



## [Understanding the Serious Crime of Stalking](#)

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*The following post appears courtesy of Susan B. Carbon, Director of the Office on Violence Against Women*

The Office on Violence Against Women proudly joins the President in recognizing January as National Stalking Awareness Month (NSAM). Stalking is described by the Justice Department's [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) as, "a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear for his or her safety or the safety of someone close such as a family member."

President Obama again this year speaks to the gravity of stalking and its impact on victims in his [proclamation](#):

"In our schools and in our neighborhoods, at home and in workplaces across our Nation, stalking endangers the physical and emotional well-being of millions of American men and women every year. Too often, stalking goes unreported and unaddressed, and we must take action against this unacceptable abuse. This month, we stand with all those who have been affected by stalking and strengthen our resolve to prevent this crime before it occurs."

Education is the first crucial step in recognizing and preventing this crime, and reporting it when it occurs so that offenders may be properly held accountable for their dangerous behavior.

Earlier this month, the United States Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released its first [National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#) (NISVS). The report reveals that stalking is a serious issue. NISVS data shows that:

- Nearly one in six women has experienced stalking *so severe that she felt very fearful or believed that she or someone close to her would be harmed or killed*.
- One in 19 men has experienced the same level of stalking.
- Women were particularly likely to be stalked by a current or former intimate partner.

Stalking behaviors can include seemingly innocuous acts, such as making unwanted phone calls; sending unsolicited or unwanted letters or emails; or leaving unwanted items, presents or flowers, but when taken together, and when feared by the victim, may constitute a criminal act. Other forms of stalking include following or spying on the victim; showing up without a legitimate reason at places where the victim is likely to be; waiting at places for the victim; and posting information or spreading rumors about the victim on the internet, in a public place, or by word of mouth.

Newer technologies, such as text messaging, emails, and electronic monitoring devices (including cameras and GPS), are also used by perpetrators to stalk victims. Stalking is also

frequently a precursor to much more serious, and sometimes lethal, acts. In fact, 76 percent of female intimate partner murder victims had been stalked by their partners prior to their death.

Stalking is a crime across the country. Despite the fact that millions are victimized each year, stalking remains a widely misunderstood and hidden crime and tends to go unreported. It is one of four crimes addressed in the Violence Against Women Act.

OVW is taking steps to ensure that we create secure and supportive communities for stalking survivors. In 2000, we launched a partnership with the [Stalking Resource Center of the National Center for Victims of Crime](#) (NCVC). The Stalking Resource Center provides training and technical assistance to enhance responses to stalking and is committed to collecting the best knowledge about stalking, including researching policy and tracking program success.

The *KNOW IT. NAME IT. STOP IT.* awareness campaign is a call to action to maintain an ongoing dialogue, increase recognition of stalking as an important issue, and provide resources to those in need.

In the words of President Obama:

“Though stalking can occur in any community, shame, fear of retribution, or concerns that they will not be supported lead many victims to forego reporting the crime to the police. As we strive to reverse this trend, we must do more to promote public awareness and support for survivors of stalking.”

During this month and throughout the year ahead, we are committed to spreading the word that stalking will not be tolerated. For more information, please visit the Stalking Awareness Month website at: <http://stalkingawarenessmonth.org>.

*For more information about the Office on Violence Against Women, visit [ovw.usdoj.gov](http://ovw.usdoj.gov). We remind all those in need of assistance, or other concerned friends and individuals, to call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE or the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE.*