

## **P-664 - STALKING OF PSYCHIATRISTS BY THEIR PATIENTS: AN UNSETTLING REALITY**

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**Introduction:** Psychiatrists are particularly exposed to the risk of being victims of stalking (repeated persecution, unwanted communicating & contact causing fear) by patients.

**Aim and method:** To summarize the latest research findings on this topic. We conducted a literature review on Medline sources. Key words: Stalking by patients, psychiatrists, mental health professionals.

**Results:** Up to 20% of psychiatrists have been victims of stalking, at least once. Stalkers are usually male, single & unemployed, and under the care of the clinician; 3/4 of them suffer from a psychotic and/or personality disorder(s), mainly cluster B personality disorder(s). Duration of stalking varies between several weeks and could reach 16 years. Methods of harassment include intrusive approaches, loitering near the victim, telephone calls, following the victim, spreading gossip, violating property, and sending unwanted material (letters, sexual material etc). Victims most commonly express fear, anger, helplessness or even PTSD symptoms. Stalked psychiatrists are usually male consultants but also at risk are inexperienced trainees. Most victims search assistance and counselling from colleagues, family, friends, police or lawyers.

Countermeasures include modifying professional style, taking more precautions at work, changing telephone number, increasing home security; in serious cases residence change is needed. Any attempt of the victim to contact the stalker gets things worse.

**Conclusions:** Whether the stalker's behaviour is motivated by anger, envy, delusion, or because of misunderstandings about the nature of the psychotherapeutic relationship (false sense of intimacy), psychiatrists should maintain high levels of attention. The threat of stalking should not be underestimated.