Clients Who Stalk Psychologists: Will You Be Next?

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Think About It...

➢ If you imagine a thing can happen, you will overestimate it.
➢ If you can’t imagine a thing happening, you will underestimate it.
➢ Unless the odds are zero, it will happen.


Stalking Prevalence Rates

• Costs $520.9 Million Annually
• 200,000 in the U.S. are stalking someone right now
• 7.5 Million are stalked each year in the U.S.
• 80% know the stalker
• Lifetime prevalence rates are 6% for men, 15% for women

“A Stalker’s Imagination Begins Where Ours Ends”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDkA26KDgNw#action=share

What Is Stalking?

- Behaviors That Are Unwanted
- Willful, Malicious, Intrusive
- Threaten The Safety of The Victim
- Doesn’t “Just Happen” • Develops In Stages And Changes Over Time
- Generally < 2 Weeks, But Overall Average is 2 Years

Behavioral Intrusions

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Escalation
“A Prison Without Bars”

1. Mental — PTSD-like symptoms, Resentment, Helplessness
2. Personal — 3rd Parties, Social Isolation, Impacts Relationships
3. Workplace — Peer Isolation, Absenteeism, Performance
4. Financial — Lost Wages, Increased Security, Legal Fees
5. Property — Damage, Tampering, Moving

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Characteristics of Stalkers

- Mostly Male To Female
- Older Than Other Criminals
- Prior Criminal and Psychiatric Histories
- Unsuccessful Employment, Relationships
- Inadequate Social Skills
- Multiple Methods of Pursuit, Locations, 2/3 At Least Weekly

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Common Stalking Myths
"I Don’t Know Anyone Who’s Been Stalked, So It Can’t Be That Common"

“It Only Happens In High Profile Cases”

“It’s A Domestic Issue”

“‘I’ll Know It When I See It’”

“We Screen Potential Clients So Things Like This Don’t Happen”

“Is It Stalking, Or Just Annoying?”
1. Cause Emotional Distress

Pennsylvania Law

1. Course Of Conduct Or Acts Against Another Person
2. Demonstrate Intent to Cause Fear Or Harm
3. Cause Emotional Distress

Clients Who Stalk Psychologists

- No “Profile” Of At-Risk Psychologist
- Direct Care Carries Highest Risk
- 6-11% Psychologists Will Be Victimized During Their Career
  - 1 in 3 Will Fear For Their Lives
  - 1 in 5 Will Be Attacked By Clients
  - 1 in 4 Will Require Police Intervention
- About 3% Carry A Weapon For Protection

(Road, Frank, J. Miller, 2002. Harvard law School, MRC, 2004; Miller, Frank, 2002, Psychiatric Times, 2004; Road & Miller, 2001)
What Is Inside The Mind of A Stalker?

Mental Health Issues In Stalking

50% Have A Mental Health Diagnosis

Thought Disorders, Substance Abuse, Mood

Personality Disorders

Most Are Not Psychotic At The Time of Stalking
Why Are Psychologists At Risk?

1. Disordered Attachments
2. Psychological Issues
3. Dysfunctional Attempts To Connect With Others
4. Misconstrue Therapeutic Relationship

Stalkers...

1. Actually Had A Relationship With Victim
2. Were Only Acquaintances
3. Were Strangers

Stalker Typology

- Rejected
- Predatory
- Incompetent
- Resentful
- Intimacy Seeking
Rejected

- Ex-intimates seeking reconciliation, vengeance, or both
- Cease with threats of prosecution
- Most likely to be violent

Predatory

- Planning a sexual assault
- Gathers information, fantasizes about attack
- Fueled by power over victim
- Covert, secretive to induce fear

Incompetent

- Lack social skills and are awkward
- "Just want a date"
- Ceases if not reciprocated
- Prone to relapse
Resentful

- Seeking Revenge For Real or Perceived Injury
- Motivated By Causing Fear
- Delusional, They Are “Victims”
- Property Damage
- Court Ordered Treatment

Intimacy Seeking

- Believes Target “Loves” Them And Will Reciprocate
- Inflated Sense of Entitlement
- More Prone To Approach and Escalate
- Not Deterred By Criminal Justice Consequences

Stalking Violence

- Differs From Other Crimes
  - 50% Threaten Victims, 25% Are Acted Upon
  - Interpersonal Violence Occurs 20-25%
  - Weapon Use Is Rare, Used To Threaten/Scare
  - 3rd Parties At Risk
  - Property Damage

Stalking Violence

Motivation

Criminal & Psychiatric History

Relationship

Threats

Proximity

Did You Know...

Over 70% of U.S. Workplaces Lack A Formal Program Or Policy That Addresses Workplace Violence?

Before The First Session

1. If Possible Screen For Violence
2. Conduct A Thorough Chart Review
3. Engage In Interdisciplinary Communication

How Detailed Is Your Informed Consent?

2. Termination – Under What Grounds
3. Add Weapons Disclaimer

Commonsense Safety

1. Creation and Maintenance of Boundaries
2. Limits of Confidentiality
3. Documentation
4. Examine Transference/Countertransference
It's Time To Take Action!

Commonsense Safety

5. Know Your Office Policy As Well As Laws
6. Social Media Presence
7. Workplace Environment
8. When in Doubt, Consult!

Workplace Safety

• Office Policy Regarding Emergencies
• It’s “OK” For Staff To Interrupt Sessions If They Are Concerned
• If A Client Gets Angry, It’s “OK” To Find A Way Out
• Don’t Have Any Potential Weapons In Site
• Think About Your Office Set Up

If You Have Set Limits, Boundaries Continue To Be Crossed, And You Feel Unsafe…

It’s Time To Take Action!
If You Are Stalked...

- You Will Require Legal Assistance and Law Enforcement
- Consultation With Forensic Experts
- Private Attorneys May Be Required
- Consultation With New Provider If Transferred

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If You Didn’t Document It, It Didn’t Happen...

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Ensure That Documentation Of Any Boundary Violations Exists In:

1. Client File
2. Administration File
### Why Is Stalking Underreported?

1. 
   - Deny Its Occurrence
2. 
   - Clinician May Be Viewed As Incompetent
3. 
   - Client May Not Be Prosecuted
4. 
   - Clinician Is To Blame

The Reality: No Protocol Or Training, Or It's Poorly Managed When It Occurs

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### Remember...

- Stalking Happens Gradually Providing Opportunities To Intervene
- Address Boundary Violations Immediately - They Can Escalate
- Before Intervening, Consult With Forensic Experts
Stalking Resources

National Stalking Resource Center
www.ncvc.org/src

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-7233
www.thehotline.org

Workplaces Respond To Domestic And Sexual Violence
National Resource System
http://www.workplacesrespond.org/


