

OFFICE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN'S GRANT FUNDS USED TO ADDRESS STALKING: 2020 REPORT TO CONGRESS

The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA) required that the Attorney General submit to Congress an annual report, beginning one year after the date of enactment of the Act, providing information concerning the incidence of stalking and domestic violence, and evaluating the effectiveness of anti-stalking efforts and legislation (34 U.S.C. § 12409). In the 2005 reauthorization of VAWA, this reporting requirement was changed from an annual report to biennial, to be due on each “even-numbered fiscal year.”

The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) supplied funds to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in 2015 to redesign and administer a survey measuring stalking victimization in the United States and generate nationally representative statistics about stalking victims and victimization. BJS's report, released in April 2021, is enclosed. This report fulfills the 2020 report requirement.



Stalking Victimization, 2016

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In 2016, an estimated 1.5% of all U.S. residents age 16 or older (3.8 million persons) were victims of stalking (figure 1, table 1). Stalking is repeated unwanted contacts or behaviors that either cause the victim to experience fear or substantial emotional distress or that would cause a reasonable person to experience fear or substantial emotional distress. Most persons reported experiencing both stalking with technology and traditional stalking (0.7%). A greater percentage reported experiencing stalking with technology only (0.5%) than traditional stalking only (0.3%).

Findings are based on the 2016 Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). From July of 2016 to December of 2016, the SVS asked persons age 16 or older about their experiences with stalking during the 12 months preceding the interview. The report details the demographic characteristics of victims who were stalked during a 12-month period. It also describes the nature of stalking victimization, including the number of offenders, the victim-offender relationship, and the frequency and duration of the stalking.

FIGURE 1
Prevalence of stalking, by type of stalking, 2016



Note: Estimates include 95% confidence intervals. See appendix table 1 for estimates and standard errors.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

^aIncludes victims who only experienced the following types of unwanted behaviors: following; sneaking into, waiting at, or showing up at a place; leaving or sending unwanted items; or harassing friends or family about the victim's whereabouts.

^bIncludes victims who only experienced the following types of unwanted behaviors: making unwanted phone calls, leaving voice mail messages, or sending text messages; spying using technology; tracking the victim's whereabouts with an electronic tracking device or application; posting or threatening to post unwanted information on the internet; sending emails or messages using the internet; or monitoring activities using social media.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

HIGHLIGHTS

- About 1.5% (3.8 million) of persons age 16 or older were victims of stalking in 2016.
- A greater percentage of persons age 16 or older experienced stalking with technology only (0.5%) than traditional stalking only (0.3%).
- Females were stalked more than twice as often (2.0%) as males (0.9%).
- Most victims of stalking (69%) knew their offender in some capacity.
- Victims were three times as likely to be stalked by ex-intimate partners (21%) as by current intimate partners (7%).
- Twenty-four percent of stalking victims said the stalking behaviors lasted 2 years or more.
- About 1 in 10 victims said it happened too many times to count.
- Stalking behaviors were still ongoing at the time of the interview for more than a quarter all victims.

An estimated 2.5 million persons age 16 or older experienced traditional stalking, and 3.1 million experienced stalking with technology (table 1).

About 1.8 million persons age 16 or older experienced both traditional stalking and stalking with technology.

TABLE 1
Prevalence of stalking, by type of stalking, 2016

	Number of victims ^a	Percent of all persons ^b	Standard error	
			Number of victims	Percent of all persons
Total	3,788,800	1.5%	117,999	0.05%
Any traditional stalking^c	2,472,440	1.0%	95,410	0.04%
Traditional stalking only	703,250	0.3	50,883	0.02
Any stalking with technology^d	3,085,550	1.2%	106,545	0.04%
Stalking with technology only	1,316,360	0.5	69,637	0.03
Both traditional stalking and stalking with technology	1,769,190	0.7%	80,729	0.03%

Note: Details may not sum to totals because victims could experience more than one type of stalking. Total population age 16 or older was 256,432,020.

^aNumber of persons age 16 or older who experienced stalking victimization in the past year.

^bPercentage of persons age 16 or older who experienced stalking victimization in the past year.

^cIncludes the following types of unwanted behaviors: following; sneaking into, waiting at, or showing up at a place; leaving or sending unwanted items; or harassing friends or family about the victim's whereabouts.

^dIncludes the following types of unwanted behaviors: making unwanted phone calls, leaving voice messages, or sending text messages; spying using technology; tracking the victim's whereabouts with an electronic tracking device or application; posting or threatening to post unwanted information on the internet; sending emails or messages using the internet; or monitoring activities using social media.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

Measuring stalking victimization

To be classified as a **victim of stalking** in the Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS), the respondent must have experienced a repeated course of conduct (i.e., experiencing the same behavior or contact more than once or experiencing two or more different behaviors one time) that either—

- caused them substantial emotional distress or to fear for their safety or the safety of someone they know (actual fear)
- would cause a reasonable person to fear for their safety or the safety of someone they know.

Reasonable fear includes victimizations where the victim reported that they experienced either—

- damage, attempted damage, or destruction of property
- threatened, attempted, or completed attacks on the victim, someone close to them, or a pet.

The SVS measured 12 types of stalking behaviors, incorporating both traditional stalking and stalking with technology.

Traditional stalking includes the following unwanted behaviors:

- following and watching
- sneaking into a place

- waiting at a place
- showing up at a place
- leaving or sending unwanted items
- harassing friends or family about the victim's whereabouts.

Stalking with technology includes the following unwanted behaviors:

- making unwanted phone calls, leaving voice messages, or sending text messages
- spying using technology
- tracking the victim's whereabouts with an electronic tracking device or application
- posting or threatening to post unwanted information on the internet
- sending unwanted emails or messages using the internet
- monitoring activities using social media.

See *Methodology* for the SVS questions used to measure actual fear, substantial emotional distress, reasonable fear, and the types of unwanted behaviors that victims experienced.

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Measuring stalking victimization (continued)

Of the 3.8 million stalking victims in 2016, more than 2.2 million (59%) experienced fear and 2.4 million (64%) experienced substantial emotional distress (table 2). About 2.0 million victims (52%) had an experience that

would, by definition, cause a reasonable person to experience fear, including reporting property damage or an attack.

TABLE 2
Number and percent of stalking victims, by component of stalking, 2016

Stalking component	Number of victims ^a	Percent of victims	Standard error	
			Number of victims	Percent of victims
Total	3,788,800	100%	117,999	~
Actual fear ^{b*}	2,228,230	58.8%	90,586	1.54%
Substantial emotional distress ^c	2,418,770	63.8% †	94,371	1.50%
Reasonable fear ^d	1,960,020 †	51.7% †	84,968	1.56%
Damage/attempted damage/destruction of property*	713,340	18.8	51,247	1.22
Threatened/attempted/completed attack against victim	486,280 †	12.8 †	42,299	1.04
Threatened/attempted/completed attack against pet/someone close to victim	167,350 †	4.4 †	24,793	0.64
Two or more reasonable fear components ^e	593,050 ‡	15.7 ‡	46,720	1.13

Note: Details may not sum to totals because victims could experience more than one component of stalking.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

‡Difference with comparison group is significant at the 90% confidence level.

~Not applicable.

^aNumber of persons age 16 or older who experienced stalking victimization in the past year.

^bIncludes stalking where the victim reported that the unwanted behaviors made them fear for their safety or the safety of someone close to them.

^cIncludes stalking where the victim reported that the unwanted behaviors caused them substantial emotional distress.

^dIncludes stalking that involved damage, attempted damage, or destruction of property; or threatened, attempted, or completed attacks against the victim, a pet, or someone close to the victim.

^eIncludes stalking that involved two or more reasonable fear components (i.e., damage, attempted damage, or destruction of property or threatened, attempted, or completed attacks against the victim, a pet, or someone close to the victim).

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

59% of traditional-stalking victims in 2016 said the offender followed and watched them

The most frequently reported traditional stalking behaviors included the offender following and watching the victim (59%) or showing up at, riding by, or driving by places where the offender had no business being (52%) (table 3). More than a third of victims

of traditional stalking reported that the offender harassed their friends or family for information about their whereabouts (40%) or waited for them at home, school, or another place (36%). About 1 in 5 victims of traditional stalking said the offender left or sent unwanted items (24%) or snuck into their home, car, or other place (19%).

TABLE 3
Number and percent of victims of traditional stalking, by type of stalking behavior, 2016

Stalking behavior	Number of victims ^a	Percent of victims	Percent of all persons ^b
Total traditional stalking	2,472,440	100%	1.0%
Followed victim around/watched victim	1,450,740	58.7	0.6
Showed up at/rode by/drove by places victim was when the offender had no business being there	1,283,540	51.9	0.5
Harassed/repeatedly asked victim’s friends/family for information about their whereabouts	996,710	40.3	0.4
Waited for victim at home/work/school/any other place when victim did not want them to be there	901,480	36.5	0.4
Left/sent victim unwanted items/cards/letters/presents/flowers	604,000	24.4	0.2
Sneaked into victim’s home/car/any other place and did things to let victim know they had been there	472,990	19.1	0.2

Note: Details may not sum to totals because a victim could experience more than one behavior of traditional stalking. Total population age 16 or older was 256,432,020. See appendix table 2 for standard errors.

^aNumber of persons age 16 or older who experienced stalking victimization in the past year.

^bPercentage of persons age 16 or older who experienced stalking victimization in the past year.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

67% of victims of stalking with technology said the offender used the phone to excessively contact them in 2016

Sixty-seven percent of victims of stalking with technology received unwanted phone calls, voice messages, or text messages (67%), while 50% received unwanted emails or messages via the internet (table 4). About 35% of victims said their activities were monitored using social media. Twenty-seven

percent of victims experienced the offender posting or threatening to post inappropriate, unwanted, or personal information about them on the internet. Nineteen percent of victims of stalking with technology said the offender spied on them or monitored their activities using technologies such as listening devices, cameras, or computer or cellphone monitoring software. Nine percent of victims were tracked with an electronic tracking device or application.

TABLE 4
Number and percent of victims of stalking with technology, by type of stalking behavior, 2016

Stalking behavior	Number of victims ^a	Percent of victims	Percent of all persons ^b
Total stalking with technology	3,085,550	100%	1.2%
Made unwanted calls to victim/left voice messages/sent text messages/used telephone to excessively contact victim	2,070,400	67.1	0.8
Sent victim unwanted emails/messages using the internet or social media apps/websites like Instagram/Twitter/Facebook	1,542,570	50.0	0.6
Monitored victim's activities using social media apps/websites like Instagram/Twitter/Facebook	1,067,800	34.6	0.4
Posted/threatened to post inappropriate/unwanted/personal information about victim on internet ^c	818,550	26.5	0.3
Spied on victim/monitored victim's activities using technologies such as a listening device, a camera, or computer/cellphone monitoring software	585,770	19.0	0.2
Tracked victim's whereabouts with electronic device/application such as GPS/app on victim's cellphone	283,630	9.2	0.1

Note: Details may not sum to totals because a victim could experience more than one behavior of stalking with technology. Total population age 16 or older was 256,432,020. See appendix table 3 for standard errors.

^aNumber of persons age 16 or older who experienced stalking victimization in the past year.

^bPercentage of persons age 16 or older who experienced stalking victimization in the past year.

^cIncludes posting private photographs, videos, or rumors.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

Females were stalked more than twice as often as males

The prevalence of stalking was higher for females (2.0%) than for males (0.9%) (table 5). The overall prevalence of stalking did not vary significantly by race or ethnicity. Persons ages 20 to 24 (2.3%) were stalked

more often than persons age 35 or older. Divorced (2.8%) or separated (3.7%) persons were stalked more often than persons of all other marital statuses. Persons in households with annual incomes of less than \$10,000 (2.8%) were stalked more often than persons in households with annual incomes of \$10,000 or more.

TABLE 5
Number and percent of stalking victims, by demographic characteristics of victims, 2016

Victim demographic characteristic	Number of victims ^a	Percent of all persons ^b	Standard error	
			Number of victims	Percent of all persons
Total	3,788,800	1.5%	117,999	0.05%
Sex				
Male*	1,115,670	0.9%	64,106	0.05%
Female	2,673,140 †	2.0 †	99,196	0.07
Race/ethnicity				
White ^c	2,522,390	1.5%	96,366	0.06%
Black ^c	428,390 †	1.4	39,697	0.13
Hispanic	543,360 †	1.3	44,717	0.11
Other ^{c,d}	294,660 †	1.5	32,913	0.17
Age				
16–19	259,060 †	1.5% †	30,857	0.18%
20–24*	496,660	2.3	42,749	0.20
25–34	873,720 †	2.0	56,724	0.13
35–49	1,072,550 †	1.8 †	62,854	0.10
50–64	709,760 †	1.1 †	51,118	0.08
65 or older	377,050 †	0.8 †	37,239	0.08
Marital status				
Never married	1,558,570 †	2.0% †	75,774	0.10%
Married	1,076,600 †	0.8 †	62,973	0.05
Widowed	157,520	1.0 †	24,052	0.16
Divorced	792,470 †	2.8	54,018	0.19
Separated*	189,690	3.7	26,398	0.50
Household income				
Less than \$10,000*	419,350	2.8%	39,276	0.26%
\$10,000–\$14,999	253,370 †	2.1 ‡	30,516	0.25
\$15,000–\$24,999	505,490	1.9 †	43,128	0.16
\$25,000–\$34,999	445,030	1.6 †	40,462	0.15
\$35,000–\$49,999	518,480 ‡	1.3 †	43,680	0.11
\$50,000–\$74,999	654,520 †	1.4 †	49,085	0.11
\$75,000 or more	992,560 †	1.1 †	60,463	0.07

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. Total population age 16 or older was 256,432,020. See *Measuring stalking victimization* for more information on the measurement of stalking in the Supplemental Victimization Survey. See appendix table 4 for population estimates.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

‡Difference with comparison group is significant at the 90% confidence level.

^aNumber of persons age 16 or older who experienced stalking victimization in the past year.

^bPercentage of persons age 16 or older who experienced stalking victimization in the past year.

^cExcludes persons of Hispanic origin (e.g., “white” refers to non-Hispanic whites and “black” refers to non-Hispanic blacks).

^dIncludes Asians, Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders, American Indians or Alaska Natives, and persons of two or more races.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

Most stalking victims knew their offender

One offender committed the unwanted contacts and behaviors for more than half of stalking victims (table 6). Most stalking victims said they knew the offender. In 2016, 69% of victims of stalking knew their offender in some capacity. Victims were more likely to be stalked by a well-known or casual acquaintance (36%) or a current or ex-intimate partner (27%) than by some other relative (6%).¹

Victims were three times more likely to be stalked by an ex-intimate partner (21%) than a current intimate partner (7%). A greater portion of victims were stalked by ex-intimate partners than by persons of all other victim-offender relationships.

In 2016, about 17% of victims were stalked by a stranger. About 13% of victims were unable to identify their relationship to the offender.

¹Intimate partners includes current or former spouses or partners, boyfriends or girlfriends, or other romantic or sexual partners.

TABLE 6
Percent of stalking victims, by number of offenders and victim-offender relationship, 2016

	Total stalking	Standard error
Total	100%	~
Number of offenders		
One*	56.9%	1.55%
Two or more	33.6 †	1.47
Unknown	9.2 †	0.90
Victim-offender relationship^a		
Known	69.4%	1.44%
Intimate partner ^b	27.4	1.39
Current partner	6.8 †	0.78
Ex-partner*	20.7	1.26
Other relative	6.0 †	0.74
Well-known/casual acquaintance	36.0 †	1.50
Friend/ex-friend	7.5 †	0.82
Acquaintance/in-law or relative of spouse or ex-spouse/friends of offender	10.1 †	0.94
Roommates/housemates/boarders/neighbors	6.6 †	0.77
Professional acquaintances ^c	7.7 †	0.83
Other	4.1 †	0.62
Strangers	16.9 †	1.17
Unknown relationship	12.9 †	1.04
Number of victims	3,788,800	117,999

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to missing data. See *Measuring stalking victimization* for more information on the measurement of stalking in the Supplemental Victimization Survey.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

~Not applicable.

^aIncludes characteristics for single and multiple offenders. For multiple offenders, victims were asked if the offenders worked alone or together as a team. If the offender worked alone, victims were asked about the offender who had stalked them most recently. If offenders acted together, victims were asked if there was one who was most responsible. Victims were asked about the one offender's or the multiple offenders' characteristics. If the victims did not know the number of offenders, they were asked to focus on the most recent person who had stalked them.

^bIncludes current or former spouses or partners, boyfriends or girlfriends, or other romantic or sexual partners.

^cIncludes schoolmates, supervisors (current or former), co-workers (current or former), teachers or school staff, customers or clients, patients, students, and employees (current or former).

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

Nearly a quarter of stalking victims said the stalking behaviors lasted 2 years or more

Forty-five percent of stalking victims experienced stalking behaviors that lasted one month to less than one year (table 7). Twenty-four percent of victims said the stalking behaviors lasted 2 years or more. About 1% of victims did not know how long they had been stalked.

For more than half (57%) of stalking victims, the stalking behaviors occurred 2 to 10 times during the victimization. About 1 in 10 victims said the stalking behaviors happened too many times to count. More than 5% of stalking victims did not know or could not remember how many times the behaviors had occurred.

At the time of the interview, stalking behaviors were still going on for more than a quarter of victims (table 8). In cases where the stalking behaviors had stopped, 51% of the victims took measures to stop the behaviors. These measures included changing or blocking a phone number, email, or social media account or getting a new phone or computer; talking to the offender; moving; getting a restraining, protection, or no-contact order; or getting married or starting a new relationship. Changing or blocking a phone number, email, or social media account or getting a new phone or computer (23%) was the most common measure victims took that stopped stalking behaviors. About 20% of victims said the behaviors stopped because someone intervened, such as a friend or relative, police, or others.

TABLE 7
Percent of stalking victims, by duration and frequency of stalking, 2016

	Total stalking	Standard error
Total	100%	~
Duration		
Less than 1 month	16.6%	1.16%
1 month to less than 1 year	45.3	1.55
1 year to less than 2 years	12.5	1.03
2 years or more	23.9	1.33
Unknown	1.2	0.34
Frequency		
2 to 10 times ^a	57.4%	1.54%
11 to 50 times	18.7	1.21
More than 50 times	7.9	0.84
Too many times to count	9.4	0.91
Don't know/don't remember number of times	5.6	0.72
Number of victims	3,788,800	117,999

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to rounding and missing data. See *Measuring stalking victimization* for more information on the measurement of stalking in the Supplemental Victimization Survey.

~Not applicable.

^aUnwanted contacts or behaviors had to happen more than once for the respondent to screen into the Supplemental Victimization Survey.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

TABLE 8**Percent of stalking victims, by whether the stalking was ongoing, 2016**

	Total stalking	Standard error
Total	100%	~
Stalking behaviors are still ongoing	28.3%	1.40%
Stalking behaviors have stopped	62.0%	1.52
Reason why stalking behaviors have stopped	100%	~
Victim took measures to stop behaviors	50.8	1.98%
Changed/blocked phone number/email/social media account or got a new phone/computer	23.1	1.67
Talked to offender	12.0	1.29
Moved	8.2	1.09
Got a restraining/protection/no-contact order	5.4	0.89
Got married/started a new relationship	2.2	0.57
Someone intervened	19.6	1.57
Friend/relative	6.9	1.00
Police	6.7	0.99
Others ^a	6.0	0.94
Behaviors stopped because offender—	14.0	1.37
Was arrested/incarcerated	5.2	0.88
Moved	3.9	0.77
Started a new relationship	3.1	0.68
Got help/counseling	1.8	0.52
Other ^b	19.9	1.58
Unknown	20.8	1.61
Unknown whether stalking behaviors are still ongoing	8.6%	0.87%
Number of victims	3,788,800	117,999

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to rounding and missing data and because a victim could select more than one reason that the stalking stopped. See *Measuring stalking victimization* for more information on the measurement of stalking in the Supplemental Victimization Survey.

~Not applicable.

^aIncludes employer; school official, faculty, or staff; clergy or faith leader; or some other person.

^bIncludes the offender died and other reasons why the stalking behaviors stopped.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

Methodology

Data collection

The Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS) is a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) that the U.S. Census Bureau carries out for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). The NCVS collects data on crimes reported or not reported to police against persons age 12 or older from a nationally representative sample of U.S. households. The sample includes persons living in group quarters (such as dormitories, rooming houses, and religious-group dwellings) and excludes persons living in military barracks and in institutional settings (such as correctional or hospital facilities) and persons who are homeless.

From July 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016, persons age 16 or older in sampled NCVS households received the SVS at the end of the NCVS interview. Proxy responders to the NCVS interview did not receive the SVS. Unlike in 2006 when BJS first administered the SVS, if the 2016 NCVS interview was conducted in a language other than English, the SVS interview could be conducted in that language, either by the interviewer or a reliable translator. All NCVS and SVS interviews were conducted using computer-assisted personal interviewing, either by telephone or in-person visit. Of the 126,500 original NCVS-eligible respondents age 16 or older, approximately 96,300 completed the SVS questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 76.1%. The SVS response rate is similar to the NCVS response rate.

The combined SVS unit response rate for NCVS households, NCVS persons, and SVS persons was 58.3%. Because of the level of non-response, a bias analysis was conducted. The results indicated that there was little or no substantive bias due to non-response in the SVS estimates.

The SVS collected individual-level data on the prevalence of stalking victimization among persons, the characteristics of stalking victims, and the patterns of reporting to the police and other authorities. Respondents were asked whether they were stalked during the 12 months prior to the interview. For example, persons interviewed in July 2016 were asked about stalking victimization that occurred between July 2015 and June 2016. Stalking victimizations are classified by the year of the survey and not by the year of the victimization.

Persons who reported a stalking victimization were asked more detailed questions about their victimization and their responses to it, such as the victim-offender relationship, physical and emotional consequences to the victim, self-protective measures taken, and the response of the criminal justice system. For most sections of the survey, the SVS asked stalking victims to think about the person or persons who committed these unwanted contacts or behaviors in the last 12 months when answering questions.

Changes to the measurement of stalking victimization in the SVS

BJS first collected data from the SVS in 2006. The supplement was designed in 2005, shortly before federal stalking laws changed under the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 (VAWA). VAWA expanded the legal definition of cyberstalking to include all communications via software that use the internet or internet-based technologies. The law also expanded the victim-harm requirement to include substantial emotional harm to the victim in addition to actual or reasonable fear.²

In 2013, VAWA was amended to address presence, intimidation, substantial emotional distress, and cyberstalking.³ First, the law was expanded to apply to any person stalking another person within U.S. waters, territorial jurisdictions, or states. Second, the stalker's intent previously had to be to kill, injure, harass, or place a person under surveillance, and this was expanded to include intimidation. Third, the law was expanded to include acts that caused, were intended to cause, or would be reasonably expected to cause substantial emotional distress. Finally, the definition of cyberstalking was expanded to include any electronic communication, including interstate and foreign electronic communication.

In 2015, BJS redesigned the 2006 SVS instrument to incorporate the 2005 and 2013 updates to VAWA. The redesigned instrument began with a series of screener questions about each element of VAWA's stalking definition. The screener included expanded questions about unwanted contacts and behaviors

²Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005, 109 U.S.C. § 3402 et seq. (2005). <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-109hr3402enr/pdf/BILLS-109hr3402enr.pdf>

³Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2013, 113 U.S.C. § 2261A et seq. (2013). <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113s47enr/pdf/BILLS-113s47enr.pdf>

associated with traditional stalking and stalking with technology. Separate screener questions were also developed to measure victim responses of fear and substantial emotional distress. If the respondent's answers identified them as a stalking victim, the survey instrument included additional questions focused on details of the stalking victimization. In addition to the changes to the instrument, BJS lowered the minimum age of survey respondents from 18 to 16. Due to these changes, estimates from the 2016 SVS cannot be compared to estimates from the 2006 SVS.

The 2016 SVS can be used to estimate stalking prevalence for persons age 16 or older in the U.S. The expansions to the stalking screening questions allowed for better measurement of the types of stalking behaviors experienced by respondents, especially stalking with technology. Improvements to the questions about the stalking incident enhanced the ability to describe the characteristics of stalking victimizations.

Defining stalking victimization

There is no nationwide definition of stalking victimization. However, the federal definition and many state definitions include similar components. In developing the SVS, BJS used the expertise of a range of federal (including the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women and Office for Victims of Crime) and private sources in the fields of criminal justice and victim services.

State stalking laws

The federal government, the 50 states, and the District of Columbia have criminal laws to address stalking. However, the legal definition of stalking varies across jurisdictions. State laws vary regarding definitions of fear and emotional distress. The 50 states and the District of Columbia specify that there must have been a repeated course of conduct (**table 9**).

In addition, criminal laws in the 50 states and the District of Columbia include the element of actual fear in their stalking definition. Most states and the District of Columbia also include the element of reasonable fear, defined as behaviors that would cause a reasonable person to be fearful. Three-quarters of the states and the District of Columbia include the element of emotional distress, which is consistent with changes in federal laws. About half of these states and the District of Columbia indicate that there may also be an element of reasonable emotional distress.

All state laws require actual fear, reasonable fear, emotional distress, or reasonable emotional distress to be present for the repeated course of conduct to be defined as stalking. The laws vary regarding the standard and level of fear or emotional distress required, depending on what is included in the law and whether there are different classifications of stalking.

TABLE 9**State criminal laws on stalking, by elements of the crime, 2018**

	State law addresses—				
	Repeated course of conduct	Actual fear	Reasonable fear	Actual emotional distress	Reasonable emotional distress
Alabama	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alaska	✓	✓	--	--	--
Arizona	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
Arkansas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
California	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
Colorado	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Connecticut	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Delaware	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
District of Columbia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Florida	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
Georgia	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
Hawaii	✓	✓	--	--	--
Idaho	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Illinois	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iowa	✓	✓	✓	--	--
Kansas	✓	✓	✓	--	--
Kentucky	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Louisiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maine	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maryland	✓	✓	✓	--	--
Massachusetts	✓	✓	--	✓	✓
Michigan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minnesota	✓	✓	--	✓	--
Mississippi	✓	✓	✓	--	--
Missouri	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Montana	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
Nebraska	✓	✓	--	--	--
Nevada	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
New Hampshire	✓	✓	✓	--	--
New Jersey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
New Mexico	✓	✓	✓	--	--
New York	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
North Carolina	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
North Dakota	✓	✓	✓	--	--
Ohio	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
Oklahoma	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oregon	✓	✓	✓	--	--
Pennsylvania	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
Rhode Island	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
South Carolina	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
South Dakota	✓	✓	✓	--	--
Tennessee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Texas	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
Utah	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vermont	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Virginia	✓	✓	✓	--	--
Washington	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
West Virginia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wisconsin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wyoming	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: For the behaviors to be defined as stalking, every state and the District of Columbia require a repeated course of conduct and actual fear, reasonable fear, emotional distress, or reasonable emotional distress to be present.

✓ State law includes this element.

--State law does not include this element.

Source: Data based on Bureau of Justice Statistics review of stalking laws in each state and the District of Columbia as of April 2018.

Measuring stalking with the SVS

Because the SVS definition of stalking is aligned with the federal definition, to be classified as a victim of stalking in the SVS, the respondent must have experienced a repeated course of conduct that caused them to experience fear or substantial emotional distress or that would cause a reasonable person to experience fear or substantial emotional distress. The SVS screener questions collected the following elements of that definition: (1) unwanted contacts or behaviors; (2) a repeated course of conduct (i.e., experiencing the same behavior or contact more than once or experiencing two or more different behaviors one time); (3) actual fear; (4) substantial emotional distress; and (5) reasonable fear.

Questions used to measure stalking behaviors

SQ1. In the past 12 months, have you experienced any unwanted contacts or behaviors? By that I mean has anyone—

- a. Followed you around and watched you?
- b. [Has anyone] Sneaked into your home, car, or any place else and did unwanted things to let you know they had been there?
- c. [Has anyone] Waited for you at your home, work, school, or any place else when you didn't want them to?
- d. [Still thinking about unwanted contacts and behaviors, in the past 12 months, has anyone...]
Showed up, rode or drove by places where you were when they had no business being there?
- e. [Has anyone] Left or sent unwanted items, cards, letters, presents, flowers, or any other unwanted items?
- f. [Has anyone] Harassed or repeatedly asked your friends or family for information about you or your whereabouts?

Now I want to ask about unwanted contacts or behaviors using various technologies, such as your phone, the Internet, or social media apps. Again, please DO NOT include bill collectors, solicitors, or other sales people. In the past 12 months, has anyone—

- g. Made unwanted phone calls to you, left voice messages, sent text messages, or used the phone excessively to contact you?

- h. [Has anyone] Spied on you or monitored your activities using technologies such as a listening device, camera, or computer or cell phone monitoring software?
- i. [Still thinking about unwanted contacts or behaviors, in the past 12 months, has anyone...]
Tracked your whereabouts with an electronic tracking device or application, such as GPS or an application on your cell phone?
- j. [Has anyone] Posted or threatened to post inappropriate, unwanted, or personal information about you on the Internet, this includes private photographs, videos, or spreading rumors?
- k. [Has anyone] Sent unwanted e-mails or messages using the Internet, for example, using social media apps or websites like Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook?
- l. [Has anyone] Monitored your activities using social media apps like Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook?

Question used to measure repetition

SQ2. Has anyone done (this/any of these things) to you more than once in the past 12 months?

If the respondent answered 'no' to this question, but had experienced more than one of the stalking behaviors, the interview continued and they were asked about fear and emotional distress.

Questions used to measure actual fear and substantial emotional distress

SQ3a. Did any of these unwanted contacts or behaviors make you fear for your safety or the safety of someone close to you?

SQ3b. Did any of these unwanted contacts or behaviors cause you substantial emotional distress?

Questions used to measure reasonable fear

Now I have some additional questions about the time someone {behavior₁}, {behavior₂}, and {behavior_x...}. Thinking about the person or persons who committed these unwanted contacts or behaviors in the past 12 months, did any of the following occur—

SQ4. Did this person or these people damage or attempt to damage or destroy property belonging to you or someone else in your household?

SQ5. [Thinking about the person or persons who committed these unwanted contacts or behaviors in the past 12 months...] Did this person or these people—

- Physically attack you?
- Attempt to attack you?
- Threaten to attack you?

SQ6. [Thinking about the person or persons who committed these unwanted contacts or behaviors in the past 12 months...] Did this person or these people—

- Physically attack someone close to you or a pet?
- Attempt to attack someone close to you or a pet?
- Threaten to attack someone close to you or a pet?

Standard error computations

When national estimates are derived from a sample, caution must be taken when comparing one estimate to another. Although one estimate may be larger than another, estimates based on a sample have some degree of sampling error. The sampling error of an estimate depends on several factors, including the amount of variation in the responses and the size of the sample. When the sampling error around an estimate is accounted for, differences in estimates may not be statistically significant.

One measure of the sampling error associated with an estimate is the standard error. The standard error may vary from one estimate to the next. Generally, an estimate with a small standard error provides a more reliable approximation of the true value than an estimate with a larger standard error. Estimates with relatively large standard errors are associated with less precision and reliability and should be interpreted with caution.

Generalized variance functions (GVF) parameters were used to generate standard errors for each point estimate (e.g., numbers, percentages, and rates) in this report. To generate standard errors around prevalence estimates from the SVS, the U.S. Census Bureau produces GVF parameters for BJS. The GVFs account for aspects of the NCVS's complex sample design and represent the curve fitted to a selection of individual standard errors based on the Balanced Repeated Replication technique.

BJS conducted statistical tests to determine whether differences in estimated numbers, percentages, and rates in this report were statistically significant once sampling error was accounted for. Using statistical analysis programs developed specifically for the NCVS, all comparisons in the text were tested for significance. The primary test procedure used was the Student's t-statistic, which tests the difference between two sample estimates. Findings described in this report as higher, lower, or different passed a test at either the 0.05 level (95% confidence level) or 0.10 level (90% confidence level) of statistical significance. Figures and tables in this report should be referenced for testing on specific findings. Caution is required when comparing estimates not explicitly discussed in this report.

Estimates and standard errors of the estimates in this report may be used to generate a confidence interval around the estimate as a measure of the margin of error. The following example illustrates how standard errors may be used to generate confidence intervals:

Based on the SVS, in 2016 an estimated 1.5% of all persons age 16 or older experienced stalking victimization. (See table 1.) Using GVFs, BJS determined that the estimated prevalence rate has a standard error of 0.05. (See appendix table 1.) A confidence interval around the estimate is generated by multiplying the standard error by ± 1.96 (the t-score of a normal, two-tailed distribution that excludes 2.5% at either end of the distribution). Therefore, the 95% confidence interval around the 1.5% estimate is $1.5 \pm (0.05 \times 1.96)$ or (1.39% to 1.57%). In other words, if BJS used the same sampling method to select different samples and computed an interval estimate for each sample, it would expect the true population parameter (percentage of stalking victims) to fall within the interval estimates 95% of the time.

For this report, BJS also calculated a coefficient of variation (CV) for all estimates, representing the ratio of the standard error to the estimate. CVs (not shown in tables) provide another measure of reliability and a means for comparing the precision of estimates across measures with differing levels or metrics.

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Estimates and standard errors for figure 1: Prevalence of stalking, by type of stalking, 2016

	Estimate	Standard error	95% confidence interval	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
Total	1.5%	0.05%	1.39%	1.57%
Traditional stalking only ^a	0.3 †	0.02	0.24	0.31
Stalking with technology only ^b	0.5 †	0.03	0.46	0.57
Both traditional stalking and stalking with technology*	0.7	0.03	0.63	0.75

*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

^aIncludes victims who only experienced the following types of unwanted behaviors: following; sneaking into, waiting at, or showing up at a place; leaving or sending unwanted items; or harassing friends or family about the victim's whereabouts.

^bIncludes victims who only experienced the following types of unwanted behaviors: making unwanted phone calls, leaving voice mail messages, or sending text messages; spying using technology; tracking the victim's whereabouts with an electronic tracking device or application; posting or threatening to post unwanted information on the internet; sending emails or messages using the internet; or monitoring activities using social media.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

APPENDIX TABLE 2

Standard errors for table 3: Number and percent of victims of traditional stalking, by type of stalking behavior, 2016

Stalking behavior	Number of victims	Percent of victims	Percent of all persons
Total traditional stalking	95,410	~	0.04%
Followed victim around/watched victim	73,106	1.90%	0.03
Showed up at/rode by/drove by places victim was when the offender had no business being there	68,763	1.93	0.03
Harassed/repeatedly asked victim's friends/family for information about their whereabouts	60,589	1.89	0.02
Waited for victim at home/work/school/any other place when victim did not want them to be there	57,619	1.86	0.02
Left/sent victim unwanted items/cards/letters/presents/flowers	47,150	1.66	0.02
Sneaked into victim's home/car/any other place and did things to let victim know they had been there	41,716	1.52	0.02

~Not applicable.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

APPENDIX TABLE 3

Standard errors for table 4: Number and percent of victims of stalking with technology, by type of stalking behavior, 2016

Stalking behavior	Number of victims	Percent of victims	Percent of all persons
Total stalking with technology	106,545	~	0.04%
Made unwanted calls to victim/left voice messages/sent text messages/used telephone to excessively contact victim	87,324	1.63%	0.03
Sent victim unwanted emails/messages using the internet or social media apps/websites like Instagram/Twitter/Facebook	75,384	1.73	0.03
Monitored victim's activities using social media apps/websites like Instagram/Twitter/Facebook	62,714	1.64	0.02
Posted/threatened to post inappropriate/unwanted/personal information about victim on internet	54,901	1.53	0.02
Spied on victim/monitored victim's activities using technologies such as a listening device, a camera, or computer/cellphone monitoring software	46,432	1.35	0.02
Tracked victim's whereabouts with electronic device/application, such as GPS/app on victim's cellphone	32,290	1.00	0.01

~Not applicable.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.

APPENDIX TABLE 4**Population estimates for table 5: Number and percent of stalking victims, by demographic characteristics of victims, 2016**

Victim demographic characteristic	Population age 16 or older
Total	256,432,020
Sex	
Male	124,495,830
Female	131,936,180
Race/ethnicity	
White ^a	164,940,900
Black ^a	31,436,250
Hispanic	40,687,330
Other ^{a,b}	19,367,530
Age	
16–19	17,162,670
20–24	21,578,750
25–34	44,540,360
35–49	61,266,890
50–64	63,443,210
65 or older	48,440,140
Marital status	
Never married	79,185,130
Married	127,877,140
Widowed	15,221,900
Divorced	27,818,370
Separated	5,193,230
Household income	
Less than \$10,000	15,194,230
\$10,000–\$14,999	11,906,530
\$15,000–\$24,999	25,993,250
\$25,000–\$34,999	27,141,010
\$35,000–\$49,999	39,372,150
\$50,000–\$74,999	45,186,460
\$75,000 or more	91,638,410

^aExcludes persons of Hispanic origin (e.g., “white” refers to non-Hispanic whites and “black” refers to non-Hispanic blacks).

^bIncludes Asians, Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders, American Indians or Alaska Natives, and persons of two or more races.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Supplemental Victimization Survey, 2016.



The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for measuring crime, criminal victimization, criminal offenders, victims of crime, correlates of crime, and the operation of criminal and civil justice systems at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels. BJS collects, analyzes, and disseminates reliable statistics on crime and justice systems in the United States, supports improvements to state and local criminal justice information systems, and participates with national and international organizations to develop and recommend national standards for justice statistics. Doris J. James is the acting director.

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