a behavioral scientist who works in violence prevention at the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, part of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Women, younger adults and those who are single, separated or divorced are most at risk. Younger adults being more likely victims "goes along with what we know about violence in general," Basile said.

The results, being published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine in August, are based on phone interviews done with nearly 10,000 adults between 2001 and 2003, with responses about equally divided between women and men.

Stalking was defined as "ever being followed, spied on or communicated with, without consent, at a level perceived to be somewhat more dangerous or life-threatening (not counting commercial exchanges with bill collectors or telemarketers) for more than one month."

According to the researchers, "Stalking continues to be a public health problem at a magnitude comparable to that measured in the National Violence Against Women Study (done for the Justice Department in 1995-96)."

That study concluded that about 8 percent of women and 2 percent of men had been stalked.

Both surveys indicated that women were most likely to be stalked by someone with whom they've had a relationship, while men were more likely to be stalked by acquaintances or strangers.

"Women should be aware of the potential for stalking by an intimate partner, particularly when that intimate partner is physically or sexually violent," Basile said.

The new survey found that blacks have significantly lower odds of being stalked than whites, but Basile said the reasons for this aren't clear and that there may be differences in how people report stalking.

The earlier study found that about two-thirds of all stalking episodes end within a year, but that those involving intimate partners tended to go on longer.

Mindy Mechanic, an associate professor of psychology at California State University-Fullerton who researches intimate-partner violence, agreed that the most dangerous stalker is someone who is – or has been – in a relationship with the victim. “In the majority of homicides involving intimate partners, stalking was another tactic, another tool in the abusive armamentarium of the stalker,” she said.

However, she noted, “most stalking does not end in homicide or even violence. The perpetrator is arrested, hospitalized, moves away, gets tired or finds another victim.”

The Justice Department survey indicated that about half of victims felt the intrusions had stopped either because they had moved or because the stalker turned to a new relationship.

The duration of stalking seems to mostly depend on the stalker's motivation, according to Mechanic. “A delusional individual, like a celebrity stalker, is different from a socially unskilled, awkward ... individual who thinks that a neighbor who says ‘Hi’ in the hallways is romantically interested in them.”

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