January Is National Stalking Awareness Month

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Madison—January is National Stalking Awareness Month. With stalking playing a part in recent high-profile domestic violence homicides in Wisconsin, domestic violence advocates here say there is urgency to raising awareness about this dangerous behavior.

Among other recent domestic violence homicides in the state, the perpetrator of the shooting at a suburban Milwaukee salon and the husband of slain Wauwatosa police officer Jennifer Sebina stalked their victims immediately before the killings. The fact stalking was an element of these tragedies is not unusual. In one in five cases, stalkers use weapons to harm or threaten victims.[1] And, researchers have found stalking is associated with significantly higher risk of homicide for women in abusive relationships.[2]

“Stalking is a very serious tactic abusers use to control, intimate and terrorize their victims,” said Patti Seger, executive director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV). “We need to ensure law enforcement, prosecutors, community members, victims and potential victims recognize stalking and understand the danger.”

Stalking is difficult to recognize, investigate, and prosecute. Unlike other crimes, stalking is not a single, easily identifiable crime but a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause that person fear. Stalking may take many forms, such as assaults, threats, vandalism, burglary, or animal abuse, as well as unwanted cards, calls, gifts, or visits. One in four victims reports that the stalker uses technology, such as computers, global positioning system devices, or hidden cameras, to track the victim’s daily activities.[3] Annually, about six million Americans are stalked.

“If more people learn to recognize stalking,” said Seger, “we have a better chance to protect victims and save lives. Estimates suggest approximately 300,000 Wisconsin women have been stalked in their lifetimes. We have not fully grasped the extent of the problem nor have we dedicated enough resources to stopping this crime and keeping victims safe. Hopefully Stalking Awareness Month and the increased attention being paid to the connection between domestic violence and stalking will help us make progress.”

“I encourage anyone who is concerned about stalking behavior to call a local domestic violence victim service provider, the National Domestic Violence Hotline or visit website of the Stalking Resource Center,” concluded Seger.

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[1] Katrina Baum et al., “Stalking Victimization in the United States,” (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009).

[2] Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., “Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multi-site Case Control Study,” *American Journal of Public Health* 93 (2003): 7.

[3] Baum, *Stalking Victimization in the United States.*

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