



### 13 Violence and Intimacy-Seeking in a Female Adolescent Stalker

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After attending this presentation, attendees will recognize characteristics and nature of stalking by juveniles.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community the role of family and psychosocial factors in the etiology of stalking among juveniles.

The case presented here is of an adolescent female stalker who came to attention when Juvenile Court of Justice requested an expert opinion. This case led to reflection on the characteristics and peculiarities of juvenile stalking as compared to the adult phenomenon. As is well known, Mullen (2000) classified adult stalkers as intimacy-seekers, rejected, incompetent, resentful, and predatory stalkers. The only systematic study in a large sample of adolescent stalkers (Purcell et al. 2009) introduced the classification of this stalking as an extension of bullying, retaliating stalkers, rejected stalkers, disorganized and disturbed stalkers, predatory stalkers, and intimacy-seeking stalkers. According to this study there are substantial differences between adult and adolescent stalkers. Firstly, there is a greater prevalence of female stalkers than in the adult population. Again unlike the situation in adult stalkers, in which the “rejected” stalker seeking revenge is the most common, among adolescents stalking as an extension of bullying seems to be the most prevalent, the only motive seeming to be the desire to intimidate and torment the victim. Moreover, whereas among adult stalkers, the greater the prior intimacy between the stalker and his/her victim the greater the risk of violence, among adolescents the category of disorganized and disturbed stalkers seems to show the greatest degree of violence. These youngsters are unhappy, angry adolescents at war with the whole world. Various studies (McCann, 1998; Vaidya et al. 2005; Purcell et al., 2009; Evans & Meloy, 2011) have reported specific features of adolescent stalking, also based on case reports. The victim is most commonly a peer, although Purcell (2009) stated that for adolescent disorganized and disturbed stalkers, the victim is generally an adult. Another important point made in the same study is that among adolescent stalkers, females are statistically significantly more prone to involve accomplices in their intimidatory behavior. In literature, the data were not sufficient to distinguish a single category in which to classify the case observed, which led to further exploration and examination of the correlation between stalking and pathological attachment. In this regard, various authors (Devis et al., 2000; MacKenzie et al., 2008; Kienlen et al., 1997; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Meloy, 1996) have shown that insecure attachment is highly correlated with persecutory behavior. In fact, often in the infancy of stalkers the reference attachment figure was lost or parental negligence was present for various reasons: death, a jail sentence, drug addiction, or mental disease of a parent, so the child was handed over to other family members or community facilities (Meloy, 1996). In this sense, it can be claimed that, the stalking could be interpreted as an exaggerated form of protest against the loss of the attachment figure. Another possible explanation is seeking approval from the most important attachment figure, to reinforce the subject’s lack of self-esteem (Dutton, 1995).

In this case, a 16-year-old girl in the second year of high school came in contact with the new math teacher. From March 2010 until she was taken in custody in February 2011, she perpetrated a series of intimidatory and violent actions against the man and his family (unwelcome phone calls, insults, threats, molesting behavior, lurking, burning the car, damaging property, and slander, to include social networking sites). During this period, despite the intervention of the police and warnings from the headmaster, she continued the persecution which became progressively more violent as the victim was seen to be “indifferent” to her advances. It should be noted that these actions were often carried out in the presence of peers. The stalker was diagnosed with a borderline intelligence and came from a multi-problem family assisted by social services. Her mother was diagnosed with a delusional disorder, her father, an ex drug addict with a criminal record, was out of stable work. Related to the precarious family situation, the young girl had been living together with the two youngest of the five siblings at a community home for minors since the age of 11. The stalking began while she was living in this community.

In this case, in agreement with the literature, accomplices were involved in this case of adolescent harassment but the choice of victim was less common, being an adult. In literature, violent stalking is largely reported in adolescent disorganized and disturbed stalkers. In this case, instead, the young girl’s primary motivation was a desire to establish a relationship with the victim (an “intimacy-seeking stalker”). To gain a better understanding of the complex variables involved in juvenile stalking it is important to explore the psychological, family, and social factors that play so important a role at this age.

#### **Juvenile Stalking, Violence, Family and Psychosocial Factors**