

... Harassment and Stalking

Harassment

Harassment affects a victim's life by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. This can occur in the work place, neighbourhood or home. Northumbria Police define harassment as: any form of unwanted, non-verbal or physical conduct which occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person.

The behaviour must happen more than once, it can be the same behaviour or different behaviours executed by the same person. These actions can happen simultaneously or they can happen months apart.

Actions such as sending unwanted texts, unwanted voicemails/emails, damage to a property, standing outside someone's house or driving past it for no reason other than to intimidate are all examples of harassment.

Perpetrators can face up to 6 months imprisonment for harassment. The perpetrator can face 5 years imprisonment if a victim fears violence.

Harassment and stalking usually occur together, causing increasing distress to victims.

Stalking

Stalking is a severe and distinct form of harassment. Stalking curtails a victim's freedom by taking away their sense of safety and making them feel alarmed or distressed. Northumbria Police define stalking as: a pattern of unwanted, fixated and obsessive behaviour which is intrusive.

This may include:

- Following a person
- Monitoring someone's use of the internet, email or other electronic communication
- Publishing something which relates or appears to relate to another person
- Threats to harm a person
- Sending unwanted gifts
- Contacting or attempting to contact a person
- Watching or spying on a person (which can be through the use of technology)
- Interfering with or damaging property
- Loitering in a place (public or private)
- Repeatedly going uninvited to someone's home

Perpetrators of stalking who turn up unannounced are more likely to cause physical harm to their victims

(Dr Jane Monkton-Smith, 2017)



A third of threats that were received by victims online by a partner or ex-partner were later carried out.

(Women's Aid, 2018)

Support available

Women's Aid

Tel: **0808 2000 247** (24/7 helpline)

Email: helpline@womensaid.org.uk

Website: www.womensaid.org

Northumbria Police

Tel: **999** emergency/**101** non-emergency

Website: www.northumbria.police.uk

Victims First Northumbria

Tel: **0800 011 3116**

Website: victimsfirstnorthumbria.org.uk

National Stalking Helpline

Tel: **0808 802 0300**

Alice Ruggles Trust

Alice was stalked and murdered by her boyfriend.

Website:

www.alicerugglestrust.org/contact

Paladin NSAS

Tel: **020 38664107**

Email: info.mailbox@paladin.cjsm.net

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

Tel: **020 7091 0014**

Website: www.suzylamplugh.org



Digitally Assisted Stalking

These days, stalking often includes an element of technology. This is recognised as “digitally assisted stalking” by Northumbria Police.

There are different types of technology that offenders can access; some bear no costs, whereas others can cost hundreds of pounds.

“Stalkers by their nature are persistent and will often find the time, money and skills to use technology against their victims” (J.Perry, Digital Stalking: A guide to technology risks to behaviour, 2012, p.7).

Victims are told to be aware of how the following types of technology can be abused in order to stalk and harass:

- Social media including WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube and Messenger can show activity, locations and personal details.
- Smart home devices such as thermostats, doorbell cameras, CCTV and security can be installed into homes, TVs, laptops, phones and can be switched on without the victim being aware.
- GPS can record the victim's location from a phone and a car. Victims are asked to turn this setting off.
- WIFI/IP addresses can be hacked in to and used to see what their victim has been searching for and at what location.
- Geotagging shows the exact location of where the victim is. Victims are asked to turn this off and to tell their friends not to tag them in locations.

If you are concerned about being stalked digitally, use a library computer or other independent devices. Women's Aid have advice on how to cover your tracks online.

Whitelist is an application for mobiles used to ensure you will **ONLY** receive calls from those you accept. Victims can also set up Google alerts which informs them if their name/number etc. have appeared on the internet.

Perpetrators may send themselves abusive emails/messages from a victim's account to incriminate the victim.

(Jennifer Perry, 2012, *Digital Stalking: A guide to technology risks to victims*, p.37)

Case Study

Katie was a regular user of Ebay. When she ended her relationship with her boyfriend, he started to monitor her account after she had moved out. When Katie bought something on Ebay, her ex-partner contacted the seller stating the item had not arrived. He asked the seller to verify Katie's address. He found Katie and beat her severely causing lasting damage (Womens's Aid, 2019).