



## Introduction

Citizens Against Technological and Community-Based Harassment (“CATCH”) is a Canadian-based activism and support group dedicated to helping victims of a virtually unknown form of criminal activity.

We work in conjunction with our local Rape Crisis Centre.

Our activism efforts are directed towards raising public awareness as well as educating those in the helping professions.

CATCH deals with two types of criminal activity: “technological harassment” and “community-based harassment”. The majority of victims experience both. However, this information package focuses specifically on community-based harassment.

By taking the time to better understand this crime, you will not only help us to be heard, but you will be able to provide victims who contact you with a much-needed source of support and validation.

Thank you for taking the time to read our information package.



## Definition

### *Community-based Harassment:*

- ❖ Community-based harassment is a form of “criminal harassment”, which is defined by the Canadian Department of Justice<sup>2</sup> as follows:
  - Criminal harassment, which includes ‘stalking’, is a crime. While many crimes are defined by conduct that results in a very clear outcome (for example, murder), criminal harassment generally consists of repeated conduct that is carried out over a period of time and that causes victims to reasonably fear for their safety, but does not necessarily result in physical injury.
- ❖ As opposed to a ‘conventional’ stalking situation, which involves a single stalker, this activity involves the use of *multiple individuals* to:
  - Stalk a victim
  - Harass a victim (usually indirectly),
  - Vandalize personal property,
  - Enter a person’s house when they are away, and
  - Sometimes attempt to discredit a victim at work and in the community.
- ❖ It is an ongoing and concerted effort to destroy an individual’s life, which is very often successful.
- ❖ Because multiple stalkers are involved, the stalking can take place *every* time the victim leaves his or her home.
- ❖ Noise campaigns are common.
- ❖ Incidents are intentionally repetitive so that they stand out from normal random incidents. This process is known as “sensitizing the target<sup>1</sup>” to the presence of the perpetrators.
- ❖ Community-based harassment is also referred to as:
  - organized stalking
  - group stalking
  - gang stalking
  - cause-stalking<sup>1</sup>
  - vengeance stalking<sup>1</sup>
  - vigilante-style stalking<sup>1</sup>, and
  - stalking-by-proxy<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ This is a form of *psychological warfare*, intended to break down the target’s defenses, but is also a way for perpetrators who feel powerless to empower themselves.



## Definition - 2

*The U.S. Department of Justice website defines “Vengeance/ Terrorism Stalking”<sup>4</sup> as follows:*

The final stalking category is fundamentally different from the other three. Vengeance stalkers do not seek a personal relationship with their targets. Rather, vengeance/terrorist stalkers attempt to elicit a particular response or a change of behavior from their victims. When vengeance is their prime motive, stalkers seek only to punish their victims for some wrong they perceive the victim has visited upon them. In other words, they use stalking as a means to "get even" with their enemies.

The most common scenario in this category involves employees who stalk employers after being fired from their job. Invariably, the employee believes that their dismissal was unjustified and that their employer or supervisor was responsible for unjust treatment. One bizarre variation on this pattern is the case of a scout master who was dismissed for inappropriate conduct and subsequently decided to stalk his entire former scout troop - scouts and scout leaders alike.

A second type of vengeance or terrorist stalker, the political stalker, has motivations that parallel those of more traditional terrorists. That is, stalking is a weapon of terror used to accomplish a political agenda. Utilizing the threat of violence to force the stalking target to engage in or refrain from engaging in particular activity. For example, most prosecutions in this stalking category have been against anti-abortionists who stalk doctors in an attempt to discourage the performance of abortions.

*“Cyber-stalking”:*

The majority of victims of community-based harassment also feel that their online activities are monitored. In addition, they encounter frequent issues with ‘lost’ emails as well as ongoing virus-like behavior on their computers, despite taking extensive precautions to prevent these intrusions.

*See FAQ and Appendix I for more information.*



## Effects on Victims

Because community-based harassment may go on for many years, the psychological and health effects on the victims can be severe.

*Psychological effects include:*

- ❖ Severe depression with a strong tendency towards thoughts of suicide
- ❖ Destruction of self-esteem
- ❖ Loss of faith
- ❖ Loss of purpose
- ❖ Progressive social isolation
- ❖ Ongoing post-traumatic stress disorder

*Other effects include:*

- ❖ Destruction of personal relationships
- ❖ Loss of livelihood
- ❖ Loss of possessions due to cessation of income
- ❖ Financial strain due to constant repairs of cars and other vandalized items
- ❖ Loss of respect of friends and family
- ❖ The development of mental health issues *as a result* of the stress
- ❖ Labeling - “paranoid”, “mentally ill”, “schizophrenic”

*From the Canadian Department of Justice report on criminal harassment entitled, “Harassment: A Handbook for Police and Crown Prosecutors”<sup>2</sup>, some common responses by victims to the trauma of being stalked include:*

- ❖ Self reproach
- ❖ A tendency to downplay the impact of the stalking
- ❖ Interpretation of the stalking as a ‘private matter’
- ❖ A sense of betrayal and stigma
- ❖ Anxiety and fear due to the unpredictability of the stalker’s conduct
- ❖ Feelings of being helpless and unable to control their lives
- ❖ Lack of confidence in the Police, resulting in a *failure to report*
- ❖ Inaction, due to a lack of awareness that the conduct is criminal
- ❖ Denial or embarrassment.



## The Issue of Mental Illness

It goes without saying that there are parallels between this situation and genuine cases of “paranoid delusion”, which can make it hard for helping professionals, non-victims (and fellow victims alike) to establish the truth of a particular individual’s case.

However, when the situation is taken as a whole, rather than as a series *single, isolated* events, the picture which is formed is strikingly consistent between targets. Without taking the time to hear a victim’s story, as well as to look beyond the panic and anguish that usually accompanies the early stages of the harassment, the difference between this situation and a delusional state of mind may not be *initially* evident.

When seeing a helping professional, many victims often experience what is known as the “Martha Mitchell Effect”<sup>5</sup>:

Sometimes improbable reports are erroneously assumed to be symptoms of mental illness (Maher, 1988). The ‘Martha Mitchell effect’ referred to the tendency of mental health practitioners to not believe the experience of the wife of the American attorney general, whose persistent reports of corruption in the Nixon White House were initially dismissed as evidence of delusional thinking, until later proved correct by the Watergate investigation.

Such examples demonstrate that delusional pathology can often lie in the failure or inability to verify whether the events have actually taken place, no matter how improbable intuitively they might appear to the busy clinician. Clearly there are instances ‘where people are pursued by the Mafia’ or are ‘kept under surveillance by the police’, and where they rightly suspect ‘that their spouse is unfaithful’ (Sedler, 1995). As Joseph H. Berke (1998) wrote, even paranoids have enemies! For understandable and obvious reasons, however, little effort is invested by the clinicians into checking the validity of claims of persecution or harassment, and without such evidence the patient could be labeled delusional.

This is the uphill battle which victims of organized stalking and harassment are facing: *Is it possible to reach out for help without being re-victimized by those in the helping professions?* The damage caused by the stalking can be so great that a victim may choose to never report it.



## “Why You?”

One of the most common questions asked of the victims is “Why you?” In many cases, victims don’t know why they’ve been targeted, and as a result are rarely believed by friends and family due to the subtle and subjective nature of the harassment. It is extremely difficult for victims to gather solid evidence.

The activity of the stalking groups is very similar to that of other hate/extremist groups. According to David Lawson, who wrote *Terrorist Stalking in America*<sup>1</sup>, these methods of harassment have been modeled on those developed by the Ku Klux Klan and refined over decades. Lawson refers to these groups as “cults”, in which the interaction between members is more important than the interaction with the targets. (See Appendix 1).

In addition, Lawson states that “the primary targets of all these tactics are *the group members\**; not the target. The group members are the ones who are programmed. Group leaders define reality for their members... Stalking various targets is only part of the activity of these groups. Members are trained to perform a variety of activities *without question*. They do not know the objectives of their leaders... [However], those targeted for harassment will have no problem concluding that someone is after them, but *most never know who it is.*” (pp. 42,43,51) (\*Note: Lawson refers to the stalkers as “group members”.)

If we don’t know who is doing it, it is difficult to guess why it’s being done. However, most people can understand revenge as a possible motive for stalking or harassment. If you go online and do a search on the word “revenge” you may be shocked at what you see. Revenge has not only become an acceptable part of the sub-culture, those who promote it refer to themselves as “revengists” or “avengers”. People are targeted when they deserve to be “taught a lesson”. But the lessons are invariably cruel, and the perpetrators revel in keeping their identities a secret. This activity is empowering for the perpetrators, so they continue to do it.

It’s important to note that the stalkers themselves are not the ones who have initiated the harassment, but are being used (i.e. “stalkers by proxy”<sup>3</sup>) by an unknown individual (or corporation) to carry out the harassment. The stalkers do not know the victims personally.

Many victims have referred to their experiences as “rape”, and the emotional dynamics between perpetrators and victim in both situations may be very similar.



## Statistics

CATCH estimates that as many as 1 in 100 people (1%) may be victims of organized stalking at some point in their lives.

### *Stalking Studies:*

#### American Journal of Psychiatry:

- ❖ In 6/201 cases (approx. 3%) respondents reported multiple stalkers<sup>22</sup>.

#### Howard Journal of Criminal Justice<sup>23</sup>:

- ❖ In 5/95 cases (approx. 5%) perpetrators were part of a group
- ❖ 40% of victims (38) said that friends and or family of their stalker had also been involved in their harassment (stalking-by-proxy)
- ❖ All cases of multiple stalkers involved mixed sex stalker groups
- ❖ In 15% of cases, the victim could provide no possible reason for their harassment
- ❖ 13% reported that their homes had been bugged
- ❖ 32% reported that the stalker(s) broke into/damaged the inside of the victim's home
- ❖ 38% reported damage to the outside of the home
- ❖ 30% reported that the stalker(s) stole from the victim,
- ❖ 91% reported being watched
- ❖ 82% reported being followed
- ❖ 60% reported having their character slandered/defamed
- ❖ 84% were victim to repetitive phone calls
- ❖ 60% reported hang up phone calls
- ❖ 57% reported silent calls
- ❖ 46% reported negative attitude from the police, and 51% reported negative actions

#### British Home Office<sup>7</sup>:

- ❖ It is estimated that about 1,900,000 people (ages 16-59) in England and Wales were victims of stalking in the year 2000. That is about 3.6%, based on a population of 52 million.

### *Workplace Harassment (or “Mobbing”):*

- ❖ It is estimated that 3.5% of the working population of Sweden is subject to mobbing<sup>6</sup>.

### *Criminal Harassment (Canadian Dept. of Justice):*

- ❖ Although victims always suffered emotional harm, physical injury was recorded by the police in less than 2% of all cases<sup>2</sup>.



## CATCH Information

### *Contact information*

- ❖ Email: [admin@CatchCanada.org](mailto:admin@CatchCanada.org)

### *Website*

- ❖ The following refer to the same website:  
[www.CatchCanada.org](http://www.CatchCanada.org)  
[www.c-a-t-c-h.ca](http://www.c-a-t-c-h.ca)



## References

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4. Taken from Chapter 22 in the 1999 *National Victim Assistance Academy Text*. The complete volume is available at the U.S. Department of Justice website ([www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov)): <http://www.ojp.gov/ovc/assist/nvaa99/chap21-2.htm>.
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9. Kamphuis & Emmelkamp. "[Traumatic Distress Among Support-Seeking Female Victims of Stalking](#)". *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 158:795-798, May 2001.
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