

# Analysis of cyberstalking research identifies factors associated with perpetration, victimization

November 20 2023

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The widespread use of digital technologies and the Internet has spurred a new type of personal intrusion, known as cyberstalking. Incidences of

cyberstalking have risen, with the U.S. Department of Justice estimating that more than 1.3 million people experience this type of victimization annually. A new study has explored research to identify the factors associated with perpetration and victimization in cyberstalking. The study's findings can inform the development of efforts to prevent and address cyberstalking.

Conducted by a researcher at Sam Houston State University (SHSU), [the work](#) appears in the *Journal of Criminal Justice*.

"In light of both the high prevalence of cyberstalking and the harmful consequences associated with this type of victimization, it is important to understand more fully the factors that contribute to it," says Bitna Kim, professor of criminal justice at SHSU, who conducted the study. Kim is an expert whose work is promoted by the NCJA Crime and Justice Research Alliance.

Although cyberstalking does not involve [physical violence](#) like offline stalking, repeated and unwanted electronic communication can induce fear in victims and make them feel unsafe. Perpetrators are often difficult to find because of the anonymity of the Internet.

Kim identified nearly 60 studies on cyberstalking between 2002 and 2022. All the studies assessed repeated, unwanted electronic contacts that caused fear. Most of the research (76%) was conducted in the United States; studies were also done in Australia, Belgium, Spain, Turkey, Canada, Chile, Egypt, England, and Portugal. Participants included adults and adolescents.

Through a three-level meta-analytic approach, Kim assessed the relative validity of predictors associated with cyberstalking perpetration and victimization, including those related to individuals' sociodemographic factors (e.g., age, gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity), background

(previous experiences of cybercrime and victimization, as well as offline experiences), risk (e.g., antisocial patterns or attitudes, family risk, attachment issues), and protective domains (e.g., protective traits, guardianship and security). In each domain, she measured subdomains to identify contributing factors. Her ultimate goal: To determine the relation between a potential risk or protective factor and cyberstalking.

The background domain had the largest effect for cyberstalking perpetration and victimization, followed by the risk domain, while sociodemographic and protective domains had no significant effect. The effect of background and risk varied depending on the age of the participants and the country, highlighting the need for studies that identify the unique factors of cyberstalking in adults from various countries. Among the study's additional findings:

- People who engage in cyber-aggressive behaviors may put themselves at risk of being cyberstalked or retaliated against by victims.
- Offending experiences, both online and offline, correlated highly with cyberstalking victimization.
- Personality and psychological traits (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression) correlated strongly with both cyberstalking perpetration and victimization, as did risky relational traits (e.g., cheating behaviors, romantic jealousy, threats).
- Cyberstalking is similar to offline stalking in several ways, including that antisocial patterns (e.g., risky behaviors, [alcohol problems](#), tendency toward physical fighting, likelihood of carrying a weapon) were significantly associated with both cyberstalking perpetration and victimization.
- Cyberstalking differs from offline stalking in a variety of ways, including that personality and psychological traits relate strongly to cyberstalking but have little or no impact on offline stalking, and that victims of cyberstalking rarely know their stalkers.

"Providing a comprehensive picture of factors that increase and decrease the likelihood of cyberstalking perpetration and victimization can help institutions and governments create [prevention strategies](#)," explains Kim. "This is critical when allocating [limited resources](#) efficiently and targeting prevention strategies to areas with the greatest need."

In designing prevention strategies, Kim suggests that approaches targeting violence in general need to account for the overlap between offending and victimization, as well as the co-occurrence between offline violence and cyberviolence. For example, since the risk of perpetrating and suffering cyberstalking is higher among those who have been victimized online or offline, prevention efforts should consider these background factors.

**More information:** Bitna Kim, A multilevel meta-analysis of cyberstalking: Domains (and subdomains) of contributing factors, *Journal of Criminal Justice* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2023.102084](#)

Provided by Crime and Justice Research Alliance

Citation: Analysis of cyberstalking research identifies factors associated with perpetration, victimization (2023, November 20) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-11-analysis-cyberstalking-factors-perpetration-victimization.html>

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