Introduction

- Bullying is an intentional, repeated, hostile act that is carried out over a period of time, typically involving a power disparity between the bully and the victim.

- Cyberstalking can be defined as repeated aggressive behavior towards another person on an online or computer-based format that makes a reasonable person fear for their safety (Finn, 2004).

- Cyberbullying can take multiple forms, including harassment, defamation, denigration, impersonation, exclusion, or cyberstalking (Samara et al., 2017)

- The internet provides a sense of anonymity for perpetrators to use in harassing victims, even though most digital input leads a trail back to the stalker.

- Eventually the identity of the stalker is known (Baum et al., 2009).

- Stalkers use the internet to collect information about their victims and to post destructive data about them, sometimes even impersonating the victim (Baum et al., 2009)

- Stalkers use information they have collected to cause extreme stress and destruction on the victim’s life (Baum et al., 2009).

- Cyber victims have been found to have low self esteem, symptoms of depression, and emotional and peer difficulties (Samara et al., 2017)

Cyberstalkers

- Cyberstalkers choose their victims and terrorize them based on a variety of factors including age, race, gender, sexual orientation, or religious preference (Alexy, Burgess, Baker, & Smoyak, 2005).

- Research has shown that stalking has effects on the emotional and mental health of the victims in an offline setting (Kampfuis & Emmelkamp, 2001).

- Victimization rates for cyberstalking have been noted from as low as 5% to as high as 85% of the population (Alexy, Burgess, Baker, & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij, Bocij, & McFarlane, 2003).

- Researchers have examined attachment, violence, anger, and jealousy as possible explanations for the behaviors of cyberstalking perpetrators (Strawhun, Adams, & Huss, 2013).

- As the use of digital technology increased over the years so has cyberstalking.

- Anti-stalking laws added provisions to include electronic communication (Fraser, Olsen, Lee, Southworth, & Tucker, 2010).

- Stalking was prevalent before the digital age but the danger includes giving the perpetrator more tools to engage with.

- Cyberstalking is also much more invasive for the victim (Fraser, Olsen, Lee, Southworth, & Tucker, 2010)

Cyberstalking Cases

- One in four victims report the stalker uses technology (Baum et al., 2009).

- Technology is an inexpensive way for stalkers to instill fear and harass their victims (Baum et al., 2009).

- Some technologies enable the collection of evidence while others make it hard to prove the identity of the perpetrator.

- This can lead harassment and stalking to continue for months before law enforcement is able to pursue action (Baum et al., 2009).

- Elements of stalking cases might focus on other charges without ever pursuing a stalking charge due to the complexity of some cases (Baum et al., 2009).

Forensic Implications

- Law enforcement has a small window of time to collect evidence in stalking cases. When taking legal action, law enforcement should look at all applicable laws that may have been broken.

- If stalking criteria are not met for the crime, computer crime laws may be applicable.

- Almost all computer crimes laws can be charged as federal crimes in the US because they can cross state lines in transmission (Baum et al., 2009).

- Legal protection orders may prevent perpetrators from contacting and impersonating the victim in the future (Baum et al., 2009).

- Many victims benefit from psychological help.

- More research is needed to evaluate bullying and cyberstalking of victims.

References


