

## Introduction to this Issue: International Perspectives on Stalking

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The criminalization of stalking has advanced to the international stage. Although primarily limited to the North American, European, and Australian continents, a pattern of behavior that was once looked upon by law enforcement with curiosity, indifference, and even disdain, has become a felony in many jurisdictions around the world. Legal definitions of the crime vary, but it generally contains three elements: more than one act of unwanted pursuit, a credible threat, and the induction of fear in the victim. Relatively early forensic definitions of stalking, “the willful, malicious, and repeated following and harassing of another that threatens his or her safety” (Meloy & Gothard, 1995, p. 258), and “a constellation of behaviours in which one individual inflicts on another repeated unwanted intrusions and communications” (Pathé & Mullen, 1997, p.12), are still useful points of departure for treatment, research and consultation.

Denmark was the first country to have a stalking law, which originally appeared as a draft in their criminal code in 1912. It came into force in their new criminal code in 1933 (Section 265). The Danish term, *forfølgelse*, corresponds closely to the English term stalking, and refers to any act done repeatedly or over time that is apt to violate the peace of a person (Modena Group on Stalking, 2007). California was the first jurisdiction in North America to codify the crime in 1990, which ushered in a wave of legislation throughout the United States and Canada.

Accompanying such new legal precedents has been the spread of stalking victim advocacy groups located throughout cyberspace and accessible on the internet; and the substantial growth and close co-operation of three professional organizations, the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals in the U.S. (ATAP), and their sister organizations in Canada (CATAP) and Europe (EATAP).

In this issue of *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, we have attempted to capture the international state of the science of stalking, with a particular focus on original research and thinking that advances our knowledge regarding the unwanted pursuit of both public and private figures. Most of our authors have already made notable contributions to this specialized field of study, and herein extend their reach. Questions with which they grapple include violent and non-violent recidivism, female stalking, best treatment innovations and practices, risk assessment of both stalking and physical violence, the psychology of threats, same-gender stalking in Australia and Sweden, the evolution

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of the new stalking law in Italy, and problematic approaches and attacks toward political figures in the United States and Germany. We invited contributors who evidenced empirical rigor and creative theorizing in their previous work, and they did not disappoint.

Although most perpetrators and victims of violent crime are men, stalking is usually a gender-related crime. Eighty per cent of the victims are women, while the vast majority of acts of stalking are done by men. While we can appreciate advances in the understanding of stalking as a criminal behavior, it has not penetrated the predominately male psychology of legislators in most countries in the world as a significant social problem, and it pales in comparison to the barbarity still carried out with impunity against women: clitoridectomies, honor killings by male family members following the woman's violation of a sexual taboo, rape in marriage, rape as a method of ethnic cleansing, pedophilia and hebephilia hidden behind the fundamentalist belief in polygamy, forced prostitution, culturally sanctioned female infanticide, and the complete clothing concealment of the woman – and terrestrial control of her movement – so she does not stimulate sexual fantasies in other men. Whether based upon power, politics, culture, or religious belief, such acts defy the imagination for some, but are embraced by others, and live on in various segments of the global community.

The criminalization of stalking signals the slow march to legally codify against behavior which is unacceptable, frightening, and, in many cases, dangerous. The anti-stalking movement mirrors the efforts to criminalize all forms of child abuse and neglect which began in earnest 40 years ago. Without such legal prohibitions, *impunitas semper ad deteriora invitata* – impunity always leads to greater crimes.

## REFERENCES

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