***CYBERSTALKING:* PREVALENCE ON A STUDENT SAMPLE OF UNIVERSIDADE DO MINHO**

Abstract

The technological evolution has promoted the contact among people and consequently, intrusion. It has been noticed the growth of a phenomenon known as cyberstalking which is characterized by the persistence of a person to harass another using the internet, personal computer, cell phone or other devices with internet connection. Not only are accurate data regarding the prevalence of cyberstalking at international level not yet established, but also in Portugal they are completely unknown.

This research's objective was to analyse to what extent the inquired university sample has been the target of harassment via electronic media at any moment of their life, and which methods (e.g. to send excessively affectionate messages, to monitor online activity) were more frequently used on those dynamics. The sample is constituted by 111 students from *Universidade do Minho* attending the 1st and 3rd years from different graduate courses (e.g. Psychology and Applied Biology). For this purpose, the Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) measure, the Cyber Obsessional Pursuit, has been adapted for the Portuguese population, the Portuguese version being entitled *Escala de Avaliação de Ciberstalking* and it is constituted on its final version by 22 items that evaluate the occurrence of cyberstalking experiences. Simultaneously, a brief social-demographic questionnaire was applied, which allowed to characterize the sample and to know its habits of use and exposure relatively to electronic media.

We found that 74.8% of the sample admits having been the target of at least one of the forms of victimization by cyberstalking presented. Furthermore, some participants were the target of more than one of these actions, sometimes repeatedly. The most frequent behaviours involved harassment via telephonic media and social networks. On the other hand, the less frequent imply the transfer of contact from the digital world to the real world as well as hacking techniques (e.g. to try to deactivate the computer). The results also point out that the younger ones reported having been more frequently the target of cyberstalking: the 1st year students reported having experienced, in total, a larger number of incidents than the 3rd year students. Men were the ones who reported a greater victimization rate.

More research is needed in order to promote the student population's awareness to the dynamics involved in this phenomenon as well as to work on prevention and intervention in these cases.

Keywords: cyberstalking, victimization, prevalence, university students.