Definitions, criteria, & variations

Stalking in College Student Dating Relationships: A Descriptive Investigation

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Stalking: Definitions and Prevalence

While it is well recognized that stalking behaviors occur in some intimate relationships (Duntley and Buss 2010), among researchers, there is no agreed upon definition, set of criteria, or behaviors that constitute stalking (Duntley and Buss 2010; Johnson and Kercher 2009), and it is outside the scope of this paper to detail the debate in the literature of what constitutes stalking (see Duntley and Buss 2010). Because of this lack of definitional agreement, researchers often follow legal definitions of stalking. Legal definitions of stalking include: the willful, malicious, and repeated following and harassing of another person that threatens his or her safety (Meloy and Gothard 1995, p. 258) and “a course of conduct directed at a specific person that involves repeated visual or physical proximity, non-consensual communication, or verbal, written, or implied threats or a combination thereof, that would cause a reasonable person fear” (The National Criminal Justice Association 1993, pp. 43–44). Thus, legal definitions of stalking within the United States require a repeated pattern of behaviors that produce fear in victims.

Thus, in the current study we adopt a broad conceptualization of stalking, including both the legal and non-legal definitions provided above.

It is important to differentiate stalking behaviors from other forms of aggression, particularly psychological aggression.