

THE INTERSECTIONS OF STALKING, TRAFFICKING, AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

Trafficking and stalking can be co-occurring and intersecting experiences that impact economic security. Conditions of economic insecurity and inequality create risk factors for trafficking. Traffickers often use stalking behaviors such as surveillance to identify vulnerable individuals and determine how to recruit into labor or sex trafficking. Trafficking also intersects with other forms of economic violence, such as wage theft. Furthermore, survivors of stalking often face economic instability and increasing vulnerability.

Once trafficked, stalking behaviors are used as a form of control and economic sabotage. Traffickers may require “check-ins,” commit acts of sexual violence, and/or threaten family members as a deterrent to seeking help. Additionally, some populations are systemically at-risk for experiencing stalking and trafficking. Undocumented workers are significantly more likely to experience trafficking and are also less likely to report stalking victimization to the police.

WHAT IS STALKING?

Stalking is a pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear or suffer substantial emotional distress. Most stalking victims are stalked by someone they know, most commonly a current/former intimate partner (40%) or an acquaintance (42%). Among stalking survivor-offender relationships that are acquaintances, about one-quarter are acquaintances met through work. Stalking intersects with other forms of gender-based violence and harassment, including sexual harassment and intimate partner violence.

KEY FEATURES OF STALKING

Surveillance	Life Invasion	Intimidation	Interference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planted camera, GPS tracker, or another device in vehicle or home Used tracking software on phone, tablet, or computer Access accounts (social media and online finances) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeated unwanted contact Humiliated or tried to humiliate in public Online Impersonation and/or hacking into accounts Harassed friends, family members, employers, or other third parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeated unwanted contact Humiliated or tried to humiliate in public Online Impersonation and/or hacking into accounts Harassed friends, family members, employers, or other third parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeated unwanted contact Humiliated or tried to humiliate in public. Online Impersonation and/or hacking into accounts. Harassed friends, family members, employers, or other third parties

Source: [Identifying Stalking: SLII Strategies \(SPARC\)](#) Note: [Sextortion](#) is when a person's sexual pictures, videos, or activity are obtained through force and manipulation. The person is then threatened with public humiliation by sharing or publishing without explicit content.

A NOTE ON DATA AND TERMINOLOGY

[Stalking](#) and [trafficking](#) are very under-reported and poorly studied. Measurements differ widely based on the definition of stalking or trafficking used. This fact sheet uses the terms used by the cited study. Furthermore, this review focuses largely on experiences in the United States. More data are needed that explore the intersections of stalking and trafficking and the ramifications on economic security.



ELEMENTS OF TRAFFICKING

Force	Fraud	Coercion
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical assault• Sexual assault• Isolation• Confinement• Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• False employment offers• Sham marriages• Lying about work/living situation• Withholding wages• Taking documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Threats of violence• Psychological manipulation• Threats of arrest/deportation• Debt bondage• Withholding legal documentation and identification

Source: Identifying Indicators of Human Trafficking

WHAT IS TRAFFICKING

According to the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC) [Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center](#), human trafficking is a crime that involves the exploitation of a person into commercial sex and/or forced labor.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines sex trafficking and labor trafficking as:

- Sex Trafficking: the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; (and)
- Labor Trafficking: the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Source: [Office of Trafficking in Persons Factsheet](#)

Traffickers disproportionately target at-risk populations such as individuals who have experienced other forms of violence, are isolated from support networks, and identify within communities that are marginalized (black, indigenous, and LGBTQI+). Trafficking survivors are often exploited by employers (43%), family members (26%), and intimate partners (22%) through force, fraud, and coercion.



ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF TRAFFICKING

Economic insecurity increases a person's vulnerability to violence and exploitation. Traffickers identify individuals with existing vulnerabilities such as poverty, homelessness, immigration challenges, and lack of social support to exploit commercial sex and forced labor. Furthermore, the harm caused by trafficking such as trauma, criminal records, and feelings of diminished self-worth often prevents survivors from accessing and maintaining safe employment opportunities.

- A 2016 qualitative study of 42 survivors of trafficking identified risk factors that could make someone vulnerable to labor or sexual exploitation. These factors clustered into four key areas: economic insecurity, housing insecurity, education, and migration.
- A 2016 survey of 115 survivors of commercial sexual exploitation of children found that childhood emotional and sexual abuse, rape, ever running away from home, and having members in sex work were associated with domestic child sex trafficking.
- A 2021 systematic review of relevant trafficking studies found that risk factors of child sex trafficking include child abuse and maltreatment, caregiver strain, running away or being thrown away, substance use, peer influence, witnessing family violence or criminality, poverty or material need, difficulty in school, conflict with parents, poor mental health or view of self, involvement in child protective services, involvement in juvenile detention or delinquency, early substance use, and prior rape or adolescent sexual victimization.
- A 2021 review of 47 criminal trafficking cases found that victims experienced labor trafficking in homes (35.2%), restaurants (34.4%), hotels (8%), apartments (6.4%), agriculture fields (4.8%), and group homes (4.8%).

ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON STALKING SURVIVORS

- Work days lost due to intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and/or stalking over victims' lifetimes are worth an estimated \$137.8 billion (2022 USD).
- 17% of stalking victims describe losing a job or job opportunities.
- 1 in 8 employed stalking victims lose time from work as a result of their victimization and more than half lose five days of work or more.
- 1 in 7 stalking victims relocates as a result of their victimization, which affects their work.
- Stalking victims suffer much higher rates of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and social dysfunction than people in the general population. These impacts, and strategies for coping with them, can impact work performance.
- Among victims stalked by an ex-partner, nearly half described job losses because of the actions of their abusive ex-partner. Job losses were highest while a victim was in the process of separation.
- For those who experienced job losses, more than half of the victims talked to coworkers and about one-third talked to supervisors about the situation.
- In a 2020 sample of cyberstalking victims, 48% described negative work consequences. These consequences were exacerbated by the number of online stalking behaviors exhibited and if stalking also occurred offline.
- Across nine industry-level studies of stalking, more than a third of stalking victims reported receiving malicious or unsubstantiated complaints at work and having misinformation spread about their professional abilities.
- Rates of stalking in the workplace range widely by industry. Professions that involve frequent contact with a wide variety of people, and in which the professional has a duty of care to their clientele, may be at increased risk of stalking victimization. More research is needed to examine this issue by sector and evaluate best practices in prevention.

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE AND ONLINE HARASSMENT OR ABUSE

An emerging issue is the role of technology in facilitating, amplifying, and replicating harm, including stalking and trafficking. There are many ways that technology intersects with trafficking and stalking, largely by facilitating access to victims and expanding ways and platforms that survivors can be targeted. For example, many survivors of stalking are targeted on professional platforms such as LinkedIn and Glassdoor or other online forums.

These technological platforms amplify harm and can impact a survivor's ability to obtain and maintain safe and sustainable employment. In this way, technology, stalking, and economic security meet, part of a harm doers' strategy to exert control over and instill fear in a survivor. In addition to the White House Taskforce on Online Harassment, and consultation with survivors, technology companies should evaluate opportunities to prevent violence, particularly by minimizing the impact that online harassment has on economic security and future job opportunities. Employers must be careful consumers of online information about candidates or employees.

More research is needed on the ways that trafficking and stalking are facilitated and amplified by technology. Some sex workers note that technology platforms, such as Only Fans, have also created new opportunities for navigating their safety in a distanced manner.

RESPONDING TO STALKING AND/OR TRAFFICKING

- Many do not know how to respond to violence. In one 2013 survey, 31% of workplaces had a formal policy on stalking, 56% did not and had no plans to put one in place, and the remaining 14% planned to put one in place within 12 months.
- Stalking survivors who had positive experiences being supported by their workplace describe feeling listened to, having their immediate supervisor take the stalking seriously, having regular formal workplace meetings to deal with the stalking, and having the workplace take steps to manage safety.
- Negative workplace experiences included victim blaming, minimizing the victims' experience, discounting their fears, and leaving the victim to manage the stalker alone, thus making the victim feel isolated.
- Stalking and/or trafficking survivors are experts in their situations; economic responses must center on their agency, wishes, and consent.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

- Employers
 - Employers must familiarize themselves with the impact of gender-based violence and harassment on their employees and supply chains.
 - Review workplace policies and practices regarding workplace stalking and trafficking.
 - Include safe leave in your workplace policy and become familiar with state employment laws that protect workers who are experiencing various forms of victimization.
 - A variety of industries create conditions that increase the likelihood of trafficking occurring. The hospitality, trucking, nail salon, agricultural, service sector, and home care industries may employ a particularly high prevalence of trafficked workers. These industries should invest in prevention training and make resources readily available to their employees. The Businesses to End Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) Alliance can support this initiative.
- Workers
 - Keep a detailed Stalking Incident and Behavior Log to assist in seeking help
 - Become familiar with National Human Trafficking Hotline and Stalking Prevention and Awareness Resource Center (SPARC)
- Policymakers
 - Advocate for safe, sustainable, good jobs for all workers.
 - Invest in qualitative, survivor-centered, and trauma-informed research on the economic impacts of trafficking and stalking.
 - The Department of Labor should collaborate with human trafficking task forces and increase Wage and Hour Investigations to identify workplaces that exploit workers.
 - Develop clear guidelines for investigating online abuse and exploitation
 - Ensure cultural inclusivity and language accessibility in workforce development programs
 - Invest in nationwide workforce development and victim services that focus on underserved populations such as male-identifying, immigrant, and LGBTQIA+ survivors



FURTHER RESOURCES

- UNKNOWN COSTS STALKING VICTIMS PAY [HTTPS://IWPR.ORG/IWPR-GENERAL/UNKNOWN-ECONOMIC-COSTS-STALKING-VICTIMS-PAY/](https://iwpr.org/iwpr-general/unknown-economic-costs-stalking-victims-pay/)
- INTERSECTIONS STALKING AND ECONOMIC INSECURITY [HTTPS://WWW.WORKPLACESRESPOND.ORG/RESOURCE-LIBRARY/INTERSECTIONS-STALKING-ECONOMIC-SECURITY-INSTITUTE-WOMENS-POLICY-RESEARCH/](https://www.workplacesrespond.org/resource-library/intersections-stalking-economic-security-institute-womens-policy-research/)
- NCVC STALKING RESOURCE CENTER: [HTTPS://VICTIMSOFCRIME.ORG/STALKING-RESOURCE-CENTER/](https://victimsofcrime.org/stalking-resource-center/)
- SPARC: [HTTPS://WWW.STALKINGAWARENESS.ORG/](https://www.stalkingawareness.org/)
- BATTERED WOMEN'S JUSTICE PROJECT: [HTTPS://BWJP.ORG/ABOUT/OUR-MISSION/](https://bwjp.org/about/our-mission/)
- CAST TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: [HTTPS://CASTTTA.NATIONBUILDER.COM/](https://castta.nationbuilder.com/)
- FREEDOM NETWORK SURVIVOR REENTRY PROJECT: [HTTPS://FREEDOMNETWORKUSA.ORG/ADVOCACY/SURVIVOR-REENTRYPROJECT/](https://freedomnetworkusa.org/advocacy/survivor-reentryproject/)
- SUPPORTING THE EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT NEEDS OF SURVIVORS WITH CRIMINAL RECORD (FUTURES + FREEDOM NETWORK): [HTTPS://WWW.FUTURESWITHOUTVIOLENCE.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/SUPPORTING-THEEDUCATION-AND-EMPLOYMENT-NEEDS-OF-SURVIVORS-WITH-CRIMINAL-RECORDS-FINAL-FUTURES.PDF](https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/supporting-theeducation-and-employment-needs-of-survivors-with-criminal-records-final-futures.pdf)
- A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO TRAFFICKING: [HTTPS://NATIONALSURVIVORNETWORK.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2023/01/CARE-SELF-DETERMINATION-AND-SAFETY.PDF](https://nationalsurvivornetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/care-self-determination-and-safety.pdf)

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