

# An Exploratory Investigation of Traditional Stalking and Cyberstalking Victimization among University Students in Spain and the United States: A Comparative Analysis

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Date of submission: July 2020

Accepted in: September 2020

Published in: March 2021

## Abstract

Traditional stalking and cyberstalking have become a significant legal and social issue in today's society. Although a sizeable body of research on stalking victimization and perpetration currently exists, very little is known about cyberstalking victimization. Relatedly, there is a dearth of comparative research on the topics of traditional stalking and cyberstalking. Examining the prevalence and nature of stalking victimization across national settings will allow for an exploration of the significance of social context in affecting victims' experiences as well as help highlight the competing influences operating in different contexts. Cross-national research on stalking will also provide an opportunity to consider a wide range of alternative options and solutions to the problem. The aim of this study is to compare and contrast the prevalence and nature of traditional stalking and cyberstalking victimization between American and Spanish university students. This study focuses

on university students because there is evidence that they have a higher risk of becoming victims of stalking relative to the general population. Moreover, the comparative analysis undertaken in this study involves a country that has criminalized stalking for almost three decades (the United States) and a country that has just recently enacted an anti-stalking statute (Spain). Such analysis is warranted as it will allow the researchers to engage in critical analyses of current anti-stalking statutes and advocate for innovative, sensible, and effective solutions in addressing the crime of stalking. In addition to presenting the results, the policy implications derived from the study will also be discussed..

## Keywords

stalking, cyberstalking, cross-national research, university students

## *Investigación exploratoria y análisis comparativo del acoso convencional y el ciberacoso de estudiantes universitarios en España y Estados Unidos*

### Resumen

*El acoso convencional y el ciberacoso constituyen un problema social y jurídico en la sociedad actual. Si bien se cuenta con un considerable corpus de investigaciones sobre el acoso, sus víctimas y los perpetradores, no ocurre lo mismo en el caso de la victimización por ciberacoso, sobre el que se sabe muy poco. Existe supuestamente un cúmulo de investigaciones comparativas en torno al acoso convencional y el acoso on-line. El estudio de la prevalencia y la naturaleza del acoso del que son objeto las víctimas en sus contextos nacionales permite explorar la importancia del contexto social y la manera en que éste afecta la experiencia de la víctima, así como resaltar las influencias concurrentes que operan en diferentes contextos. Asimismo, la investigación comparativa del acoso en países diferentes permitirá considerar una amplia variedad de opciones alternativas y soluciones al problema. El presente estudio se centra en comparar y contrastar la prevalencia y las características del acoso tradicional y el ciberacoso en los estudiantes universitarios de España y de EE.UU., pues existen evidencias de que estos están en mayor riesgo de ser víctimas en comparación con su población en general. Asimismo, el análisis comparativo se centra en los Estados Unidos, donde el acoso es tipificado como delito desde hace casi tres décadas, y en España, un país cuya legislación contra el acoso ha sido promulgada recientemente. Este enfoque se justifica por cuanto posibilita un análisis crítico de las leyes anti-acoso por parte de los investigadores y la promoción de soluciones innovadoras, razonables y eficaces para hacer frente a los delitos de acoso. Además de presentar sus resultados, el estudio se complementa con una discusión acerca de las implicaciones para las políticas derivadas de éste.*

### Palabras clave

*acoso, ciberacoso, investigación transnacional, estudiantes universitarios*

## 1. Introduction

Stalking is a relatively new crime in Spain. In 2001, at the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in Istanbul, the subject of combatting violence against women emerged as a top priority on the European Union political agenda. In particular, a series of behaviors were identified as criminal at the meeting and the signatory countries subsequently introduced a series of unwanted and harassing behaviors in their penal codes. Among these behaviors was stalking. In March 2015, *stalking* was outlawed and included in the Spanish Criminal Code through the organic law 1/2015 (article 172b).

Several studies in the stalking field have highlighted certain limitations on the methodology since there is -as of now- no consensus on how stalking should be defined (Nobles et al., 2012). On one hand, American studies often define stalking as repeated and unwanted -usually non-physical- contact imposed on another in a manner which could be expected to cause distress and or fear for their safety (Basile, Swahn, Chen & Saltzman, 2006; Baum, Catalano & Rand, 2009). In Spain, on the other hand, stalking is defined as persistent or repetitive behavior or activities imposed on another person in a manner that results in a disruption of the individual's daily life (Villacampa & Pujols, 2017). Article 172 ter of the Spanish Criminal Code also includes a list of conducts and activities that the Spanish criminal system considers *stalking*. Although the American and Spanish definitions of *stalking* both highlight persistence, repetition and intrusiveness when defining this crime, the American definition requires the victim to feel distressed and/or fear, while the Spanish definition emphasizes how the events negatively affect or alter the victim's life.

In prior studies on stalking there was no explicit mentioning of the different characteristics that would indicate cyberstalking is different from offline stalking. Further, these studies did not cast doubt upon whether cyberstalking and traditional stalking could be separate phenomena. However, there is currently a persisting debate on whether cyberstalking should be considered an individual phenomenon -it can happen without there being any signs of offline stalking- (Bocij & McFarlane, 2003), or acknowledging there is a conceptual overlap between online and offline stalking and that the only difference between those

two is the space where they take place. (Nobles et al., 2012; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). The debate shines a light on the necessity for more research on this topic.

The definition of cyberstalking varies in the literature and there is terminological confusion. However, cyberstalking is generally defined as a pattern of reiterated and insistent behaviour associated with the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) -such as laptops, mobile phones, or tablets- which induces in the victim fear or distress (Maple, Short, & Brown, 2011; Nobles et al., 2012; Short, Linford, Wheatcroft, & Maple, 2014).

### 1.1. Stalking and cyberstalking prevalence

The prevalence rate of stalking victimisation in the U.S. for the general population is estimated to be between 5% and 28%, increasing to between 7% and 56% among college students (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014). A similar pattern has been documented in Spain where the prevalence rate for the general population is estimated at 11% (FRA, 2014) and the prevalence rate for the university population is estimated to be between 30% and 70% (Villacampa & Pujols, 2017; León & Aizpurúa, 2019). As evident from the research conducted in the United States and Europe, the age group with a heightened risk for stalking victimization are women and men between the ages of 18 and 20. Hence, it is not surprising that a large proportion of prior research has focused on university students. In the United States, the prevalence rate for female university students is estimated to be between 13% to 30% and for male university students, it is between 11% to 19% (eg, Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2002; Fremouw, Westrup & Pennypacker, 1997; Nobles, Fox, Piquero & Piquero, 2009; Reynes & Scherer, 2018; Shorey, Cornelius, & Strauss, 2015).

Studies about cyberstalking in the U.S. indicate that the prevalence rate of cyberstalking victimisation is around 3-18% to 40% (Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005; Bocij & McFarlane, 2003; Finn, 2004; Nobles et al., 2014). It is noteworthy that the disparity found in the prevalence of cyberstalking and traditional stalking is due to differences in the methodology and the operationalization of the variables and the sample used. (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014; Nobles et al., 2014).

Although studies examining offline stalking or online stalking abound, only a handful of studies have focused on the

relationship between these two types of stalking. One such study is the one conducted by Alexy et al. (2005) which is considered to be one of the most important studies on the topic to date. The sample in Alexy et al.'s study consists of 765 university students. The researchers found that although females were more likely to be stalked offline, males were more likely to be cyberstalked than females and were likely to have also been victimized offline. Some researchers point out that it is common, for stalkers, to start showing stalking behaviours in cyberspace and later threaten the victim to continue them in the physical world (Bocij, Griffiths, & McFarlane, 2002; Lee, 1998), coming to be considered a predictor of offline harassment behaviour (Reynes, Henson & Fisher, 2011).

In a more recent study conducted by Reyns & Fisher (2018) a sample of 3,488 university students was used to investigate the relation between online and offline stalking victimization. Reyns & Fisher (2018) concluded that there is, in fact, a relation between the two. They found online stalking to be an added strategy for the stalker to commit such acts. Their study also concludes that gender plays a big part in the type of received stalking and the relation between online and offline stalking. The chances for men to become victims of offline stalking increased when they had been stalked online beforehand. Women were more likely to be stalked online when they had previously experienced offline stalking. And women who were stalked online in the first place had a lower risk to become victims of offline stalking.

Other studies have examined the differences between online and offline stalking through the stalker's point of view. One example of such is the study conducted by Cavezza & McEwan (2014). They were the first to examine and compare a forensic sample of perpetrators who had stalked their victims online and offline. The authors concluded that most cyberstalkers had also acted similarly in the offline world and that they were more likely to use a larger variety of methods to come into contact with the victims than offline stalkers. This study also pointed out that perpetrators stalked mostly women and that there was usually a previous relationship between victim and perpetrator.

As we have seen, the data gathered by the literature around the topic remains scarce and, in some cases, inconsistent. Therefore, more research is needed.

## 2. Present Study

There is a growing interest among Spanish academics in examining the crime of stalking as evidenced by a series of recent publications. In this exploratory investigation we seek to contribute to the existing body of scholarship on this topic by exploring the prevalence of stalking and cyberstalking victimization among Spanish and American university students and describing the differences between the two. Besides, the characteristics of the victims will be analyzed in greater detail for a better understanding of the phenomenon. We hypothesize, after studying the previous body of research, that: (1) the victimization rate for stalking behavior will stand higher for women than men in both countries (Basile, 2006; Villacampa & Pujols, 2017), (2) the victimization rate for cyberstalking behavior will be higher for men than for women in both countries (Alexy et al., 2005; Reyns & Fisher, 2018).

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Procedure

Data from the present study came from an online self-report survey of victimization and perpetration of stalking behavior. The instrument used is a version of the Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS) of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) (Baum et al., 2009) translated into Spanish. On February 6, 2018, the survey was approved by the Committee of Research Ethics (CER) of the International University of Catalonia (UIC Barcelona). During the last week of February 2018 an email was sent by the coordinators of different undergraduate and graduate programs from different universities of Spain and the U.S. The participation was voluntary and anonymous. The students were informed that the average time to answer the questions was 20 to 25 minutes (including the average time response). The researcher's contact also appeared in the survey instructions in case the participants needed help or additional information. The survey included questions related to sociodemographic information of the respondents and divided the succeeding questions into two large blocks: the first part consisted of 35 questions about stalking victimization and the second block centered around stalking perpetration (10 questions). The survey avoids using the word harassment or stalking, although

reference is made to the term “unwanted behavior”. All data have been analyzed using the statistical package SPSS version 26.

### 3.2. Sample

A total of 2,610 students participated in the study, 1,796 from Spain (68.8%) and 814 from the U.S. (31.2%). A total of 1,879 of the sample is female (72%) and 718 (27.5%) is male. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 64 ( $M = 21.2$  years,  $SD = 4.31$ ). Regarding the procedure of sample collection, a mixed methodology was chosen: a total of 717 (27.5%) of the Spanish surveys were administered in person, and the rest (72.5%) using the Qualtrics online platform. This fact will be taken into account in the analysis of the data and interpretation of the results. Approximately half of the sample is single (55.5%), while 41.3% declare that they have a partner; 1.4% are married and 0.9% indicate they have a common-law partner; 0.6% are divorced.

None of those surveyed indicate that they are a widow. Regarding the living situation, 45.7% of the sample (1,185) live with their parents, 27% (704) recognize living in a students' apartment, 3.7% live in an off-campus dorm (97) and 11.2% (293) live in an on-campus dorm, 6.6% (171) live with a significant other and 5.5% (143) live by themselves.

In this regard, it is important to point out the differences between Spanish and American students regarding their living situation. More than half of the Spanish students admitted to living with their parents, while a greater part of the American students were independent and lived either in a student apartment or on a dormitory campus. This fact is interesting to analyze because it could be a cultural difference to take into account. Regarding their employment status, more than half of the sample was unemployed and the other approximate half had a part-time job. Exactly 5.5% of the sample had a full-time job and studied at the same time.

Variables	Full sample		Spain		USA	
	N	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	718	27.5	494	27.5	224	27.5
Female	1,879	72	1,289	71.8	590	72.5
Total	2610	100	1,783	68.8	814	31.2
<b>Marital Status</b>						
Single	1,444	55.3	995	55.4	449	55.2
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	1,078	41.3	741	41.3	37	41.4
Married	44	1.7	25	1.4	19	2.3
Common-Law Partner	24	0.9	19	1.1	5	0.6
Divorced	16	0.6	12	0.7	4	0.5
<b>Living Situation</b>						
With their parents	1,185	45.4	1,096	61	89	10.9
Student apartment	704	27	413	23	291	35.7
Off campus dorm	97	3.7	75	4.2	22	2.7
On campus dorm	293	11.2	16	0.9	277	34
With significant other	143	5.5	72	4	71	8.7
By themselves	171	6.6	107	6	64	7.9

Work Situation						
Not employed	1,608	61.6	1,228	68.6	380	46.7
Full-time employed	143	5.5	87	4.8	56	6.9
Part-time employed	851	32.6	473	26.3	378	46.4

Table 1. Sample characteristics (N= 2,610)

Regarding their employment status, more than half of the sample was unemployed and the other approximate half had a part-time job. Exactly 5.5% of the sample had a full-time job and studied at the same time.

### 3.3. Measures

In order to know the characteristics of the victims a questionnaire was designed to measure the following constructs:

- **Age.** The variable age will be measured in years. The participants in this study had to be 18 years old or more.
- **Sex.** The variable sex will be coded as 1 = female, 0 = male;
- **Country.** The variable country will be coded as 1 = Spain, 2 = The U.S.
- **Marital Status.** This variable was coded as follows: (1) Single, (2) Boyfriend/Girlfriend, (3) Married, (4) Common-Law Partner and (5) Divorced.
- **Living Situation.** This variable was coded as follows: (1) living with their parents, (2) student apartment, (3) off-campus dorm, (4) on-campus dorm, (5) with significant other and (6) by themselves.
- **Stalking victimization.** For the present investigation, we have considered victims of stalking those who have indicated that they have experienced at some point in their life and on more than one occasion any of the following unwanted contacts that could have been committed by a stranger, acquaintance, friend, relative or partner: a) received unwanted calls or unwanted messages on the answering machine; b) having been followed or spied on; c) someone had waited for them outside or inside a room; d) someone had appeared in unsuspected places; e) someone had given unwanted things, gifts or flowers. The answers, of a dichotomous nature, will be coded as 1 = the person has experienced an intrusive behavior at some time and 0 = the person has not experienced any intrusive behavior. If the person indicates that they have only suffered one of the exposed behaviors, they will be differentiated from those who have indicated that they have suffered more than one of the behaviors, coded as multiple forms of victimization by stalking.
- **Cyberstalking victimization.** We have considered victims of cyberstalking those who have indicated that they have experienced at some point in their life and on more than one occasion any of the following unwanted contact that could have been committed by a stranger, acquaintance, friend, relative or partner: a) receiving unsolicited or unwanted e-mails and b) having information about them posted on the Internet. The answers, of a dichotomous nature, will be coded as 1 = the person has experienced an intrusive behavior at some time and 0 = the person has not experienced any intrusive behavior. If the person indicates that they have only suffered one of the exposed behaviors, they will be differentiated from those who have indicated that they have suffered more than one of the behaviors, coded as multiple forms of victimization by cyberstalking.
- **Duration of stalking and cyberstalking behavior:** students were asked for how long had they experienced those unwanted behaviors: (1) between 1 and 6 days, (2) between 1 and 3 weeks, (3) between 1 and 11 months, (4) years or (5) I do not know.
- **Relationship with the author:** the variable relationship with the author of the unwanted behaviors will be coded as (1) husband or wife, (2) ex-husband or ex-wife, (3) parents or step-parents, (4) son, daughter or step-

child, (5) sibling or step-sibling, (6) other relative, (7) boyfriend or girlfriend, (8) ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend, (9) friend or ex-friend, (10) roommate, (11) classmate, (12) neighbour, (13) client, (14) student, (15) patient, (16) supervisor, (17) work partner, (18) known, (19) unknown, (20) other, (21) impossible to identify the person.

## 4. Results

The study found that 7.5% (197) of the sample had been stalked offline on more than one occasion during their lifetime and 12.1% (316) reported to be cyberstalked. The frequencies with which respondents reported being victimized online or offline are presented in Table 2. When we analyze all the victims, we see that 18.1 % (197) were stalked offline and 29.1% (316) were cyberstalked. As we can see, cyberstalking is more prevalent than offline stalking. In relation to the victims' gender, females have a higher victimization rate online and offline than males. This fact is not surprising, since there are many investigations that have obtained the same results (eg, Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Miller, 2012, Mullen, MacKenzie, Ogloff, Pathé, McEwan & Purcell, 2006). These results could also be explained by the fact that in the sample there are more females represented than males. As for the age of the victims the mean age is 21.5 ( $SD = 4.9$ ) for offline stalking victims and 21.9 ( $SD = 5.6$ ) for cyberstalking victims.

When we analyze the results in closer detail we can see that men report more offline victimization (32%) than online (16.8%), both in Spain (30.8% offline and 15.8% online) and in the United States (34.4% offline and 18.8% online), although it is true that the difference between percentages is not very high. As for women, the results go in the opposite direction. Women report becoming more often victims of stalking in the online environment (82.3%) than offline (68%). These results are surprising, because they contradict some above-mentioned investigations (Alexy et al., 2005; Reynolds & Fisher, 2018). This issue should be further analyzed in future research.

The students who indicated that they were single were the ones who reported the greatest number of stalking victimization, both online and offline. Regarding their living situation, in the case of Spain, most victims lived with their parents. However, it is interesting to see how in the United States most offline stalking victims lived on a campus dorm (43.8%) and most cyberstalking victims (40%) lived in a student apartment.

As for the gender of the stalker, regardless of the country, we can see how the majority of the victims indicate having been stalked by a male perpetrator. However, it can be seen that females who stalk tend to perform stalking in the offline world in contrast to doing it online. With respect to the relationship between the stalker and the victim, in Spain 17.3% (23) of the victims indicated that they had been stalked by an ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend. While regarding the victims who had been stalked online, in 25.8% (57) of cases they knew their stalker but did not have any kind of intimate relationship with them. In contrast, in the U.S. 20.3% (13) of offline victims recognised having been stalked by a friend and in the 28.4% (27) of cyberstalking cases the actions were executed by someone who the victim had met before. Being stalked by a stranger was more common in cyberstalking cases rather than offline stalking. Finally, it is interesting to see how most victims do not remember how long the stalking lasted, and those who did remember indicated that it had lasted for years.

In summary, these results show that females are at a higher risk of becoming victims of offline and online stalking regardless of the country they live in, and males tend to stalk more than their counterparts. Most of the victims are single. In Spain more than 50% of victims live with their parents. However, in the U.S. there is an existent difference between offline and online stalking victimisation in terms of their living situation, where 43.8% (28) of the offline stalking victims live on campus dorms but 40% (38) of online stalking victims live in student apartments.

	All sample (N = 513)		Spain (n = 354)		USA (n =159)	
	Offline stalking 197 (18.1)	Cyberstalking 316 (29.1)	Offline stalking 133 (37.6)	Cyberstalking 221 (62.4)	Offline stalking 64 (40.2)	Cyberstalking 95 (59.7)
<b>Victims' Sex</b>						
Male	63 (32)	53 (16.8)	41 (30.8)	35 (15.8)	22 (34.4)	18 (18.9)
Female	134 (68)	260 (82.3)	92 (69.2)	183 (82.8)	42 (65.6)	77 (81.1)
<b>Marital situation</b>						
Single	98 (49.7)	171 (54.1)	72 (54.1)	112 (50.7)	26 (40.6)	59 (62.1)
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	93 (47.2)	129 (40.8)	56 (42.1)	97 (43.9)	37 (57.8)	32 (33.7)
Married	4 (2)	6 (1.9)	3 (2.3)	4 (1.8)	1 (1.6)	2 (2.1)
Common-Law Parnter	1 (.5)	4 (1.3)	1 (.8)	4 (1.8)	-	-
Divorced	1 (.5)	5 (1.6)	1 (.8)	3 (1.4)	-	2 (2.1)
<b>Living Situation</b>						
With their parents	88 (44.7)	140 (44.3)	79 (59.4)	132 (59.7)	9 (14.1)	8 (8.4)
Student apartment	51 (25.9)	74 (24.7)	33 (24.8)	40 (18.1)	18 (28.1)	38 (40)
Off campus dorm	7 (3.6)	8 (2.5)	5 (3.8)	6 (2.7)	2 (3.1)	2 (2.1)
On campus drom	28 (14.2)	34 (10.8)	-	3 (1.4)	28 (43.8)	31 (32.6)
MWith significant other	9 (4.6)	24 (7.6)	6 (4.5)	12 (5.4)	3 (4.7)	12 (12.6)
Themselves	12 (6.1)	28 (8.9)	8 (6)	24 (10.9)	4 (6.3)	4 (4.2)
<b>Sex Stalker</b>						
Male	131 (66.5)	258 (82.9)	91 (68.4)	184 (83.7)	40 (62.5)	74 (77.9)
Female	49 (24.9)	26 (8.2)	30 (22.6)	17 (7.7)	19 (62.5)	9 (9.5)
Don't know	6 (3)	18 (5.7)	4 (3)	12 (5.4)	2 (3.1)	6 (6.3)
<b>Relationship with the stalker</b>						
Relative	1 (.5)	3 (.9)	1 (.8)	2 (.9)	-	1 (1.1)
Boyfriend/Grilfriend	11 (5.6)	21 (6.6)	6 (4.5)	14 (6.3)	5 (7.8)	7 (7.4)
ExBoyfriend/ ExGirldfriend	32 (16.2)	41 (13)	23 (17.3)	28 (12.7)	9 (14.1)	13 (13.7)
Friend	35 (17.8)	22 (7)	22 (16.5)	13 (5.9)	13 (20.3)	9 (9.5)
Known	28 (14.2)	84 (26.6)	19 (14.3)	57 (25.8)	9 (14.1)	27 (28.4)
Stranger	9 (4.6)	35 (11.1)	6 (4.5)	32 (14.5)	3 (4.7)	3 (3.2)
Friends on social media	17 (8.6)	18 (5.7)	15 (11.3)	16 (7.2)	2 (3.1)	2 (2.1)
Other	17 (8.6)	29 (9.2)	12 (9)	15 (6.8)	5 (7.8)	14 (14.7)



Time of the Stalking						
Days	22 (11.2)	46 (14.6)	17 (12.8)	39 (17.6)	5 (7.8)	7 (7.4)
Weeks	11 (5.6)	21 (6.6)	9 (6.8)	16 (7.2)	2 (3.1)	5 (5.3)
Months	36 (18.3)	50 (15.8)	23 (17.3)	30 (13.6)	13 (20.3)	20 (21.1)
Years	37 (18.8)	68 (21.5)	23 (17.3)	43 (19.5)	14 (21.9)	25 (26.3)
Dont' know	52 (26.4)	80 (25.3)	40 (30.1)	60 (27.1)	12 (18.8)	20 (21.1)

Table 2. Victims' characteristics (%)

Generally, the victim and the stalker know each other; however, in the offline stalking cases the relationship between the two is closer than cyberstalking where the emotional bond is not so close.

To see if there was a relation between stalking victimization and cyberstalking victimization, a chi-square test was conducted. There was a significant relation between these two forms of victimization,  $\chi^2(1, n=1078) = 65.508, p < .000$ , although it is true that the strength of the association is weak (Cramer's V = .247) (See Table 3). The same test was carried out to analyze the same relationship between

forms of victimization, but differentiating the country of origin. In the case of Spain, the relationship between the variables was significant ( $\chi^2(1, n = 643) = 73.123, p < .000$ ; Cramer's V = .337), as in the United States ( $\chi^2(1, n = 435) = 5.225, p < .022$ ; Cramer's V = .110). If we compare the results of both countries, we can say that Spanish students claim to have been victims of stalking both online and offline more often than U.S. students, although it is true that the difference is not very pronounced. A limitation that we must take into account is that there were more Spanish students than American students participating in the sample, which could explain the above results.

		Offline Stalking Victimization		$\chi^2$	Cramer's V
		No	Yes		
Cyberstalking Victimization	No	53.4	17.3	65.508*	.247
	Yes	28.3	1		
p<.000					

Table 3. Relationship between stalking victimization and cyberstalking (%)

The next step was to analyze the differences based on the gender, and the country of residence of the victim, and separating them according to the type of stalking reported. In this sense, a chi-square test was conducted to investigate if there was a systematic relation between country and cyberstalking victimization on females and males. There was a significant relation in the group of females between their country and becoming a victim of cyberstalking ( $\chi^2$  (1,  $n=861$ ) = 18.800,  $p < .000$ ), which was absent in the case of males ( $\chi^2$  (1,  $n=212$ ) = 1.278,  $p < .258$ ). The same procedure was used to analyze the relation between country and offline stalking victimization in men and women. Again, there was a significant relation in the women's group ( $\chi^2$  (1,  $n = 860$ ) = 5.618,  $p < .018$ ) but not in men's ( $\chi^2$  (1,  $n = 212$ ) = 1.185,  $p < .276$ ).

Overall, these results indicate that there is a significant relation between the country where the victim lives and the type of victimization females suffer.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The fact that there's scarce literature in Spain about the phenomenon of stalking and cyberbullying is not surprising, as it is a relatively new crime in our context. However, in Anglo-Saxon countries, and especially in the United States, there is more experience in this regard. One of the main problems when we do research on stalking is the lack of agreement to define what is stalking and what is cyberstalking (Owns, 2016). Currently, there is no universally accepted definition of stalking either in the legal sphere or in the academic arena. Nevertheless, we have identified three common and overlapping elements: the repetition, the victim or the fact that the victim does not wish to receive these behaviours and the negative consequence derived from the conduct of stalking.

As mentioned in the literature review, stalking is a phenomenon present in society that affects about 11 to 20% of the population; generally, those who are at greater risk of being victimised are young women, especially those that are in a university/college context (Basile et al., 2006; Baum et al., 2009; FRA, 2014; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). That explains why stalking research has focused mainly on the university context. This also accords with our earlier observations, which showed that females reported, to a greater extent, becoming victims of stalking in both Spain and the United States.

One of the objectives of the project was to identify the differences in the prevalence of stalking and cyberstalking victimization in Spain and in the U.S. The results are consistent with previous studies (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014): single females are at a higher risk of being stalked and cyberstalked by males in both countries and there is usually some kind of previous relationship between them. It has also been observed that the bond between the two parts in offline stalking cases is narrower than in cyberstalking cases. This result may be explained by the fact that stalking someone in the physical world implies a more direct contact with the victim than in an online world. Having a previous relationship between the two makes it easier to find that physical contact. In this regard, it's interesting to note that cyberstalking victims in the U.S. usually live in student apartments and offline victims tend to live in campus dorms. Thus, the closeness and proximity between victims and perpetrators could explain offline stalking.

Another important finding was that the number of victims of stalking and cyberstalking that reported that the victimization occurred during a period of years was higher than those who reported that the victimization occurred for months or weeks or days. A possible explanation for this fact is that the victims who are stalked, either offline or online, for a longer time are more aware and can better identify the stalking victimization process to which they are being subjected. The victims who have been stalked for days or weeks will not recognise the process as easily and could have a harder time identifying themselves as victims. However, caution must be applied as the findings might not be representative.

It has been suggested that men are more exposed to being victims of cyberstalking than women and that women are at a higher risk of becoming victims of offline stalking (Alexy et al., 2005; Reyns & Fisher, 2018). This does not appear to be the case. Contrary to expectations, this study found that men claim to be victims of offline stalking more often than cyberstalking, while females claim to be victims of cyberstalking more often than offline stalking in both countries. A possible explanation for this might be that both men and women are more sensitized to this type of behavior and therefore, they can identify it. Further research should be undertaken to investigate in this regard.

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Finally, this is an exploratory study, therefore it is necessary to continue investigating. Future investigations will be aimed at learning about the relation between stalking and cyberstalking denounced by the victims, as well as seeing what strategies they use to face the situation of stalking. In this way, legislative and social proposals can be carried

out taking into account all these issues. In addition, since it is a comparative study, it will be possible to analyze the differences between coping strategies and overcoming in each country, and to see, therefore, what works and what does not work so that what we find that does work can be implemented everywhere.

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### Recommended citation

FERNÁNDEZ-CRUZ, Victoria; AGUSTINA, José R.; NGO, Fawn T. (2021). «An Exploratory Investigation of Traditional Stalking and Cyberstalking Victimization among University Students in Spain and the United States: A Comparative Analysis». *IDP. Revista de Derecho, Internet y Política*, No. 32, pp. 1-14. UOC [Accessed: dd/mm/yy] <http://dx.doi.org/10.7238/idp.v0i32.373814>



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