



As Seen In the April 2010 Issue

What police need to know about stalking

by Dr. T.K. Logan and Teri Faragher

Twenty-three-year-old Florida newlywed Alissa Blanton was recently murdered by a man who stalked her for two years. She was gunned down in the parking lot of her workplace, in front of horrified bystanders who ducked for cover as the stalker shot Alissa and then himself. Her tragic death has brought much needed attention to a crime that has, for the most part, remained hidden because it is often denied, dismissed or ignored.

Stalking can be defined as the covert pursuit of someone by tracking, trailing, hunting, pursuing, shadowing, and hounding them. It occurs more frequently than many would imagine. A recent study reported that 3.4 million people in the U.S. are stalked annually.

Most stalking victims are female, while most stalkers are male. For women, the most likely stalker is an abusive partner or ex-partner.

However, about one-third of victims are stalked by acquaintances, like in the Blanton case. Stalking often spills over to affect other family members, co-workers and friends.

In many cases, the stalker's callous disregard for others

puts the public in danger, such as attempts to run the victim off of the road or confrontations in public places.

Stalkers often have prior

ment agencies as "incidents" or distinct criminal acts that begin and end in a relatively short period of time.

What distinguishes the

without bars."

For victims of stalking, it is a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week experience. They never know when or where their stalker is going to strike, so they must constantly look over their shoulders.

So, what can or should law enforcement do?

Of course, when appropriate, arrest is the preferred response.

However, even if an arrest cannot be made, officers can help victims by: (1) believing them and taking stalking seriously; (2) talking to them about safety planning and the importance of protecting themselves; (3) referring them to local and national resources (e.g., the National Stalking Resource Center); and (4) instructing them to keep detailed and specific documentation logs.

Stalking is one of the few crimes for which victims must often take an active role in their ongoing safety as well as in their own evidence collection to document the crime.

Victim logs should include detailed descriptions of incidents, noting witnesses, dates, times and locations. Victims should also be advised to retain any cell phone data, videos or pictures that might be pertinent and to record how the incident made them feel, since fear or

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criminal histories and are adept at manipulating the criminal justice system. And stalking is costly. A recent study found that partner stalking cost one small rural state over \$9 million a year.

Stalking may be hard to recognize because the vast majority of crimes in America are viewed by law enforce-

ment agencies as "incidents" that are systematically and deliberately designed to induce fear in the victim, much like a predator hunting prey. Stalkers invade every aspect of victims' personal and professional lives, sometimes causing them to live, as one victim put it, in a "prison



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extreme emotional distress is typically an element of the legal definition of stalking. Also, victims should be told to obtain and keep copies of all police reports.

Victims often do not use the term "stalking," so an officer might be the first person to put the pieces together and recognize it for what it is.

While stalking cases can be very complex, some things to consider in assessing the stalking situation include:

1. The duration of the stalking.

2. The intrusion: how many areas of the victim's life have been invaded?

3. The intensity: the type and variety of tactics as well as the frequency and changes in the levels of intensity of stalking.

4. The persistence: has the stalking continued in spite of court orders or other interventions?

5. The victim's percep-

tions regarding the credibility of implicit and explicit threats: the kinds and frequency of threats as well as victim's level and types of fears. For example, fear of physical harm, harm to others, or job loss due to harassment in the workplace.

6. The stalker's past history of stalking and other criminal charges.

Each interaction officers have with stalking victims can be an important step to increase victim safety and offender accountability. Every time officers help victims put the pieces together and encourage them to take an active role in planning for their safety and building a case by documenting their experiences, they take away some of the stalkers' power.

Communities must demonstrate to stalkers that they are no longer in charge.

While Alissa Blanton's husband, family and friends mourn her loss, our nation should view her death as a call to action.

It is a call that law enforcement officers and communities across America must heed – a call to stop stalkers in their tracks.

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Facts at a glance

- **Over 1 million women and 370,000 men are stalked annually in the United States.**
- **1 in 12 women and 1 in 45 men will be stalked in their lifetime.**
- **77% of female and 64% of male victims know their stalker.**
- **87% of stalkers are men.**
- **59% of female victims and 30% of male victims are stalked by an intimate partner.**
- **81% of women stalked by a current or former intimate partner are also physically assaulted by that partner. 31% of women stalked by a current or former intimate partner are also sexually assaulted by that partner. Intimate partners that stalk are four times more likely than intimate partners in the general population to physically assault their victims and six times more likely to sexually assault their victims.**
- **73% of intimate partner stalkers verbally threaten the victims with physical violence, and almost 46% of victims experienced one or more violent incidents by the stalker.**

Source: Stalking in America: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey.

Jodie Foster was stalked for years by John Warnock Hinckley, Jr. After repeated viewing of the film "Taxi Driver," Hinckley became obsessed with Foster, who portrayed a child prostitute in the film. When Foster went to Yale, Hinckley moved to New Haven to be closer to her. After failing to form a relationship with her, though he called her numerous times and sent her messages, he decided to either hi-jack a plane or commit suicide in front of her to gain her attention. In the end, Hinckley attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan in 1981, mimicking the plot of "Taxi Driver," to get Foster's attention.

