

school reported harassment and stalking by an ex-boyfriend to campus police, but her complaint was not taken seriously. In fact, "The school ended up taking her scholarship away," says soc program director Alison Kiss, "Ostensibly because they thought it best that she get out of the city," which is what she eventually did. The perpetrator, in contrast, remained on campus.

Just days before the Virginia Tech shootings in fact, a 26-year-old employee at the University of Washington named Rebecca Griego was shot and killed at 9:30 a.m. while working in her office. The murderer was an ex-boyfriend who had stalked her for months.

"Authorities called it phone harassment," says Michelle Garcia, who notes that perhaps, "If they had named the behavior for what it was, they might have enforced it differently." Advocates say that it is this kind of dismissive attitude that trickles down to students who minimize the danger.

The stalking of Holly Huse and Christina Lilick eventually wound its way through the system and reached the Office of Judicial Affairs at Virginia Tech, which ultimately took no action against Cho.

According to Virginia law, had he been prosecuted for stalking, he would not have been eligible for a gun permit. ❁

Rebecca Griego's ex-boyfriend stalked her for months before killing her while at work at the University of Washington



Students from the University of Dayton in Ohio sign a banner to be sent to Virginia Tech after the massacre that left 33 people dead, including the killer. (AP Photo/Dayton Daily News, Jan Underwood)

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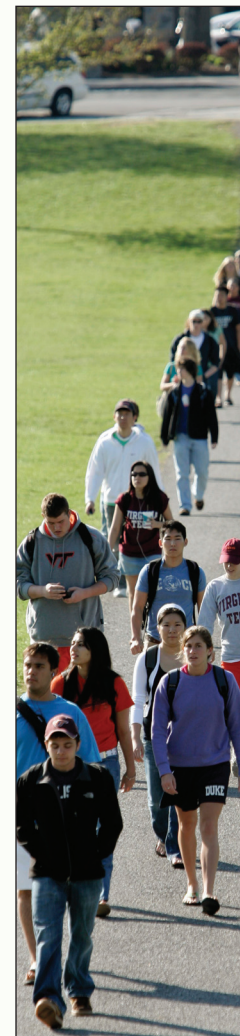
PICTURING A WORLD WITHOUT VIOLENCE

A PUBLICATION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUND

SPECIAL ISSUE



at Virginia Tech Before the massacre



(AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

AS WORD SPREAD about the mass shootings that occurred on the Virginia Tech campus that fateful April morning, we at FVPF were, like most observers, stunned and anxious for answers. When we heard that police assumed the first shootings to be domestic in nature, most likely involving an intimate partner or boyfriend as the perpetrator, our organizational commitment to the story became especially high.

Authorities were wrong, as it turned out. The killer was not a boyfriend or spurned ex-lover. But it wasn't long before we learned that the lone killer, 23-year-old Seung-Hui Cho, had a prior history of stalking female students at Virginia Tech. We found it significant, as did others, that these acts of sexual intimidation and harassment had gone virtually unchecked before the rampage.

The story prompted us to look more closely at stalking on college campuses not just at Virginia Tech, but nationwide. As we delved more deeply into this often-ambiguous crime, some noteworthy patterns began to emerge. Kristal Brent Zook reports. [TO PAGE 2 »](#)

Family Violence Prevention Fund

by Kristal Brent Zook

Young women between the ages of 18 and 29 are most at risk for being stalked.

THE MOST DEADLY school shooting in our history, the Virginia Tech massacre, began at West Ambler Johnston Hall around 7:15 a.m. on the morning of April 16, 2007, and ended at Norris Hall more than two hours later leaving 28 students and five faculty members dead. Despite these now familiar facts, there is much about that day we still do not understand.

Even after a special Governor's panel issued its findings and conclusions in August, we still do not know, for example, why Cho was seen "just standing...waiting" outside the dormitory of Emily Jane Hilscher prior to 7 a.m. that morning — or why Hilscher, 19, became his first victim.

As the story unfolded last spring, we learned that at least two female Virginia Tech students, Christina Lilick and Holly Huse, both 22, had been stalked by Cho in November and December of 2005. Huse lived not far from Cho's family home in Centreville, Virginia and Lilick attended high school with the killer. Neither woman knew him well. Both received unwanted Instant Messages, phone calls, and even disturbing late night visits to dorm rooms. Claiming to have been rejected by another woman, Cho talked of wanting to beat the woman up, recalled Lilick to members of the media. Authorities also believed that Cho came into the common area of one of the dormitory suites and drew a question mark on the message board, as he had often referred to himself as "the question mark."

Neither Lilick nor Huse pressed charges. Both were led to believe, according to press reports, that the situation was being handled. In fact, it was not.

As universities nationwide ramp up their emergency notification procedures this semester, and as some states fight to close loopholes in mental health procedures and easy access to guns, we thought it important to focus on this somewhat forgotten aspect of the Virginia Tech story: the prevalence and impact of stalking on college campuses.

As it turns out, the dynamics of stalking are particularly unique on college campuses. Perhaps the most important difference is that students, or young women between the ages of 18 and 29, are at the highest risk of being stalked, with somewhere between eight and 14 percent of women reporting such an experience. Some experts put the figure as high as 28 percent. Their high numbers are perhaps also due to the fact that women on campuses are particularly vulnerable, being away from the protection of parents and familiar environments for the very first time.

In addition, the form that stalking takes on campuses is particular. Experts estimate that as many as 80 percent of campus cases involve technology. Cyber stalking, in fact, is a critical new "gray area" legally, that is not yet well understood, and therefore even less likely to be uniformly defined or prosecuted.

Another complicating factor is the motives of university administrators, some of whom prefer to keep such crimes out of the public eye and to downplay them when they do occur for fear of negative publicity (such fears were seen most notably in the recent Eastern Michigan University case, whereby the botched cover-up of the rape and murder of a student in her dorm room led to the firing of the president



Police often feel that their hands are tied and that there's nothing they can do.

Police tape surrounds Norris Hall on the campus of Virginia Tech, Thursday, April 19, 2007, three days after the fatal shooting. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)

and two other officials).

Add these complications up, and the result can equal shamefully inadequate support for victims.

"The focus on campuses is warranted," says Michelle M. Garcia, Director of the Stalking Resource Center at the National Center for Victims of Crime, who adds that current research is needed on the prevalence of stalking on campuses as much of the existing data is between seven and eleven years old. Garcia is especially eager to see the results of the forthcoming U.S. Department of Justice's Annual National Crime Victimization Survey. For the first time ever, the federal study, available in January of 2008, will include new stalking data.

And there is yet another difference in campus cases: strong emerging evidence that stranger and acquaintance stalking (as opposed to cases involving intimate partners) is higher on campuses than it is in the general population.

This is a significant shift, says Carol E. Jordan, Director of the Center for Research on Violence Against Women at the University of Kentucky, who found that more than 40 percent of stalking cases on her campus involved strangers.

And yet, even with a wide variety of laws now in place (the first anti-stalking law was passed in California in 1990, while the federal Clery Act, established that same year, mandated that campus crimes be reported and made public on an annual basis), many anti-violence experts say that both law enforcement officials and victims still have a poor understanding of when stalking constitutes a criminal act.

Because most state stalking

laws require a "credible threat" be made against the victim (and most stalkers do not make direct threats), police often feel that their hands are tied and that there's nothing they can do. Their misperceptions can in turn, have a profound impact on how victims respond.

According to a 2000 U.S. Department of Justice study on the "Sexual Victimization of College Women," 83% of stalking incidents were not reported to police or campus law enforcement, with 72% of respondents saying that they "didn't think the incident was serious enough" and another 33% explaining that they "thought police wouldn't think it was serious." Of course, these two key points are connected.

And so the question arises, were the two young women at Virginia Tech assured by authorities that stalking was a serious crime and that they would be protected if they decided to press charges?

We still do not know what Holly Huse and Christina Lilick were told by campus police at the time they made their reports. Nor do we know whether they were appropriately warned about the dangers of stalking or encouraged to take the contacts more seriously.

What happens on college campuses, say some advocates, is that women who report stalking are often discouraged by university law enforcement officials and administrators who warn them against ruining another young student's life unnecessarily.

An example of this was seen earlier this year in a case reviewed by the nonprofit organization, Security on Campus, which says that a female basketball student at a Division 1

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