Psychologists Who Are Stalked by Their Clients: The Dangers of Working in Direct Care

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What Is Stalking?

Behaviors That Are...

- Unwanted, Wilful, Intrusive
- Threaten Safety
- Develops in Stages And Changes Over Time
- Doesn’t “just happen”
- Generally < 2 Weeks, But Average is 2 Years

Communications
- Letters
- Phone Calls
- Email
- Texts
- Social Media

Approaches
- Waiting
- Following
- Being Kept Under Surveillance
- “Chance” Encounters

Escalation
Stalkers…

1. Actually Had A Relationship With Victim
2. Were Only Acquaintances
3. Were Strangers

Characteristics of Stalkers

- Mostly Male: Female
- Older Than Other Criminals
- Prior Criminal and Psychiatric Histories

Characteristics of Stalkers

- Unsuccessful Employment, Relationships
- Inadequate Social Skills
- Multiple Methods of Pursuit and Locations
- 2/3 At Least Weekly

What Is Inside The Mind of A Stalker?
Why Are Psychologists at Risk?

1. Formation of a Romantic or Child-like Attachment
2. Resentment: Real or Perceived Injury or Rejection.
3. Misinterpretation of Interest and Sympathy.
4. Delusional Beliefs (e.g., Erotomania)
5. Other Psychological Issues.
1 in 3 Will Fear for Their Lives
1 in 5 Will Be Attacked
1 in 4 Will Require Police Intervention
3% Carry a Weapon for Protection

Did You Know??

No correlation between skill level or experience and victimization
Clinical setting: months - years, vs. short lived.
Starts within 6 months of services.
1/3 of clinicians develop MH diagnosis

My Study
Are Clinical Boundaries and a Clinician’s Personality Traits Related to the Experience of Client Stalking Behaviors?

- Mostly Private Practice (65%)
- Clinical 60%, Ph.D. and Psy.D.
- Years in Practice (M = 23; SD = 12)
- 81% Licensed

- CBT 43%
- Integrative/Eclectic 29%
- Psychodynamic 14%
- Other (e.g., Family Systems) 10%
- Humanistic/Existential 4%
Behaviors Endorsed

- Unwanted emails/calls
- Followed
- "Chance" encounters
- Social media
- Threats to self and staff
- Sexual assault
- Killed pet

"Grabbed me by my shirt"
"Tried to strangle me"
"Attempted to stab me with a pencil/scissors"
"Threw items at me from my office"

Other Results...

Positive Correlations

Experience
- Unwanted Behaviors
- Level of Fear

Openness
- Unwanted Behaviors
- Communications
No Statistical Significance Between Males and Females on:
1. Amount of behaviors experienced
2. Experience of communications/approaches
3. Level of fear
4. Setting
5. Theoretical orientation

▸ Experience and openness are strongest predictors of client behaviors

Purpose of My Study

• Raise Awareness
• Promote Discussion
• Safe Forum for Disclosure

AND...

Create A Safety Awareness Program

How Can I Protect Myself?
Documentation

- Time
- Place
- Witnesses
- Evidence
- Professional Contact and Response (e.g., police)
- Your Reaction (e.g., fear)

Safeguard Personal Information

- Online
- Office
- Basic Safety Considerations

Informed Consent

- Threats
- Weapons Disclaimer
- Revisit as Necessary

Boundaries

- Create
- Maintain
- Revisit

Givers need to set limits because takers rarely do.
Communication

- Staff
- Colleague Assistance
- Consistency

Consultation

- Local
- State
- National (e.g., APA, ATAP)

Transfer or Terminate

- Threats = Destroyed Therapeutic Alliance
- Be Honest and Share Concerns

You Aren’t Alone!

- Therapy
- Self-Care
- Time Off
Stalking Resources


- Example of informed consent
- Clinical and Systemic Interventions

Psychological Associations

APA, (800) 374-2721 or (202) 336-5500
http://www.apa.org/

PPA, (703) 620-6000
http://www.papsy.org/

http://www.victimsofcrime.org/
http://our-programs/stalking-resource-center

http://www.atapworldwide.org/
http://www.workplacesrespond.org/

Tech Safety
https://www.techsafety.org/resources/

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
www.thenhotline.org

Victim Connect Resource Center:
855-4-VICTIM (855-484-2846)

Other Stalking Resources

Workplaces Respond To Domestic And Sexual Violence
National Resource System:
http://www.workplacesrespond.org/

National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-799-7233
www.thenhotline.org

Crime Victims Assistance Program
800-552-7192

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
www.ncadv.org

National Billion Dollar Budget
800-233-1770

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
www.thenhotline.org

Victim Connect Resource Center:
855-4-VICTIM (855-484-2846)
Recommended Books

Additional Articles and Resources

https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/media-spotlight/201401/when-therapist-is-being-stalked
http://www.apa.org/monitor/2014/10/improper-contact.aspx
http://kspope.com/stalking.php
http://www.outrageus.org/
https://www.stalkingriskprofile.com/
http://drreidmeloy.com/


