

## Chapter 15

# Cyberstalking Victimization and Perpetration among Greek College Students

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### ABSTRACT

*Cyberstalking is a rapidly growing phenomenon, which is becoming more common among youth nowadays. The study aimed at investigating: 1) the prevalence, behaviors, and tactics of both victims and perpetrators among a sample of Greek undergraduate students, 2) the correlates of victimization and perpetration with personality, attachment style, and relating to others, and 3) the impact of cyberstalking on victims' mental health. Results showed that 23.9% of the students were victims and 9% were perpetrators, with females, disproportionately both experiencing and inflicting cyberstalking. Negatively close relating (i.e., intrusive, restrictive and possessive relating) increased the risk of cyberstalking perpetration, whereas negatively distant relating (suspicious, avoidant, and self-reliant relating) decreased the risk of cyberstalking victimization. Agreeableness decreased the risk of perpetration. Mother's affectionless control increased the risk of both perpetration and victimization and mother's neglectful parenting increased the risk of perpetration only.*

### INTRODUCTION

Although stalking is not a new behavior, as it has been reported since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its emergence into the cyber-world is (Lewis, Fremouw, Ben, & Farr, 2001). Stalking is defined as engaging in a pattern of harassing or threatening behavior, such as following a person, appearing at a person's home or place of business, making harassing phone calls, leaving written messages or objects, or vandalizing a person's property (Ashcroft, 2001; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The advancement of information and communication technologies, such as the Internet, has offered stalkers an additional and perhaps more effective, though dubious and insidious, way to target their victims and commit their malevolent acts. Thus, some stalkers have become cyberstalkers.

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Despite experts' and legislators' attempts to define cyberstalking, still there is no commonly accepted definition of *cyberstalking* or *technology-aided stalking*. However, the term is generally used to refer to the "behaviors that involve repeated threats and harassment by the use of electronic mail or other computer-based communication that would make a reasonable person afraid or concerned for their safety" (Finn, 2004, p. 469). Similar definitions involve the repeated pursuit or monitoring of an individual utilizing electronic means (e.g., e-mails, blogs, instant messaging, video, chat rooms, on-line social networks, or other websites) or tracking technologies that induces the victim to feel distress, fear, alarm, or concerned for his/her safety (Bocij, 2006; D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003; Reyns, 2010). This may involve threatening, coercive, harassing, or intimidating messages or sexual overtones or other unwanted, persistent, and intrusive contact.

To the author's knowledge there is no study up until this date which describes cyberstalking in Greece. The prevalence of both cyberstalking perpetration and victimization worldwide is also unknown because of the different definitions employed and study samples, which results in variant prevalence rates. Few estimates concerning the perpetration of cyberstalking are readily available (Roberts 2008), particularly due to the difficulty in obtaining offending data. It has been reported that approximately 1 in 4 stalking victims reported some form of cyberstalking (Baum, Catalano, Kristina, Michael, 2009). Cyberstalkers are primarily male (Working to Halt Online Abuse; WHOA, 2011), with a mean age of 24 years (D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003) and they usually know the victim (e.g., a friend, coworker, fellow student, or an ex-partner) (WHOA, 2011).

Several studies among university students have reported relatively high, though diverse prevalence rates of cyberstalking victimization too, ranging from 18.9% (Holt & Bossler, 2009) to 45.2% (Alexy et al., 2005). Estimates of cyberstalking victimization range between 2% to 13% of males and 8% to 32% of females (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Risk factors for cyberstalking victimization include being females (e.g., Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2012) and in young adulthood (between 18 and 30 years of age; e.g., Brownstein, 2000).

Cyberstalking behaviours are likely to be more prevalent in the population of emerging adults (aged between 18–25 years old; Arnett, 2000), than in any other age group as they are the highest users of social media. They are also more likely to connect with partners in their intimate relationships through digital technologies (Boyle & O'Sullivan, 2014; Dewing, 2010). Moreover, the relationships in this age group are characterized by greater emotional intensity and importance or commitment compared to earlier ages (Collins, 2003), which might be the cause of the potential distress of letting go during the process of adjusting to a breakup (Lee & O'Sullivan, 2014).

Scarce research exists on the personality of cyberstalkers and cyberstalking victims. Cyberstalkers are low on agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability, and high on extraversion (O'Riordan & O'Connell, 2014), while other studies have described cyberstalkers as introverted (Wall, 2007). The personality correlations associated with cyberstalking victims is currently unknown. However, victims of cyberbullying have been described as low on agreeableness and high on extraversion and openness (Festl & Quandt, 2013; Peluchette, Karl, Wood, & Williams, 2015).

Studies have revealed that cyberstalkers have an insecure-anxious adult attachment style (MacKenzie, Mullen, Ogloff, McEwan, & James, 2008; Patton, Nobles, & Fox, 2010; Tonin, 2004). Fox and Warber (2014) found that people with "preoccupied" and "fearful" attachment styles reported higher levels of "relationship uncertainty" within a romantic relationship and higher levels of interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES) of romantic partners (i.e., checking up more often on their romantic partners). Interpersonal electronic surveillance of a partner after breaking up could lead to cyberstalking provided that

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