

END VIOLENCE TOGETHER

For The Dignity Of Every Woman

FACT SHEET

CRIMINAL HARASSMENT (STALKING)

Stalking is not romantic. It is not a sign of love. These actions can be threatening and can constitute a serious crime: following someone, leaving notes or showing up at their home or work uninvited.

DEFINITION

Criminal harassment (the legal term for stalking) is obsessive behavior directed towards another person.¹ The behaviour might be directed at a person or at that person's family, friends or pets. It includes²:

- Threats
- Following, watching or tracking
- Damage to property
- Repeated phone calls, emails or other contact
- Unwanted gifts

Criminal harassment threatens the victim's physical and emotional safety and forces them to limit or change their life to avoid the harassment.

Sexual harassment is a type of criminal harassment. It includes any unwanted or unwelcome behaviour, actions, words, comments or gestures that cause embarrassment and that are sexual in nature, offensive or humiliating, relating to a person's sex, sexuality or body parts, or repeated even after the person has been told to stop.³

Most victims of criminal harassment are women and most offenders are men. In most cases, the offender is someone that the woman knows, often an ex-spouse or ex-boyfriend.⁴

Criminal harassment was added to the Criminal Code of Canada in 1993. The crime of criminal harassment is not gender-specific, but the legislation was primarily introduced in response to violence against women, particularly spousal assaults against women.⁵

Place Your Agency Information Here

STATISTICS

- In 2004, three-quarters of incidents of criminal harassment reported to the police were directed at women. 50% of the women were stalked by a person with whom they had an intimate relationship.⁶
- 9 out of 10 stalkers are men.⁷
- Stalking has been identified as one of the primary risk factors for attempted and actual murders of women.⁸
- 66% of all criminal harassment incidents occur at the victim's home.⁹
- About 85% of high school girls report that they have been sexually harassed, in most cases by male students and in some cases by teachers or school employees. About 50-75% of boys reported being sexually harassed, including being called "gay" in a derogatory way.¹⁰
- 58% of stalking survivors are under the age of 34. This is consistent with patterns of other kinds of violence against women.¹¹

THE IMPACT OF CRIMINAL HARASSMENT

Psychological and Physical Impact

- Some common effects of the trauma for survivors include¹²:
 - Denial or embarrassment
 - Anxiety and fear
 - A sense of betrayal
 - Feeling helpless and a lack of control over their lives
- In an American study, as a result of stalking:¹³
 - 56% of women stalked took some type of self-protective measure
 - 26% of stalking victims lost time from work because of it, and 7% never returned to work
 - 30% of female victims and 20% of male victims sought psychological counselling.
- The incidence of anxiety, insomnia, social difficulties, and severe depression is much higher among stalking victims than the general population, especially if the stalking involves being followed or the destruction of one's property.¹⁴
- The physical impact resulting from the stress of harassment often include insomnia, headache, muscle pain, stomach ailments, skin problems, changes in body weight, drug/alcohol dependency and depression.¹⁵

Impact on Employment

- Being stalked affects the ability of people to work due to stalkers behaviours to restrict the movements of their victims. Often stalking can extend to the workplace itself, making it unsafe for women to work. The mental health effects of stalking, including forgetfulness, fatigue, lowered concentration, and disorganization can cause the victims to lose their jobs.¹⁶
- In one study of women who experienced harassment, more than 25% were fired or laid off and 25% resigned.¹⁷

Impact of Harassment on High School Students

- While both girls and boys are subjected to harassment and its aftermath, girls clearly suffer more serious educational and emotional consequences.¹⁸
- High school students who had been harassed reported a range of behaviours including not wanting to go to school, finding it hard to pay attention, not wanting to speak in class, had lower grades, and considered changing schools.¹⁹

CRIMINAL HARASSMENT IN SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES

We have included information here about some groups of women who face additional challenges when they are harassed and when they seek help.

Aboriginal Women

Aboriginal women often face racism when they try to get help after being assaulted. Aboriginal women may be living in urban cities or be isolated in small rural communities, where there are few services and where confidentiality is compromised. Aboriginal women may be reluctant to report violence by Aboriginal men, knowing that Aboriginal men are more likely to be arrested and jailed than non-Aboriginals.

The Ontario Native Women's Association and the 1991 Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba concluded that these findings were especially alarming given that the violence experienced by Aboriginal women is believed to exceed that of any other group of women in Canada:

- For Aboriginal women, violence frequently begins in childhood and continues throughout adolescence into adulthood.²⁰
- Violence in Aboriginal women's lives is pervasive; results of a study conducted by the Ontario Native Women's Association in 1989 revealed that 80% of Aboriginal women experience violence in relationships.²¹
- Compounded by the violence of systemic and institutionalized racism, as well as the effects of historical violence such as residential schooling, the Indian Act and other legacies of colonization, violence in many Aboriginal women's lives is a daily occurrence.²²
- The 1991 Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba also identified the intersection of racism and violence for aboriginal women: "Aboriginal women and their children suffer tremendously as victims in contemporary society. They are victims of racism, of sexism and of unconscionable levels of domestic and sexual violence. The justice system has done little to protect them from any of these assaults."

Immigrant & Refugee Women

Immigrant and refugee women, and women without official immigration status, may have a number of difficulties in accessing support when they have been victimized. Service providers may blame a woman's culture or race for the violence, stereotyping certain communities as more violent than other Canadians (which is not accurate). There may not be services available in a woman's first language, and she may not speak English well enough to use mainstream

services. She may be isolated within a small community, or afraid to bring in outside authority figures such as police.

Women With Disabilities

Depending on her disability, a woman may be more vulnerable to harassment. If the offender is her caregiver, she may be dependant on him for basic needs such as food, medication or communication. She may not be able to tell anyone about the abuse she is experiencing.

Women in Same-Sex Relationships

Very few studies have been done to determine the rates of violence in same sex relationships, and those that have been done are often small and present conflicting numbers. Some suggest the rates of violence are similar to those in heterosexual relationships; others say that rates are higher or lower. A woman in a same-sex relationship may experience homophobia when she reports violence. She may not be taken seriously once service providers find out that the abuser is a woman. She may be part of a small lesbian community where confidentiality is difficult to maintain, and where the abuser is powerful and well respected. She may not want to expose her abusive partner to police or others' bias.

Sex Workers

Sex workers, particularly those who work on the street, face high levels of violence in their work, including criminal harassment. Many come from groups that are particularly discriminated against: women and girls, Aboriginal people, immigrants and transgendered people. In BC, many sex workers have gone missing or have been murdered, particularly from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and from Highway 16 between Prince Rupert and Prince George (the "Highway of Tears"). Many women and children are trafficked into Canada from other countries to work in the sex trade. Because of their lack of immigration status, they are extremely vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

RESOURCES

There are approximately 400 programs to assist with violence against women and children in BC. These include:

- Community-Based Victim Assistance Programs
- Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs
- Outreach Programs
- Transition Houses
- Children Who Witness Abuse Programs
- Second Stage Houses
- Safe Homes

To find a program in your community you can call:

VictimLINK (Victim Information and Referrals) is a Multi-lingual line.

- Call toll-free in BC at 1-800-563-0808, 24 hours every day

- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call Information Service Vancouver's TTY Service at (604) 875-0885. If calling from outside the Lower Mainland, call collect

CONTACT US

- If you want more information
- If you need help
- If you want to volunteer or make a donation

PLACE YOUR PROGRAM NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION HERE:

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- 5 Ibid
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