Nearly Half of Americans Admit to ‘Stalking’ an Ex or Current Partner Online

2020-02-12

New NortonLifeLock Survey Reveals the Most Common Habits on How Exes and Partners Spy on Each Other

TEMPE, Ariz.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- NortonLifeLock (NASDAQ: NLOK), a global leader in consumer Cyber Safety, today released findings from its Online Creeping Survey, revealing that many Americans’ online creeping tactics are unwittingly veering into cyber stalking behavior: 46 percent of Americans admit to ‘stalking’ an ex or current partner online by checking in on them without their knowledge or consent.

Online creeping, or following someone persistently or stealthily online, is typically benign behavior. However, when that becomes a pattern of behavior or escalates to using the same technology and tactics to harass someone online, it’s cyber stalking. Cyber stalking can take on many forms, but the common denominator is that it is unwanted, obsessive and sometimes illegal.

Conducted in partnership with The Harris Poll, the NortonLifeLock Online Creeping Survey interviewed more than 2,000 U.S. adults to help determine when online creeping veers into cyber stalking. The results showed the most common forms of online stalking included checking their current or former partner’s phone (29 percent) and reviewing their partner’s search history on one of their devices (21 percent) without their knowledge or consent. Nearly one in ten Americans created a fake profile to check on them on social media (9 percent) or tracked their physical activity via their phone or health app (8 percent). Notably, 10 percent admitted to using an app to monitor an ex or current partner’s text messages, phone calls, direct messages, emails and photos, with men being 2.5 times more likely than women (15 percent vs. 6 percent) to engage in this behavior.

“Some of the behaviors identified in the NortonLifeLock Online Creeping Survey may seem harmless, but there are serious implications when this becomes a pattern of behavior and escalates, or when Stalkerware and creepware apps get in the hands of an abusive ex or partner,” says Kevin Roundy, Technical Director, NortonLifeLock. “These apps can be hard to detect as they hide in plain sight as apps with legitimate uses such as family locating. For instance, our researchers found an app that was flagged for abuse calling itself a “Girlfriend Tracker” that later relaunched and branded as a family GPS tracker.”

NortonLifeLock researchers take this threat seriously and have worked diligently to identify and report Stalkerware and creepware apps. Since 2017, they have identified more than 1,000 apps that could allow someone to ‘stalk’ current or former significant others, and Norton Mobile Security has detected roughly 1,250 infected mobile devices monthly.

Additional findings from the NortonLifeLock Online Creeping Survey include:

- **Many Americans have trust issues, while some are “just curious.”** When asked why they checked in on

their current or former partner without their knowledge or consent, 38 percent said they were “just curious,” while 44 percent said they didn’t trust them or suspected they were up to no good. Meanwhile, one in five (20 percent) said they found out their partner was checking in on them, so they decided to do the same.

- **The differences in behaviors and attitudes between men and women are pronounced.**
  - Overall, thirty-five percent of Americans that say they don’t care if they are being stalked online by a current or former partner as long as they are not being stalked in person, but men are far more likely to agree with this sentiment (43 percent vs. 27 percent of women).
  - Men are more likely than women to track a current or former partner’s location (20 percent vs. 13 percent) and physical activity (11 percent vs. 6 percent) online.
  - Men are more likely than women to condone 'online stalking' behavior if one or both partners have cheated or are suspected of cheating (34 percent vs. 27 percent).
- **Younger adults are far more likely to engage in online stalking behavior and believe it to be harmless.** 65 percent of 18-34 year olds and 68 percent of 35-44 year olds say they have checked in on a current or former significant other while only 53 percent of 45-54 year olds, 25 percent of 55-64 year olds, and 10 percent of those 65 and older report such behaviors. Additionally, nearly half of Americans ages 18-34 (45 percent) find online stalking to be harmless (compared to 27 percent of 45-54 year olds, 19 percent of 55-64 year olds and 13 percent of those 65 and older).

For more information, please visit the NortonLifeLock news room at https://www.nortonlifelock.com/about/newsroom.

About the NortonLifeLock Online Creeping Survey

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of NortonLifeLock from December 18-20, 2019 among 2,050 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, employment, marital status, household size and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

About NortonLifeLock

NortonLifeLock Inc. (NASDAQ: NLOK) is a global leader in consumer Cyber Safety. NortonLifeLock is dedicated to helping secure the devices, identities, online privacy, and home and family needs of nearly 50 million consumers, providing them with a trusted ally in a complex digital world. For more information, please visit www.nortonlifelock.com.

View source version on businesswire.com: https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20200212005192/en/

Jenna Torluemke
NortonLifeLock Inc.
(415) 767-7800
Jenna.Torluemke@nortonlifelock.com

Christine Kim
Edelman for NortonLifeLock
(415) 712-3409
Christine.Kim@edelman.com

Source: NortonLifeLock Inc.