

# Study: Women and men who experienced cyberstalking in Canada, 2014

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Cyberstalking, which affects 8% of women and 6% of men who use the Internet, does not have the same implications for women and men.

Today, about 90% of Canadians use the Internet at least several times a month. The ever-present and immediate access to the Internet can be positive in many respects, but it can also lead to negative outcomes such as online victimization. The Internet provides perpetrators new, and potentially anonymous, ways of harassing or threatening others.

In a new study entitled "[Women and men who experienced cyberstalking in Canada](#)," data from the General Social Survey (Victimization) is used to explore the prevalence of cyberstalking among women and men aged 15 and older, as well as the association between experiences of cyberstalking, self-rated mental health and satisfaction with personal safety from crime.

In this study, cyberstalking is measured by asking respondents whether, in the past five years, they had been the subject of repeated and unwanted attention that caused them to fear for their safety or the safety of someone known to them. It includes those who received unwanted messages through email, text, or social media, as well as those who reported that someone posted inappropriate, unwanted or personal information about them, or pictures on a social media site.

The study finds that there are certain factors associated with cyberstalking, and that these factors are similar for both women and men.

Factors include age, marital status and whether a person has experienced abuse or witnessed parental violence. Specifically, younger men and women are more likely to experience cyberstalking, as are those who are separated, divorced or single.

Among those who were separated or divorced, female victims of cyberstalking were nearly 2.5 times more likely to report having been physically or sexually abused by an ex-spouse in the previous five years than their counterparts who had not experienced cyberstalking (29% versus 12%).

Among women who experienced both physical and sexual abuse in childhood, the probability of being cyberstalked as an adult was 15%, compared with 6% among those who did not report being abused. A similar relationship was found for men.

Similarly, among those who witnessed violence involving at least one parent in childhood, the probability of experiencing cyberbullying was 10% for women and 8% for men, compared with 7% of women and 5% of men who did not witness such violence.

## People who are cyberstalked report lower levels of self-rated mental health

Like other forms of victimization, an association exists between cyberstalking and the mental health and feelings of personal safety of those who are experiencing it. This association, however, differs between women and men.

While cyberstalking was associated with lower levels of self-rated mental health for both women and men, the association was stronger for women. Among women who had been cyberstalked, the probability of reporting "very good" or "excellent" mental health was 67%, compared with 74% among those who were not cyberstalked. Among men, this gap was smaller (70% versus 75%).

Women who had been cyberstalked also had a lower probability of being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their personal safety from crime (80%) than those who were not cyberstalked (86%).



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Similarly, the probability of a woman stating that she was "not at all worried" about her personal safety from crime when home alone in the evening or at night was lower for those who had experienced cyberstalking (77%) than for those who had not (83%).

Among men, by contrast, there was no relationship between cyberstalking and either satisfaction with personal safety from crime or feelings of worry when home alone in the evening or at night.

The associations presented above control for other factors that are associated with mental health or personal feelings of safety. The results presented above, however, are based on cross-sectional data and causal relationships cannot be inferred.

#### **Note to readers**

*This study uses data from the 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization). The target population consisted of the non-institutionalized Canadian population aged 15 and older, living in the provinces (excluding the territories). Only women and men who indicated that they had used the Internet at least once during the past five years were included in this study.*

#### **Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4504](#).**

The article "[Women and men who experienced cyberstalking in Canada](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

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