

2022 Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report

How We Define Online Creeping

The definition we use for online creeping is characterized by following someone persistently or stealthily online without their knowledge or consent. The impact of online creeping varies from year to year, but the most common denominator of this behavior is that it is unwanted, invasive, obsessive and in some circumstances, illegal.

The Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report: Online Creeping, shows the changing behaviors and attitudes associated with online creeping, while analyzing the greater implications for consumers in a digital world.

This document details some of the common methods people utilize when online creeping, alongside the differences between stalkerware, creepware and surveillance apps to note the nuances in mechanisms behind online creeping.

Methods for Online Creeping:

- Checking on a current or former partner's phone
- Reviewing their partner's search history on one of their devices
- Using their knowledge of their passwords to access their device or online accounts
- Tracking their location via a location sharing app
- Creating a fake profile to check on them on social media
- Using an app to monitor their text messages, phone calls, direct messages, emails or photos
- Tracking their physical activity via their phone or health app

Stalkerware vs. Creepware

Stalkerware is an invasive app that turns a victim's mobile phone into a sophisticated spying device. Once installed on a victim's phone, the stalkerware perpetrator monitors that device's activity, like texts, phone calls, and emails. Stalkerware apps enable abusive behavior, and domestic violence practitioners have long reported instances of this tech-enabled abuse. Creepware is a term that refers to mobile apps that don't possess the full features of stalkerware. However, they can still be used to stalk, harass, defraud, or threaten another person, directly or indirectly.

Stalkerware vs. Surveillance apps

Surveillance apps enable mutual tracking and are transparent about what is being monitored and shared with the other partner, with ample notifications and awareness of both parties. Stalkerware is entirely covert, performing tracking on unsuspecting victims.