Title: Occurrence of StalkingVictimization among Female and Male Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

We examined the occurrence of stalking victimization among female and male undergraduate students attending three urban colleges. Specifically, we explored the proportion of students who experienced only stalking victimization and the relationship to the perpetrator identified by victims of stalking. Our findings suggest that stalking victimization is less frequently perpetrated by intimate partners and occurs independent of more commonly measured forms of interpersonal victimization. Given recent changes to the Jeanne Cleary Act to include stalking victimization as a mandatorily reportable offense, these results provide insight to college administrators responsible for designing violence-related educational efforts, as well as to health care providers who counsel and provide care to college-aged young adults.
BACKGROUND

Stalking victimization refers to unwanted behaviors that cause the victim concern for personal safety and includes pursuing or harassing in an intentional or ongoing manner, following, watching, calling, or writing a person obsessively (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Spitzberg, 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Stalking victimization is often overlooked as a serious form of interpersonal victimization; however, stalking victimization has been associated with numerous adverse physical and psychological outcomes. Many stalking victims report fear for their personal safety, feelings of vulnerability (Davis, Coker, & Sanderson, 2002), changes in their daily routine (Amar, 2006), high levels of depression, anxiety, and panic disorders, as well as increased alcohol and other substance use (Basile, Arias, Desai, & Thompson, 2004; Davis et al., 2002; Kuehner, Gass, & Dressing, 2007; Lacey, McPherson, Samuel, Powell Sears, & Head, 2012; Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000; Westrup, Fremouw, Thompson, & Lewis, 1999). Further, estimates suggest that 40-50% of college stalking victims change their routines as a result of victimization (Amar, 2006; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2002). This behavior, while promoting safety, may be concerning for colleges and universities, where changes in routine may lead students to change residences, drop out of classes, change schools, or abandon their education (Amar, 2006; Bjerregaard, 2000; Fisher et al., 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

Prior estimates suggest between 10 and 30% of college students experience stalking victimization (Amar, 2006; Bjerregaard, 2000; Bonomi et al., 2012; Buhi, Clayton, & Surrency, 2009; Coker, Sanderson, Cantu, Huerta, & Fadden, 2008; Fisher et al., 2002; Hauggaard & Seri, 2003). However, few studies have concurrently assessed physical, sexual, and emotional victimization (Bonomi et al., 2012; Buhi et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2002; Hauggaard & Seri, 2003; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000; Logan et al., 2000), limiting our
ability to understand the unique contribution of stalking victimization to the overall burden of interpersonal violence among college students. Further, although stalking may be perpetrated by non-intimate partners (Bjerregaard, 2000; Black et al., 2011; Buhi et al., 2009), victimization perpetrated by current or former intimate partners is most commonly examined (Bonomi et al., 2012; Dutton & Winstead, 2011; Haugaard & Seri, 2003; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Logan et al., 2000; Roberts, 2005; Thompson & Dennison, 2008).

With recent broadening of mandatorily reportable offenses under the Jeanne Cleary Act to include stalking victimization ("Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013," 2013), this study provides insight into the burden of stalking victimization, which prior studies suggest is experienced by up to one in three students, and concurrent IPV on urban college campuses. The primary objective was to describe the occurrence of stalking victimization among female and male undergraduate students and to assess the relationship that existed between the perpetrator (acquaintance/friend, intimate partner, stranger, or other) and the victim.

**METHODS**

As described previously, self-administered, anonymous surveys among female and male undergraduate students attending three urban colleges in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania were collected (Redacted). Undergraduate, day classes from all course levels, schools, and disciplines were eligible for inclusion, providing a heterogeneous, non-clinical, university-based sample of participants. The study team randomly selected day classes from available course rosters at participating colleges. All students, 17 to 22 years of age, enrolled in selected courses were eligible. Overall, 910 surveys were returned representing approximately 70% of eligible students. Written consent was waived since only de-identified information was collected and students were notified that returning a completed survey indicated their consent to participate.
Approximately 3% of students returned a blank survey or left the classroom before the surveys were distributed. Institutional Review Board approval was granted by all participating colleges and investigators’ institutions.

Stalking victimization questions were developed specifically for this survey. The questions were similar to those used in other studies and used a behaviorally-based description of stalking victimization (Black et al., 2011; Bonomi et al., 2012; Buhi et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2000). Closely resembling the item used by The National College Women Sexual Victimization Survey (Fisher et al., 2000), our survey asked: “Since you have been at this institution, have you ever been stalked (followed by, watched, received calls or letters that caused you to have concern for your personal safety)?” Students who reported stalking victimization identified their relationship to the perpetrator (acquaintance/friend, intimate partner, stranger, or other) with a free text field to clarify the “other” responses. Students were not asked to identify whether the relationship was in the present or past. Physical, sexual, and emotional victimization questions were based on the previously validated Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) and the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationship Inventory (Wolfe et al., 2001).

Univariate statistics described the demographic characteristics of the study population, the characteristics of students who experienced stalking victimization, and the perpetrator relationship (acquaintance/friend, intimate partner, and stranger). Students who experienced only stalking victimization were compared to students who reported experiencing stalking and additional forms of victimization (physical, sexual, and/or emotional) using chi-square tests. Significance was determined using two-sided tests with p<0.05 for all comparisons. Statistical analysis was performed using Stata version 12 (StataCorp, 2011).
RESULTS

910 female and male undergraduate students aged 17-22 years participated in the study. Slightly over one-half of respondents (57.1%) were female and 58.7% were white, 16.4% were African-American, and 15.1% were Asian, with few participants reporting Hispanic ethnicity (6.4%). The majority of students (64.7%) were in their second and third years of college.

Stalking victimization was the most frequently reported form of violence since beginning college (16.0%). Sexual victimization was reported by 12.0% of students, emotional victimization was reported by 11.8% of students, and physical victimization was reported by 7.0% of students. Female students were more likely than male students to report stalking victimization (22.1% vs. 7.9%, p<0.001). However, there were no other significant demographic differences between students who reported stalking victimization and those who did not. Of students who reported stalking victimization, 59.6% reported experiencing only stalking victimization and no additional forms of interpersonal violence.

Table 1 summarizes the relationship between stalking victims and perpetrators. Acquaintances/friends were the most frequently identified perpetrator, while intimate partners were only identified by 13.7% of stalking victims. When comparing students who reported only stalking victimization and those who experienced stalking victimization and additional forms of violence, there were no significant demographic differences. However, differences were observed in the victim-perpetrator relationship. Most students who experienced only stalking victimization identified the perpetrator as an acquaintance/friend or stranger. Compared to students who experienced only stalking victimization, students who experienced stalking and additional forms of victimization were significantly more likely to identify the perpetrator as an intimate partner (p=0.006).
DISCUSSION

Our study measured stalking, physical, sexual, and emotional victimization in a randomly selected sample of urban undergraduate students. Stalking victimization was the most frequently reported form of violence, by both women and men, experienced by one in six students. Consistent with prior studies (Bjerregaard, 2000; Black et al., 2011; Haugaard & Seri, 2003; Logan et al., 2000), we found that women were significantly more likely than men to experience stalking victimization. Stalking victimization often occurred independent of more traditionally assessed forms of violence (physical, sexual, and emotional). In addition, 30% of victims in our study reported only stalking victimization and no concurrent physical, sexual, or emotional victimization. Because many screening questionnaires are limited to physical, sexual, and emotional violence, individuals who only experience stalking victimization may be underreported. Further, perpetrators of stalking victimization were most commonly identified as acquaintances/friends or strangers, not intimate partners as examined in prior studies (Bonomi et al., 2012; Dutton & Winstead, 2011; Haugaard & Seri, 2003; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Logan et al., 2000; Roberts, 2005; Thompson & Dennison, 2008).

The high prevalence of stalking victimization observed among both female and male students in this study is of particular importance for college health care providers, campus security, and administrators. The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 broadens the forms of victimization that must be tracked and reported by colleges and universities to specifically include stalking victimization as a publically reportable offense under the Jeanne Cleary Act ("Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013," 2013). Not only will stalking offenses need to be tracked and disclosed by diverse campus officials, but campuses will need to expand existing educational programming and policies regarding victims’
rights to specifically address this serious and often surreptitious form of violence. Creating environments where all students, regardless of gender, feel safe seeking support and non-judgmental assistance is critical to identifying the prevalence of stalking victimization.

Prior research has found that stalking victimization may lead to significant adverse health outcomes, including poor mental health (Basile et al., 2004; Kuehner et al., 2007; Logan et al., 2000; Westrup et al., 1999), alcohol and other substance use (Davis et al., 2002; Lacey et al., 2012), and poor health status (Amar, 2006; Davis et al., 2002). Due to fear for personal safety, students experiencing stalking victimization often change their routines (Amar, 2006; Dutton & Winstead, 2011), which could result in isolation from peer supports and academic failure due to decreased class attendance. Individuals experiencing stalking victimization may carry weapons for protection and adopt aggressive behaviors (Davis et al., 2002; Dutton & Winstead, 2011), further increasing their risk of physical injury. Health care providers and campus administrators should consider the prevalence and consequences of stalking victimization to adequately anticipate, assess, and respond to the health and well-being of their student population.

There are several limitations of this study. First, respondents were attending college in a large east coast city, thus we cannot generalize our results to young adults not attending college or attending college in non-urban settings. Second, we only surveyed students attending daytime classes. Students who only attend evening classes may have different victimization rates and are not represented in this study. Further, students experiencing significant stalking may have been absent from class out of fear for their safety and therefore are not represented in these results. Third, given the covert nature of stalking behaviors, students may be unaware that they are being pursued and therefore, our findings may underestimate stalking victimization. Fourth, electronic forms of communication (such as e-mail, social media, and text messaging) were not specifically
included in the survey’s definition of stalking victimization. If included, higher rates of stalking victimization may have been found.

In conclusion, our results indicate the need to address stalking victimization as a separate form of violence among college-aged women and men and to recognize that stalking victimization often occurs outside the context of intimate relationships. Stalking victimization may require specific assessments, educational efforts, and counseling, beyond those in place for other types of violence or violence perpetrated by intimate partners. The high prevalence of stalking observed in this study suggests that university communities must provide student education regarding behaviors that may constitute stalking and how students may report and access services to address stalking. Further, efforts to monitor stalking trends on campus will be critically important, particularly to assist with monitoring the impact of changing education and policies on stalking over time. Individuals providing care to college-aged young adults may benefit from engaging in broader assessments of and screening for victimization experiences, not solely focusing on violence in intimate relationships, for both female and male students.
References


StataCorp. (2011). *Stata Statistical Software: Release 12*. College Station, TX: StataCorp LP.


Table 1. Relationship Between Stalking Victims and Perpetrators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Relationship</th>
<th>Total n=146 (%)</th>
<th>Students Reporting Only Stalking n=87 (%)</th>
<th>Students Reporting Stalking and Additional Forms of Victimization n=59 (%)</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance/Friend</td>
<td>60 (41.1)</td>
<td>38 (43.7)</td>
<td>22 (37.3)</td>
<td>0.265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>47 (32.2)</td>
<td>30 (34.5)</td>
<td>17 (28.8)</td>
<td>0.321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate Partner</td>
<td>20 (13.7)</td>
<td>6 (6.9)</td>
<td>14 (23.7)</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not reported or unable to</td>
<td>20 (13.7)</td>
<td>13 (14.9)</td>
<td>7 (11.9)</td>
<td>0.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>determine relationship†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages do not total 100%, as one student reported more than one perpetrator relationship (both Acquaintance and Intimate Partner).
† One free text responses was unable to be categorized (“Baseball player”).