

Relentless, not Romantic: Intimate Partner Stalking in Aotearoa New Zealand

NATIONAL COLLECTIVE OF INDEPENDENT
WOMEN'S REFUGE INC

Ngā Whare Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa



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The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR) is a central part of the solution to New Zealand's problem of family violence – both in the context of providing an immediate crisis and longer term support. In 2018/19, our network of 40 affiliated refuges received 48,106 crisis calls and provided 61,066 nights of secure accommodation within our safe houses, with direct assistance provided to 32,317 women and children. A large and growing percentage of our client base consists of children and young people under the age of 17 years, with 43% of these children under the age of 10 years.

Our workforce of some 300 FTEs (supported by a roughly equivalent number of volunteers) accepts referrals from Police, from other social service organisations, and from clients wishing to self-refer. Our focus is on continually finding effective ways to protect and assist women affected by abuse within relationships and preventing this abuse from re-occurring or escalating.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Stalking is a sequence of unwanted contact, monitoring, surveillance, and sabotage. This research looks specifically at intimate partner stalking (IPS), perpetrated against partners or ex-partners. Common stalking actions can include showing up, driving past, confrontation, calling repeatedly or texting/direct messaging incessantly, posting on social media, delivering gifts or tokens, using spyware or obtaining access to private information and communication, making threats, contacting people proximal to the victim, and sabotaging the victim's freedom and prospects. Many of these individual actions appear innocuous when taken alone, but this intrusion becomes distressing or fear-inducing when cumulative. Intimate partner stalking is associated with an elevated risk of intimate partner homicide, and frequently escalates to physical and sexual violence. Some stalking behaviours are prohibited under various laws such as the Harassment Act 1997 and the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015, but court action for stalking crimes is infrequent. Intimate partner stalking is a highly gendered form of interpersonal violence that capitalises on a pre-existing power differential within a relationship. It is predominately perpetrated by men and against women but can be perpetrated in other relationships. Women's Refuge statistics show that of clients who are asked and answer assessment questions about stalking, 74.6 percent are stalked by their intimate partner pre-separation, and 64.7 percent are stalked post-separation. Anecdotally, Women's Refuge advocates have raised concerns about the invisibility of stalking behaviours within judicial interagency responses to victims of intimate partner violence, and about the rise of digitally-facilitated stalking and their capacity to support digital safety.

Aims

In response to the concerns raised by advocates and clients, we searched for available resources and research into IPS and found little that fit within an Aotearoa context. We therefore aimed to gain a local understanding of how stalking by intimate partners manifests, how cumulative harm is considered and understood, what the responses of frontline practitioners hearing disclosures and reports of stalking are, and how our framing of the issue might give rise to safer practice.

Methods

We used a qualitative-dominant, mixed-methods design comprising of a survey and semi-structured interviews. 712 respondents who had been subjected to intimate partner stalking answered the survey, and we interviewed 18 of these. We also interviewed four advocates. The survey was principally qualitative in nature but was supplemented with prevalence measurement questions. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, assisted by NVivo QSR International qualitative data analysis software.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The experience of stalking

The key distinguishing features of stalking across respondents' narratives were insidious regular contact, jealousy and retribution for imagined transgressions as the orienting motivations for stalking, and cyclical patterns of perpetration that oscillated between affection or reconciliation attempts and destructive and malicious actions. While often perpetrated covertly or discreetly, an escalation to physical or sexual violence was commonly part of stalkers' broader patterns of power and control, and this was interwoven with visible stalking tactics. The number of tactics reported by respondents and the variance in how these were perpetrated precludes a total list. Instead, we developed a multi-domain model of stalking tactics that classifies tactics by impact domains; specifically, intrusive contact, monitoring/surveillance, intimidation and violence, and life sabotage.

Impacts on victims

Inimical impacts to mental health and emotional functioning were common, but the impacts of stalking extended beyond emotional wellbeing and into social, employment, and relational/family spheres. Being stalked by proxy or by digital means meant safety was an elusive concept and the consequences to the victim of online stalking pervaded their existing and new relationships, their employment standing and prospects, and their use of online spaces as previous sources of safety and connection. Hypervigilance, fear and a sense of futility or hopelessness about ever escaping the stalking plagued

victims for prolonged periods of time. For some, this represented a compelling reason to return to the abuser, where at least patterns of abuse could be somewhat anticipatable and interspersed with periods of relative safety. Costs to victims may traverse multiple spheres of their lives, such where they have been forced to make compromises, withdraw, or behave differently in an attempt to negate the physical and social risks of the stalking behaviour. Identifying the full range of these costs may elicit greater comprehension of the threat that stalkers pose to victims' futures in addition to the risk to physical safety.

Pathways to safety and justice

Some respondents described affirming responses from social support networks, police, or specialist services when they attempted to seek help to stop the stalking. However, most described their experiences of help-seeking as overwhelmingly negative. Typically, the first strategy they used was informal and focused either on de-escalating the stalker's attempts to exercise control or on simply avoiding opportunities for the stalker to have access to them, either physically or digitally. Such avoidance inevitably required a sacrifice of competing forms of safety, such as engagement in social or community routines or reliable employment. When the stalking overwhelmed the strategies they alone could enact, many reported the stalking. However, this was complicated by people's assumptions about what a 'nice guy' could be capable of or motivated by and by a lack of viable pathways to stop the stalking.

When they did attempt to report, it was difficult to meet the threshold of evidential sufficiency, given that the stalking pattern was often predicated on subtlety and subjectivity. Typically, they did not receive any acknowledgement of the implicit or symbolic threat posed by tactics that were perpetrated against a backdrop of intimate partner violence. Acknowledgement of harm was usually only given if there were objectively violent or threatening stalking episodes; otherwise, there was little recourse available to them. Despite more than half having reported the stalking to police, and despite reported stalking typically involving a greater volume of high-risk tactics, respondents felt overlooked, frustrated, stigmatised, and blamed. Given the consistencies between their experiences of reporting stalking, and the findings of research into the beliefs informing police responses elsewhere, this is likely to be in part testament to misplaced blame attribution, and to incomprehension of the significance of seemingly harmless unwanted contact.

Myths, beliefs, and dominant conceptualisations of stalking

Respondents were frequently met with comments that minimised, denied, or legitimated the stalking. Many people hearing their concerns about continued intrusive behaviour relegated these concerns to an unhelpful narrative of misplaced romantic love and commitment, rather than a narrative of power, abuse, and violence. Similar themes have been found in numerous other research projects, where the history of an intimate relationship has been found to somehow nullify the violent significance of stalking in the eyes of listeners. Hearing these responses discouraged further help-seeking, regardless of how severely the violence then escalated. Given the power of language to legitimise or delegitimise victims' experiences, we developed a set of five 'stalking myths' that were discernible throughout respondents' accounts of the reactions they encountered. Namely, these were: "Constant contact is out of love", "Anger is just romantic jealousy", "It will go away if no one feeds the fire", "Stalking reports are from hysterical/paranoid women", and "If it was really bad, victims would call Police". Adherence to these myths invariably results in harmful responses to victims' complaints and they need to be systematically deconstructed.

The need for stronger legislation and judicial consistency

Stalking is not explicitly referenced in Aotearoa's harassment legislation, but many stalking-type behaviours are prohibited by way of the Harassment Act 1997. However, the greater part of this legislation is civil; it sets out victims' rights to obtain a restraining order. This is unobtainable by victims of partner violence, who must instead obtain a protection order, for which the threshold of harm is significantly higher. Victims' reports to police were rarely met with court charges against the stalkers, and many were unable to access protection orders on the basis of stalking alone. Those who did have protection orders found these were unreliably upheld and consequently not usually effective at curbing the stalking. The legislative framework covering stalking could potentially be strengthened by introducing a new stalking offence that better captures the dynamics typical of intimate partner abusers or by reconsidering the artificial split between protection and restraining orders.

The need to build anti-stalking infrastructure and invest in services

Fragmented support services, disjunction between police and helping agency priorities, and a lack of understanding about risk potential all textured respondents' experiences of help-seeking and advocates' experiences of support provision. Regardless, in contrast to their experiences of the justice system, victims described accessing invaluable support from counsellors and from the specialist family violence sector. Correspondingly, advocates make use of several strategies to work collaboratively with victims to promote safety and these have been simply and sequentially set out here. Respondents also gave a range of recommendations for developing support services. However, the consideration of risk in a stalking context is under-theorised in New Zealand, with few resources available to frontline workers. Accordingly, we have developed a risk matrix that encapsulates empirical research into risk indicators and respondents' experiences of risk escalation.

Conclusions and recommendations

Intimate partner stalking can happen before, during, or after a relationship, and it is the two latter temporal periods that are the focus of this research. The significance of individual actions tends to be considered in isolation but should be viewed as building blocks that cumulatively and progressively cause harm to victims. This cumulative harm can disrupt and limit victims' capacity to lead full and self-determining lives. While there has been little attention to stalking as a distinct manifestation of intimate partner violence in New Zealand to date, the resources developed as part of this research may be utilised by the specialist sector to inform both their understanding of stalking risk dynamics. However, this cannot be effective without simultaneously attending to the flaws in justice actors' responses to victimisation. At present, the state of knowledge and definitional clarity on stalking is disparate; there is minimal national consistency or best practice guidelines for addressing intimate partner stalking. In the absence of a prioritisation of stalking, stalking myths which delegitimise victims' experiences have been permitted to pervade the conceptual frameworks of first responders. This has been reinforced by an inadequate and under-utilised legislative framework, which frequently fails to secure victims' safety until there has been a violent escalation of the stalking.

Recommendations therefore include a national policy focus on stalking and of the potential for interagency initiatives to grow in scope; a police focus on holding stalkers accountable, and addressing issues of blame attribution and adherence to stalking myths; partnership between the specialist sector and digital safety agencies and training of staff; and a review of the current law's suitability for and responsiveness to intimate partner stalking.

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INTRODUCTION

I got into a relationship when I was in a very vulnerable place. I had just lost a baby so I was rather vulnerable, and it wasn't until about two or three months into the relationship that things started to get, I don't know, I guess you could say questionable. First it started with a bombardment of texts, like when I was working and I wasn't at home, you know, [with him asking] 'where are you, who are you with', [and] just constant[ly] wanting to know where I was every second of the day.

Then our relationship escalated from there because it got extremely physical and extremely violent. He was sexually violent, [and] physically violent, and I kind of turned to alcohol through[out] that. So I kind of was in survival mode, and then after quite a long time I managed to break off the relationship and kind of get out. But it began there - I would see him turn up at random places all the time, like, [places] where I'd be. I didn't have a car, so I was either walking or taking the bus, and him and his mates would just appear out of nowhere, and they would be either following me, or they would be in the same vicinity of [me] where I was going home.

At that point, after leaving the relationship, there was a break and I actually found out I was pregnant with my daughter. After I had my daughter, again it started [back up], like if I was out and about they would be there, you know, they would follow me, but it wasn't only him, it was his associates [too]. And I had huge issues with the police, because I tried going to the police and it was like 'well we can't find him by that name' and I'm like 'well that is the name I know him by' and they made it very difficult for me. And at one point I gave up with the police, like over a period of four years of dealing with them, because I was more worried about what the consequences of me saying anything were [than the stalking itself]. [I wanted to tell them] that it is all fine and well that they get it, but his associates knew exactly where I was. I ended up saying to the police 'none of this happened, [I'm] making it all up'. Erin¹, research participant.

Erin's ex-partner stalked her over several years, starting when she was still in her teens. Before long, this stalking turned (back) into physical and sexual assaults, despite living separately from the stalker. These were, in the main, perpetrated without attracting any criminal justice response. In part, this absence of response was because her interactions with police had been so negative that she was reluctant to continue to report the violence. However, it was also because much of the stalking abuse was insidious, was perpetrated opportunistically and without witnesses, and was predicated on the stalker's confidence that Erin would not be taken seriously if she disclosed the stalking to anyone. This ongoing monitoring, surveillance, and harassment, as well as the assaults that she was subsequently subjected to, could have been prevented if agencies had recognised the significance of the stalking behaviour. Instead, Erin tolerated years of unpredictable stalking abuse, leading to intense distress, anxiety, and hypervigilance.

What is intimate partner stalking (IPS)?

Stalking is the pattern of unwanted communication and contact that elicits distress or fear in a victim. It can include actions such as repeatedly showing up, driving past, calling home, work, or mobile numbers, or sending messages, emails, mail, gifts; social media posts; creating or maintaining false internet or social media presences; contacting friends, family, or colleagues to ascertain the victim's whereabouts and activities; and maintaining a physical presence outside the victim's home, work, or school (Stalking Resource Center, 2018; Stuart, Thomas, Purcell, Pathe, & Mullen, 2008). In this project, we have focused exclusively on intimate partner stalking – in other words, stalking by someone who is or has in the past been a romantic, sexual, or dating partner.

Most stalking actions, taken individually, do not appear to be overtly threatening or harmful, and this makes recognising and responding to the implicit threat posed by a sequence of such actions more difficult. In Erin's case, for example, the stalker intermittently sent her messages, followed her home, and threatened her. Any of the messages he sent her, taken individually, would not have seemed like cause for concern. Taken cumulatively, they portrayed his refusal to allow her to move on with her life. The key difference between the individual activities that are typically listed within harassment or stalking legislation, and the actual patterns of behaviour indicative of systematic stalking of victims, is the absence of a legitimate purpose to be engaging in those activities. Once it has been established that the contact is not reciprocal, but that the stalker continues to pursue and/or uses the victim's identity or information to threaten, intimidate,

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout this research.

degrade, impersonate, endanger, or steal from the victim (Bociji & McFarlane, 2002), this pattern then constitutes stalking behaviour.

Stalking is usually perpetrated by men and against women but can occur within any relationship. It is also important to note that while stalking clearly does also happen to men, this is almost always as a consequence of the stalker identifying the man as being a vicarious target of secondary interest to the principal victim, who is almost always female (Zorza, 2009). This, of course, is consistent with other manifestations of gender-based violence, particularly those which are exercised by one partner against another.

How common is intimate partner stalking?

Being stalked is far from an uncommon experience. The U.S National Violence Against Women Survey showed that lifetime prevalence is approximately 10 percent for women, and five percent for men (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Baum, Catalano, and Rand (2009), using the data from a US Supplemental Victimization Survey oriented towards stalking, found that 1.4 percent of the population experienced stalking (at a criminal threshold), and that of these, 26.1 percent experienced cyberstalking either as the focal or contributing stalking method. As with other (particularly gender-based) categories of crime, this is likely to under-represent the true scope of the problem, as stalking behaviour is not always identifiable as such, is often misinterpreted as other offences, is too difficult to disclose, or is regarded simply as offensive but not criminal behaviour and thus ignored.

We have no population-based statistics from which to draw regarding how stalking happens in New Zealand, who it happens to, and how frequently people report it. Instead, coverage in New Zealand has been limited to popular media, and focuses principally on the stalking of high-profile figures, with additional commentary on the general risks of stalking more recently. This adds to general confusion about what stalking is, especially since the popular narrative is so different from victims' realities. However, Women's Refuge database statistics show that of clients who complete the intake assessment section relating to their experiences of stalking, 74.6 percent are stalked by their partner or ex-partner pre-separation, and 64.7 percent are stalked post-separation.

While the concept of stalking often evokes a depiction of a shady character physically pursuing a victim, proximity is not a prerequisite for stalking. A subset of stalking behaviour, called cyberstalking, involves unwanted and repeated contact, surveilling, intimidating, or embarrassing the victim through digital means. Such stalking can be prolonged; U.S Department of Justice statistics indicate that 11 percent of stalking offences are perpetrated over five or more years. Victimization may also extend beyond indirect abuse against the targeted person - approximately one quarter of stalking patterns also involved instances of destruction of property and over one fifth involved physical assaults. Moreover, 15 percent of victims disclosed that attacks by stalkers were further perpetrated against family, friends, pets, or colleagues as part of the stalking violence (Tapp & Daulton, 2011). Stalking is closely linked to physical and sexual violence against the primary victim. In earlier research, the rate of physical violence in stalking cases was found to be 39 percent (Rosenfield, 2004), highlighting the importance of recognising and responding to intimate partner stalking as an indicator of potential – and often severe – physical violence.

Why research IPS in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Clearly, intimate partner stalking is far from uncommon, yet police rarely choose to prosecute harassment type offences, and even fewer of these result in conviction. Statistics obtained under the Official Information Act show that there are, on average, approximately 100 convictions per year under the Harassment Act 1997, and fewer than 100 per year under the Harmful Digital Communications Act for partner-related offences. This is reinforced by anecdotes from Women's Refuge advocates, who have reported feeling frustrated with the barriers that clients face to accessing safety mechanisms in the absence of physical violence or explicit threat. Finally, in our recent research projects into other forms of intimate partner violence (IPV), abusers' stalking behaviours such as electronic surveillance, the mining of digital email or social media accounts for personal information, street confrontations, and drive-bys were repeatedly raised by participants. Despite the frequency with which these behaviours are disclosed, there is minimal research on how the existence of a present or past intimate partnership might require different responses for victims of intimate partner stalking than for other victims. Recently, this has also been raised informally by helping services as having important ramifications for immediate safety, particularly with regard to admitting victims of IPV to safe houses when their digital security (such as through the tracking mechanisms enabled on smartphones) cannot be guaranteed. Accordingly, we felt that stalking was so under-studied as a common phenomenon within IPV contexts that it merited further attention.

This research seeks to fill some of the gaps in knowledge about how stalking by intimate partners manifests in Aotearoa New Zealand, how cumulative harm differs from single severe episodes of violence, how first responders and support agencies interpret and respond to episodes of stalking, and how the language we use to describe stalking by intimate partners can exacerbate or ameliorate the difficulty in identifying and communicating the harm it causes.

Structure of report

Victims' experiences of intimate partner stalking are complex and multifaceted. In this report, we have chosen to organise findings and analysis of these findings by topic rather than linearly and have divided these aspects of the report into six parts. Part One focuses on the stalking itself, and introduces the stalking story, the tactics used by stalkers, and the contexts in which they stalk their victims. In Part Two, we explore the range of impacts that stalking has on its victims, including emotional and psychological, social, relational, and economic impacts. Part Three addresses the pathways to safety and justice, and discusses barriers to disclosing and reporting stalking, and the experiences of victims and advocates who have turned to police in an attempt to stop the stalking. Part Four explores the use of language we employ to describe stalking and how this use of language informs the ways that both formal and informal sources of support respond to victims. Part Five introduces the legislative context of New Zealand and themes in relation to international anti-stalking laws and considers the role of criminal and civil provisions in holding stalkers accountable and securing victims' safety. Finally, Part Six explores the complexities of help-seeking for victims and makes recommendations regarding establishing risk, developing responsive services, and instrumentalising advocacy strategies to protect and support victims. In the next section of the report, we set out the international literature on intimate partner stalking.

Literature Review

Before undertaking this project, we reviewed the literature as it relates to stalking violence by current or ex-partners, thus excluding the majority of results (which related to political stalking, campus stalking, adolescent and children stalking, celebrity stalking, and profession-specific stalking such as against doctors, social workers, lawyers, and judges). Results were then clustered into the following themes: stalking dynamics, identifying stalking, blame and accountability, impacts, the association between stalking and serious physical violence, stalkers' characteristics, victims' help-seeking, legislation and policy consequences, police training and decision-making, and the justice process for stalking offences.

Stalking dynamics

How is stalking different from harassment?

The term 'stalking' initially arose to describe the obsessive following of celebrities, after which anti-stalking legislation was introduced in much of the Western world. However, given the dissimilitude of jurisdictional definitions of stalking, a pattern of behaviour may be conceived as stalking or not stalking depending on where it takes place (SALC, 2003). By its nature, stalking is difficult to legislate for, as it generally comprises sets of seemingly innocuous behaviours rather than a single offensive act (Mullen et al., 2006).

To distinguish everyday activities from stalking ones, we must consider whether the victim perceives this contact as unwanted, repetitive, and with menacing undertones. Stalking is not limited to ex-intimate partners – it is often perpetrated while still in a relationship with the victim (Campbell et al., 2007).

The acts that collectively make up stalking are, taken individually, often perfectly legal. It is only when they are taken in context that they may be interpreted as a pattern of harassment usually involving a constellation of intrusive, distressing, annoying, or forceful behaviours. Police have traditionally been uncertain about the way to proceed in such cases and frequently put the onus back on victims to seek protection through legal orders, or to collect 'evidence' until the collective weight of the behaviours becomes objectively evident (Melton, 2000; Sinwelski & Vinton, 2001; Proctor, 2003; Wattendorf, 2000).

How does stalking happen online?

The term 'Facebook stalking' is colloquially used to denote the casual perusal of a specific individual's online presence. However, there appears to be some truth to the use of the term 'stalking' when referring to obsessive online behaviour and, more importantly, this can be used to predict harmful cyber and real-life behaviours. Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, and Cratty (2011) surveyed 411 respondents to explore whether there were associations between Facebook stalking/harassment and cyber obsessional pursuit (COP; in other words, online stalking) or obsessive relational pursuit (ORI; in other words, real-life stalking). They found three distinct categories of online communication with ex-partners that was harmful: covert provocation, public harassment, and venting. Interestingly, each of these was independently associated with both COP and ORI, and individuals who obsessively pursued their ex-partners online were up to six times more likely to also obsessively pursue them physically (Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, and Cratty, 2011). Previous research has found that technology has been a mechanism to convey threats, manipulate partners, and publicise others' personal details (Melander, 2010). Many of these behaviours were likely to be unknown to the victim, at least initially. Studies have consistently found that people who harass, monitor, and stalk their victims online usually do so in person as well (Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, & Cratty; Sheridan & Grant, 2007; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). However, despite the growth of digitally-perpetrated stalking, much of stalking literature defines it in quite restrictive ways or includes traditional methods such as following, loitering, and gift-leaving only.

Stalkers may now spot increasing opportunities to perpetrate harm: as widening digital access can expand opportunities for safety for victims, so too can it represent an aid for stalkers to track and harass their victims. Tapp and Daulton explain how this changes the landscape of stalking, stating "These aren't your grandmother's stalkers. It's much less common these days for a stalker to be waiting for a victim in the parking lot, flowers in hand." (p. 76). Face to face contact is no longer a pervasive feature of stalking, leaving stalkers with an inflated sense of confidence and the potential to inflict reputational damage without their own identity becoming apparent (Paziotopoulos, 2017). While both physical and cyber stalking are driven by a desire to control and demonstrate power over the victim, cyber-stalking is particularly insidious as it does not require proximity or disclosure of identity (Keynes, 2010).

Why is stalking so difficult to define?

Attempts to define stalking can be somewhat nebulous (McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2014; Mullen, Pathe, & Purcell, 2001; Sinclair & Frieze, 2000), in that it is often the reaction of the victim that indicates whether a seemingly innocuous act (or set of acts) is harmful: a dozen text messages a day from a partner can be normative and enjoyable for some, but can be a relentless attempt to monitor and control for others. Similarly, a card in the letterbox that reads "Thinking of you" or "Can't wait for tonight" can be interpreted as a thoughtful token of affection, or a threat of repeat violence, depending on the context and history of the relationship. A broad definition of stalking, then, is the pattern of contact, monitoring, or pursuit behaviour that the recipient experiences as unwanted, intrusive, or distressing. However, it is important to note that defining stalking should not, as McKeon et al. (2014) suggest, be entirely "victim-defined", because a lack of comprehension of stalking dynamics is likely reflected in victims' own analysis; instead, assessing behaviours for patterns that are consistent with monitoring, contact, and pursuit behaviour should be the basis for identifying stalking behaviour.

What are the unique dangers of stalking?

The length of time that stalkers engage in stalking behaviour per victim can range from days to several years, and the average is almost two years (Spitzverg & Cupach, 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). More than half of stalking is perpetrated simultaneously with sexual or physical assault (Abrams & Robinson, 1998; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Most stalkers are physically sighted by their victims, even when online perpetration occurs alongside. The advantage of this physical presence is to begin to compile evidence, such as in the form of a log of dates, times, and places, even if communication was brief, harmless, or indirect. Many physical sightings occur as the stalker begins to compile information on the victim's behaviour and routine, which may then escalate the risk of subsequent abuse at those same locations (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). Loitering, following, or showing up may be concealed by the stalker, or it may be overt (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011), especially given that most stalkers believe they are entitled to the victim's compliance and believe they are righteous in their actions.

Stalkers show catastrophically high rates of both stalking recidivism and violent recidivism. Using a sample of 1005 cases originally gathered by Mondandie et al. (2006) to establish a stalking typology, Eke et al. (2011) used a subsample of police cases to explore police threat assessments and recidivism over time. They found that 77% of stalkers go on to reoffend at a level that met the threshold for criminal charges, that more than half go on to be charged with additional stalking offences, and that the rate of violent offending is 33 percent (Eke et al., 2011).

Range of behaviours

Zorza (2009) reports on findings from the largest U.S.-based survey into stalking victimisation, defined as “a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear” (p. 21) on two or more occasions. While broad in scope, the wording is still problematic in the use of the term ‘reasonable’ as neither the perpetration of IPV nor consequent analysis of discrete events following it constitute (or should be expected to demonstrate) reasonability. The survey showed that 40% of victims were concerned that the stalker would hurt their friends, family, colleagues, or pets as well as themselves, and that the stalker typically used a range of behaviours from the following:

- Making unwanted phone calls;
- Sending unsolicited or uninvited letters or e-mails;
- Following or spying on the victim;
- Showing up at places without a legitimate reason;
- Waiting at places for the victim;
- Leaving unwanted items, presents, or flowers; and
- Posting information or spreading rumours about the victim on the Internet, in a public place, or by word of mouth

These categories have widespread utility as they allow varied manifestation of stalking behaviour to remain captured (e.g. calling the workplace instead of the victim’s cell phone, which would otherwise need to be represented by a separate category). These consequently formed the basis for our own survey categories, although these have been expanded to capture contexts as well as actions.

Identifying stalking

Classifying stalking behaviour

How stalking is defined by the wider community inevitably determines whether stalking behaviour is correctly identified by stalkers, victims, law enforcement, and victims’ supporters (McKeon et al., 2014). If there are disjunctive perceptions of what constitutes stalking, for instance between victims and police, or between police and support services, there is unlikely to be an adequate, cohesive response to safety and support (Scott, Rajakarunu, Sheridan, & Sleath, 2014). Earlier evidence from a small sample of Australian police officers demonstrates the effects of discrepant understandings of stalking categorisation on the application of stalking law; police were less likely to make arrests of ex-partners compared to stranger stalkers because they were ‘just domestics’ (Pearce & Easteal, 1999). Following greater proliferation of stalking laws internationally, experimental research that assessed responders’ tendencies to classify behaviours as stalking by manipulating the prior relationship between victim and stalker showed that both police and non-police participants more readily acknowledged stalking by strangers than stalking by ex-intimate partners (Quirk, Rosenfield, & O’Connor, 2004; Scott, Lloyd, & Gavin, 2010; Scott et al., 2014; Weller, Hope, & Sheridan, 2013). Despite the disproportionate perpetration of homicides by ex-intimate partners comparative to stranger stalkers, even police with specialist training in intimate partner violence are more likely to consider stranger stalkers’ behaviour as intrusive, problematic, and dangerous than that of current or ex-intimate partners (Weller et al., 2013). This is of particular concern given that in comparison to stranger stalkers, ex-intimate partners who demonstrate stalking behaviour are more likely to persist in these behaviours and ultimately more likely to perpetrate physical violence against the victim (McEwan, Mullen, & MacKenzie, 2009; McEwan, Mullen, McKenzie, & Ogloff, 2009).

Stalking Schemas

Stalking schemas (mental representations) are often borne out of problematic or incorrect beliefs, such as that victims overreact to behaviours that are simply expressions of affection, that stalking may be irritating but is likely not serious, that victims like and/or invite the stalking, that victims have precipitated or encouraged the stalking by not being firm in their rejection, or that their victims' responses to the behaviour are exaggerated, hysterical, malicious, or overly dramatic (Copson & Marshall, 2002; Yanowitz, 2006). A sample of university students were asked to draft scripts of stalking patterns. These scripts usually featured behaviours such as following and surveillance than actions the researchers classified as 'romantic', i.e. leaving gifts or notes (Yanowitz & Yanowitz, 2012). They argued that, based on these results, the students mistakenly differentiated stalking from what they termed 'romantic pursuit' – insinuating that romantic pursuit and stalking were in fact indistinguishable from one another. 'Romantic pursuit' (with the assumed desire for subsequent romantic partnership), however, is markedly different from a pattern that is predicated on the demonstration of power over victims, and the desire to control them – which is fundamentally the motivation of ex-intimate partner stalkers.

Other researchers have also acknowledged the power of stalking schemas in shaping people's responses. Kamphius et al., (2005) and DeFazio and Galeazzi (2004) found that multiple schemas may contribute to misperceptions of stalking behaviour; for example, victim-blaming schemas, schemas constructing stalking as simply a nuisance, and schemas that positioned stalking as a flattering pursuit. Factors involved in these stalking schemas that influence whether monitoring, contact, or pursuit behaviours are classified as stalking include the length, frequency, severity, and perceived level of threat. Stalking behaviours that go on for long periods of time, that are very frequent (Dennison & Thompson, 2002; Phillips et al., 2004), that escalate quickly or involve physical violence, or where there is a clear or explicit threat to the victim (Dennison, 2007; Scott et al., 2014) are more readily interpreted as stalking than sporadic, infrequent, or ambiguous forms of stalking. Aggression is the principal factor that influences the gravity of police responses (Sheridan & Scott, 2010), yet, paradoxically, physical violence is not always a common facet of stalking – at least until there is a violent finale (Dressing, Kuehner, & Gass, 2005; Purcell et al., 2002). Yet even in the absence of express violence, there is considerable harm to victims (Purcell et al., 2002). Consequently, victims' reports are often met with minimising responses, as we discuss next.

Minimisation of IPV-related offences

Stalking that is perpetrated by a current or ex-intimate partner is often dismissed as minor or as benign. For instance, McKeon et al. (2015) invited participants to view vignettes of a stalking situation and asked them indicate agreement or disagreement with a number of statements to test the reliability of schemas that minimised the seriousness of stalking, identified it as 'romantic', and blamed victims for the stalking. They found consistency amongst all three, with minimisation of stalking being particularly prevalent, and suggested that this was because it was relegated to a superordinate knowledge structure regarding 'relationship difficulty' and therefore considered at least somewhat acceptable (McKeon et al., 2015). Importantly, men showed significantly higher rates of endorsement of stalking myths than women. This endorsement of stalking myths was strongly associated with judging the stalker in a vignette to be 'not guilty' (McKeon et al., 2015), which is consistent with trends amongst intimate partner violence myth adherence generally. In sum, regarding partner stalking as less serious influences how responders attribute blame.

Early studies into blame attribution are highly relevant to understanding the lack of response victims receive when they disclose stalking violence, whether formally or informally. For example, Shotland and Straw (1976) invited participants to sit in a room where they 'overheard' a man's attack on a woman. Half overheard a scenario with the woman shouting "I don't know you!" and the other half overheard the same scenario except the woman instead shouted "I don't know why I ever married you!" Participants believing the woman was being attacked by a stranger were likely to intervene 65 percent of the time, while those perceiving it as being perpetrated by the woman's husband were only likely to intervene 19 percent of the time (Shotland & Straw, 1976). These findings were echoed by Summers and Feldman (1984) who discovered that participants were much more likely to attribute culpability to the woman in situations where the victim had had an intimate relationship with the attacker. These themes of 'legitimate' victimhood and blame attribution have stayed relatively consistent in more recent studies that are specific to stalking. Hill and Taplin (1998), for instance, measured responses to a stalker threat while manipulating the victim-perpetrator relationship, finding that participants were more likely to be afraid and call police if the perpetrator in the scenario was a stranger. Similarly, Sheridan et al. (2003) used scenarios involving stalkers that were either ex-partners, colleagues, or strangers, and the scenarios with ex-partners were

perceived as considerably less realistic and likely than those with strangers or colleagues. Finally, multiple (and recent) studies assessing the perceived seriousness of stalking found that participants are generally less inclined to view stalking cases as serious if the stalker is a victim's ex-partner (Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld, & O'Connor, 2004; Scott, Lloyd, & Gavin, 2010; Scott & Sheridan, 2011). Such schemas are difficult to uproot when they are reinforced by numerous sources.

Problematic and stereotypical stalking schemas may be reinforced by inaccurate depictions of stalking in media and popular culture, which promote the stereotype of stalking as often perpetrated by strangers (Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002), that perpetrators are suffering from a delusional mental illness (despite this being rare; see Storey, Hart, Meloy, & Reavis, 2009), and of stalking either as part of courtship or a psychopathic attempt at vengeance. Such pervasive adherence to schemas and stereotypes of stalking may at least partially explain the stereotype-dependent discernment in identifying and classifying stalking behaviours. However, they also dictate how we legitimise (or otherwise) victims' experiences, as set out below.

Blame and accountability: language and messages

The language we use to describe stalking behaviour and women's responses to stalking is inherently powerful; it legitimises or delegitimises their practical, cognitive, and emotional responses to being stalked. Yet even in research aimed at analysing these experiences and the help-seeking that they precipitate, descriptions of both stalking and women's responses serve to obscure the seriousness of the crime. Malsch et al. (2009, p. 79) for example describe prior research as finding that "fear of violence is justified in between 10 and 33% of cases". While this is likely to mean that violence did eventuate in that proportion of cases, it insinuates that in cases where violence was not perpetrated, the fear was not justified – a problematic finding as the potential for violence is never fully quantifiable by victims. As with media portrayals, researchers too have fallen into the trap of labelling stalking as "inept or coercive attempts to pursue romance" (McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2015), using language of courtship and partnership that arguably serves to obscure the possessive and dominating nature of stalking, where 'romance' is not desired so much as further ownership of the victim by the stalker. Correspondingly, scholars often use the term 'romantic jealousy', which attempts to capture the centrality of the intimate partner relationship but unwittingly relegates it to the 'romantic' sphere rather than the concept of abuse (Muise, Christofides, Desmarais, 2010). This is evident in descriptions of behaviour; for example "those who sought intimate involvement with their victims were highly persistent" (Weller, Hope, & Sheridan, 2013, p. 322), where again, the stalker's attempts to regain control over the victim – either through a rekindling of the relationship or through continued demonstration of power – is relegated to the 'heartbroken ex-partner' narrative.

Highlighted in the discussion of schemas, literature and popular media influence attitudes toward stalking. The kinds of behaviours reported by research participants commonly mirror those that are romanticised as courtship pursuit by popular fiction (Nicol, 2006). Some, taken alone, may even constitute normal behaviours in the context of a desired courtship (Nicol, 2006; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014). However, when these are (or become) unwanted, obsessive, or intrusive, and especially when the victim then is forced to change their routine ways of living their lives, this becomes stalking (Emerson, Ferris, & Gardner, 1998; Logan, Cole, Shannon, & Walker, 2006; Logan, Walker, Jordan, & Leukefeld, 2006; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014), despite being rarely recognised as illegal.

These messages are also implicit in strategies that aim to prevent stalking violence but are instead targeted at women's behaviour. Prevention strategies necessarily depend on a thorough understanding of the relationship between the stalker and the victim. Obstructing access to personal information is likely to have some success against prospective stranger stalkers but have little benefit in preventing stalking by ex-partners, whose stalking behaviour is often predicated on their pre-existing knowledge of the victim's personal information (Bociji & McFarlane, 2002). Most attempts to forestall stalkers are premised on the theory of Situational Crime Prevention (SCT) – essentially the adaptation of an environment to make a particular type of offending more difficult or less appealing (Clarke, 1992, 1995). While effective in preventing petty crime (Clarke and Cornish, 1985), this is deeply problematic as an approach to curbing any manifestation of gender-based violence as it shifts responsibility onto the victim. Victims may already have constrained freedom as a result of victimisation and then must restrict aspects of their own lives to obstruct the potential stalking from being further perpetrated. Further, the SCT approach assumes that crimes occur because criminal opportunities are present (Cornish and Clarke, 1987). Conversely, gender-based violence is typically motivated not by the ease of offending but by a desire to continue to exercise power and control over a victim, irrespective of ease or of consequence. The concept of a 'rational offender' who, when confronted with roadblocks, will either desist or switch victims does not apply

to stalking and other gendered violence crimes; rather, the victim is at the centre of the stalker's intention to stalk (Tapp & Daulton, 2011).

Despite these incompatibilities, advice to victims in New Zealand has predominately been consistent with an STC approach, with a heavy focus on amending personal conduct, changing personal and social routines, and removing information from (or limiting participation in) social media. This is consistent with the international approach of law enforcement. For instance, Reyns (2010) advocates for the use of the STC model, arguing that many specific activities under the five domains (increasing the effort involved, increasing the risks, reducing the rewards, reducing the provocations, and removing excuses) are applicable to (specifically cyber) stalking. On closer examination, however, the majority of these still appear to be premised on a presumption of the interchangeability of victims to stalkers, which is in sharp contrast to the typical reality of the victim as an intimate ex-partner. Finally, these approaches rely on (usually women's) self-policing of behaviour, putting the onus unfairly on victims to deter offences against them. This is illustrated in the following passage:

“There may be influences which provoke potential stalkers to contact potential victims in the early stages of a stalking incident, but to be provoked into continual pursuit, a stalker would have to be, say, continuously aroused. One possible way this could occur if the victim continually updates the source of information for the stalker with new information (for example, the victim posts sexually provocative photos of themselves frequently on their social networking page). In other words, continuing to feed the fire.” (Reyns, 2010, p. 113).

This discourse of ‘provocation’ and ‘feeding the fire’ feeds into an outdated and thoroughly debunked myth of victim responsibility in gender-based violence and as such is an unhelpful approach to confronting stalking violence. Further, the everyday lexicon around conduct regarding intimate partners online serves to legitimise this online surveillance and harassment as an issue of provocation, with terms such as ‘Love and Heartbreak on Facebook’ and ‘Public Breakup Issues’ bandied around in blogs to explain mistreatment of ex-partners in cyberspace (Candy, 2009; Zaki, 2008). This can complicate people's understanding of the impact of this kind of stalking on victims.

Impacts

Unsurprisingly, stalking results in a range of inimical emotional, psychological, social, and physical consequences (Blaauw et al., 2002; McFarlane, Campbell, & Watson, 2002). As discussed above, aside from the personal distress of the victim, stalking has been identified as a significant predictor of serious physical assault (Palarea et al., 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and of intimate partner homicide (Campbell et al., 2003; McFarlane, Campbell, & Watson, 2002). However, both the methods of stalking and the effects are heterogenous; stalking, and the effects on victims, is as much uniquely experienced by each victim as the broader pattern of IPV is (Blaauw et al., 2002). Other forms of abuse commonly accompany stalking violence, contributing to the depth of impacts experienced by victims. Stuart et al. (2008) sought to establish whether effects of stalking that did not lead to physical assault differed in nature from the effects of stalking that did not – and, expectedly, found that greater traumatic impacts were experienced by victims who were also assaulted (Stuart et al., 2008). As with other types of intimate partner violence, the effects are cumulative – something may not be experienced as distressing until it is prolonged – and stalking conduct may span years (Tapp & Daulton, 2011). Cyberstalking incites similar feelings of distress, anxiety, and helplessness as real-world stalking (Bocij 2004; Wall 2001), however, these impacts are difficult to measure precisely.

Reliable research into the mental health impacts is difficult to obtain because samples are usually client-based (and so are typically only of people affected) rather than random, do not differentiate between victims with multiple other experiences of adversity, and do not temporally track periods of emotional ill-health (i.e., to identify whether they preceded victimisation). Diette et al., (2013), however, attempted to bridge the gap in knowledge about psychological impacts by merging datasets that made it possible to distinguish the associations between mental health disruption and stalking separately from life-cycle stage and other victimisation (particularly rape), finding that in the 18-45 age group, first episodes of poor mental health were much more prevalent amongst victims of stalking than amongst non-victims. Further, they found that this increased risk is disproportionately greater in young women (18-22), as women in this age range who are stalked (but not sexually assaulted) were 113 percent more likely to then suffer a first episode of mental ill-health following their experience of stalking (Diette et al., 2013). Stalking in adolescence was also found to be particularly harmful to mental health when coupled with sexual assault.

Adolescent women who had experienced both sexual assault and stalking were 516 percent more likely to then experience an episode of mental ill-health compared to their non-victimised counterparts. They also found that there may be a delay between the experience of stalking and the subsequent psychological distress (Diette et al., 2013). Further, Purcell et al. (2004) found that if stalking is prolonged beyond two weeks both the likelihood of escalating violence and the likelihood of victims' psychological distress are substantially increased. The range of mental health ill-effects are well documented; these include fear and anxiety (Bjerregaard, 2000; Nicastro, 2000), a loss of sense of fairness and a loss of a sense of control (Mullen et al., 2009), and general distress (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In fact, the impacts on mental state are arguably serious enough that the level of impairment they cause is equivalent to that caused by one or more psychiatric disorders (Blaauw, Winkel, Arensman, Sheridan, & Freeve; Kamphius & Emmelkamp, 2001). Moreover, psychological distress is only one aspect of the cumulative impacts of stalking.

The social impacts of stalking on victims' lives can also be devastating: stalking can precipitate the upheaval of their own and their children's lives, the loss of employment and corresponding financial stability, a reduced level of social connectedness and reduced involvement in social and leisure activities, and victims' increasingly restrictive and safety-seeking behaviour (Sheridan, 2005). Of victims of stalking who took part in Sheridan's (2005) research, 19 percent had their homes broken into, 18 had been subjected to sexual assault by the stalker and most had faced some financial disadvantage, such as through lost work time or legal costs. In addition, severe physical violence associated with stalking may escalate these impacts.

Severe physical violence

Stalking is also demonstrably related to homicide, often acting as a precursor even in the absence of other forms of abuse. Several researchers have found that intimate partner murders are commonly preceded by stalking, although stalking data is often incomplete or not thoroughly recorded by police (Glass, Koziol-McLain, Campbell, & Block, 2004; McFarlane et al., 1999; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2002). Paziotopoulos (2017) comments that stalking "may in fact be the most important indicator of escalating violence and a more common precursor to intimate partner homicide than abuse." (p. 55). Interestingly, however, the absence of stalkers' previous convictions where there is subsequently homicide or serious nonfatal violence was found in a minority of cases, where risk was estimated to be lower because perpetrators did not 'give away' their intentions by following or loitering, and yet carefully planned the serious (and in some cases, lethal) violence in advance (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). The most recent research into associations between stalking violence and other variables used a sample of 369 police reports of domestic violence that involved stalking. The researchers found that there are several variables that are independently associated with serious physical violence; namely, contact with the victim's children, a history of physical partner violence, recent separation, non-fatal strangulation of a partner, jealousy, and victims' belief that they will be harmed (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019). James and Farnham (2003) also established correlates for serious and lethal violence in stalking cases, finding that the factors most predictive of homicide or other serious violence were coming to the victim's home, stalking having recently begun, and having no prior violent convictions, while having a history of violence was associated with less serious violence. Conversely, Sheridan & Roberts (2011) found that the single greatest predictor of a stalker's use of lethal or serious violence is the victim's feeling of extreme fear, evidencing the need to take seriously cases where the victim perceives risk but there is little documented data to objectively support this perception.

Stalking is also associated with both severe and less-severe physical assault. Sheridan & Roberts (2011) found that almost one third of victims were physically assaulted by the stalker and, of these, almost one third required emergency room medical treatment (e.g. for violent rape, burns, cuts, fractures, strangulation, or paralysis). This proportion was classified as having experienced 'serious stalker violence' while the remainder was classified as having experienced 'violence'. Over a third were threatened with violence by the stalker, and approximately two thirds suffered property damage (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). Other people may also be targeted as part of the stalker's campaign to exact revenge or remove barriers to control, such as new partners, children, work colleagues, friends, family, and supporting professionals such as social workers or counsellors. In fact, in more than half of stalking cases, other parties are targeted alongside the primary victim. In 6-17% of cases these other parties are also physically assaulted by the stalker (Mohandie, Meloy, Green-McGowan & Williams, 2006). Finally, New Zealand's Family Violence Death Review Committee's (FVDR) fourth report gives examples of coercive control tactics, including abusive partners stalking their ex-partner after separation (termed 'jealous surveillance'), and highlights the risk that this poses even in the absence of violence (FVDR, 2014).

In examining the potential for serious violence and establishing risk, both victims' experiences and victims' perceptions of risk are important sources of data. Threats of assault are highly predictive of subsequent serious violence (Rosenfield, 2004; James & Farnham, 2003). Women's own assessments of risk from current or ex-partners have been demonstrated to be strongly indicative of actual risk (see Bell, Cattaneo, Goodman, & Dutton, 2008; Gondolf & Heckert, 2003; Heckert & Gondolf, 2004). In fact, the assessment of risk by women who are victims of intimate partner violence are shown to be as accurate as the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment and more accurate than the Kingston Screening Instrument for Domestic Violence Offenders (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). In short, if stalking by an ex-partner is perceived by the victim to be a risk of violence, then it probably is. Stalking has been also associated with threatening behaviour, the use of alcohol or other drugs, and with personality disorders (see McEwan et al., 2007), exacting revenge (Meloy, Sheridan, & Hoffman, 2008; Rosenfield & Harmon, 2002) or with predatory behaviour such as rape or homicide (see Mullen, Pathe, and Purcell, 2000). Prior relationship, threats, and a revenge motive all pose a greater likelihood of some form of violence within the stalking (Rosenfield & Lewis, 2005). While the conceptual stereotype of stalking is of a violent, psychopathic, and obsessive stalker, the presence of psychosis in a stalker is actually inversely associated with violent perpetration (Mohandie et al., 2006; Rosenfeld, 2004), although it is also argued that psychosis may interact with other factors and may present a heightened risk in some instances (McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie, & Ogloff, 2009). Conversely, substance use and repetitive contact are both strong indicators that a physical attack may be imminent. Past research into associations between contact and attacks show that an average of more than three visits per week to either the victim's home or work is significantly associated with serious physical violence (Sheridan & Boon, 2002; Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). Meanwhile, the use of alcohol or other drugs may fuel anger and suppress impulse control, heightening the risk of violence toward the victim. (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011).

The stalkers

Stalkers usually do not fit a stereotypical image that people conjure when asked to think about stalking. There is no single profile of stalkers, although a disproportionate number are middle-aged and they are almost always men (Meloy, 1996; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). However, previous authors have (somewhat problematically) argued that university students are likely to more frequently stalk than the rest of the population, on the basis that their forays into romantic relationships are suddenly unencumbered and may be inept (Geistman et al., 2013; Haugaard & Seri, 2004). Geistman et al. (2013) for example state that young adults at university "may have trouble distinguishing between acceptable and non-acceptable dating and relationship behaviour" (p. 44). However, this reinforces the stereotype of stalkers being romantically infatuated and socially deficit individuals who are simply pursuing a desired romance, rather than depicting the darker overtones of power and control that, as with other subcategories of intimate partner violence, texture perpetrators' behaviour. Unsurprisingly (and in all likelihood as with the rest of the population, university-age stalkers tend not to perceive their own behaviour as being intrusive, despite the victims perceiving it as such (Sinclair & Frieze, 2005; Spitzberg & Veksler, 2007). Sheridan and Grant (2007) also highlight the ubiquitous presence of the stalker in the victim's life: their capacity to draw out information from third parties, dedicate hours every day to monitoring or contacting, and their use of increasingly innovative methods to communicate to or about the victim cannot be overstated.

Help-seeking

As we have discussed above, stalking tactics are utilised across multiple domains of victims' lives. Victims often suffer the psychological and social consequences of these and use a range of coping strategies. 'Coping strategies' can be defined as behavioural and cognitive methods of dealing with situations that are perceived to exceed an individual's capacity to cope alone (Kraaij, Arensman, Garnefski, & Kremers, 2007). The most commonly reported 'formal' strategy to cope with stalking is to file for a protection or restraining order (Spitzberg, 2002), which is often the first course of action recommended by police when stalking is reported to them. However, as with all relational offences, there are likely to be compelling reasons for some victims not to report stalking to the police. Sheridan (2005) conducted research into the experiences of several thousand victims from 47 countries, finding that, more often than not, victims do not alert law enforcement to the stalking even when the stalking involves the targeting of victims' family and friends. There are a multitude of reasons for this non-report, such as fear of retributive anger and the belief that reporting is pointless (Olson, 2009). A US Department of Justice study (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009) found that help-seeking attempts that utilised police or law enforcement methods, such as seeking restraining orders or reporting stalking as a crime, were only about half as likely (25%) as help-seeking methods that utilised informal sources of support, such as confronting the stalker or asking family

and friends to confront them (50%). While this is suggestive of the effectiveness of informal strategies, it may also be dependent on what specific behaviours were defined as stalking, reliant on self-identification of the stalking, and potentially indicative of police (un)willingness to deal with stalking cases. Correspondingly, the rate of dissatisfaction with police and with the justice system is relatively consistent across services, with approximately half of victims dissatisfied with police and/or justice responses to their complaints of stalking (Brewster, 2001; Dunn, 2001; 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Legislation and policy consequences

Help-seeking through formal avenues is dependent on having quality services and justice responses available. However, the classification of crime and the response that it attracts from the justice system is invariably linked with the prioritisation of certain justice interests. Accordingly, priorities in crime policies may influence how police regard complaints of behaviours that indicate stalking, and, accordingly, how many are prosecuted (Groenen, 2006). It was the growing recognition of stalking as a precursor to homicide that precipitated a focus on policy reform in Britain. A spate of high-profile homicides committed by perpetrators who had stalked their victims prior to killing them led to new police strategies being developed in England and Wales (Horley, 2007). Similarly, recognition in the Netherlands of the inadequacy of police responses occurred after ex-intimate partner murders where stalking information was reported to police but failed to attract any decisive, appropriate, or timely action. The high-profile murder of Saga Backman, for example, showed that Saga made an official police report that went through intake, assessment, and assignment to a detective before an investigation was finally initiated, by which time she had been killed. In the following two years, similar patterns were publicised after the brutal and pre-warned deaths of women at the hands of current or ex-partners, each preceded by stalking behaviour that had been communicated to the police before the women were killed (Hehemann et al., 2017).

Researchers reviewing such cases discovered that the inadequacy of police responses could, at least in part, be attributed to police officers' underestimation of the level of risk posed by ex-partners and dismissal of victims' perceptions of their own risk (Van der Heijden, 2014). Amendments to legislation are generally positive in terms of law enforcement's approach to addressing stalking; updates to stalking law typically results in greater numbers of prosecutions in the subsequent years (Malsch, 2007). In both Belgium and the Netherlands, such reform means that stalking offences are now, more often than not, tried alongside other crimes; for example, crimes of violence, theft, destruction of property, bodily harm, slander, vandalism, and confidentiality or privacy (Malsch, 2007; Groenen, 2006). However, the effects of good legislation may be limited: despite increasing prosecutions of stalking alongside these crimes, Malsch et al. (2009) notes continued concern that the links between stalking and murder are likely downplayed, because stalking is so commonly either not reported to or not recorded as such by police. Therefore, when a homicide occurs, this information may not be recorded anywhere and so not identified as a precursor. Clearly, legislation alone is insufficient to guide police practices on responding to a complaint of behaviour that may amount to stalking.

Police responses to stalking

In the third decade of stalking research, there is now considerable literature on perpetrator traits (Logan, 2010), victims' experiences of the justice system (Baum et al., 2009; Geistman et al., 2013; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), the associations between stalking and other forms of violence (Jasinski & Mustane, 2001; Logan et al., 2007; Melton, 2012) and police and community perceptions of stalking (Farrell et al., 2000; Scott et al., 2013; Weller, Hope, & Sheridan, 2013), but very little on how police respond to reports and how initial police response influences the progression of cases through the criminal justice system (with few exceptions; see Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). Fears of false report are largely unfounded; although there is minimal research on the incidence of false reports of stalking, Mohandie, Hatcher, and Raymond (1998) assessed stalking report reliability and found the false reporting rate to be under one percent.

Literature regarding police response is typically reliant on scales or on vignette responses and is rarely the result of case reviews using real data where the victim was also interviewed. In other words, matching the two perspectives – police and victim – using real case data is rare. However, Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) in their review of domestic violence police reports found that one in six of the 1,785 reports contained evidence of stalking, yet a grand total of only one report resulted in a stalking charge. A decade later, Woodruff (2010) examined 1,200 police cases in Florida using Florida's anti-stalking statute and identified 45 cases of stalking, of which only one third had been classified as stalking by police. It is also worth noting that the cases only included data which the police had considered relevant to record, potentially excluding

some stalking information that may have been deemed irrelevant by the officer receiving the complaint. In addition, of the cases that police did classify as stalking, only two were arrested for stalking, although some others were arrested on charges such as making threats of violence or violations of protection orders (Woodruff, 2010). Other estimates of arrest rates for stalking cases range from 7.7 percent to 23.5 percent (Baum et al., 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The rates of actual stalking victimisation are clearly discrepant from police report numbers. Importantly, Woodruff (2010) also found that cases that met the definition of stalking, but which police did not identify as stalking, received either no or very little follow up by police in comparison to those that were clearly classified as stalking, indicating that how stalking is interpreted by police has immediate implications for victims' safety. Weller et al. (2013) also noted that there was some disagreement by police participants about whether digital methods of monitoring or reputation damaging were part of a pattern of stalking, or whether they should be separately regarded as cyber offences and as distinct from the stalking. This is illustrative of the way that stalking as a pattern of behaviour is often at odds with the ingrained police tendency to assess and manage immediate and clearly criminal behaviours. In other words, if stalkers do not behave in ways that are immediately and perceptibly criminal and offensive, police can struggle to recognise the overall pattern as one that is harmful and offensive and to intervene accordingly (Voerman & Brandt, 2016). This shift in analysis towards considering patterns comprising of repeated and unwanted (if arguably minor) events is difficult but necessary for ensuring a safety-focused police response to stalking.

The quality of the contact between the victim and the police officer hearing the complaint is integral to the victim's continued willingness to proceed with a complaint (Alderden and Ullman, 2012), especially if, as is often true for stalking cases, this contact has to be ongoing. Prolonged contact may present challenges to both police and victims: police often find it difficult to maintain sympathy to victims who they regard as repeatedly returning to dangerous situations (Horwitz et al., 2011) and victims may be reluctant to alert police to additional (especially minor) incidents, especially if they feel as though they are not being taken seriously (Xie et al., 2006). Correspondingly, Baum et al. (2009) found that nearly half of victims who did report to the police were dissatisfied with the response they received, and that 20 percent stated that the officer who heard their concerns took no action at all. Brady and Nobles (2017) suggest that this arises from a potential disjunct between officers' practice of reactively ensuring safety, such as by attending an incident and looking at what is necessary in that moment, and proactively putting smaller incidents into the context of a pattern of behaviour that required a different and considered response. They further note that this considered response is unlikely to occur if police training does not adequately address the phenomenon of stalking. Having similarly noted the need for a consistent response, Sheridan and Roberts (2011) used data from 1,565 stalking cases to identify opportunities for police intervention and develop questions that could assist police in establishing stalking patterns. As part of this, they classified perpetrators as belonging to one of two groups: the 'sadistically motivated' stalker, and the 'vengeful ex-partner' stalker (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). This is likely to refer to the small minority of rapists and murderers who identify and then stalk their victims, but it also presupposes a false separation between the two; i.e. that ex-partners are not sadistically motivated. In reality, stalking behaviour falls on a continuum of harm, similar to intimate partner violence generally and may include violent or sadistic overtones even if perpetrated by an ex-partner who is continuing a pattern of gender-based power and control behaviour. However, research projects such as this gather a much broader range of information and context than that which is reported to police or available within police data, and therefore can represent a valuable knowledge transfer mechanism for police to access (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011).

While rarely used in practice, tools to assist police in decision-making have been developed for stalking crimes. The use of tools to assess and respond to differential levels of risk have been consistently demonstrated to increase the quality of police responses to intimate partner violence by assisting them to reliably evaluate the likelihood of further violence and the likelihood of reoffending (Baldridge et al., 2012; McEwan et al., 2017; Messing & Thaller, 2013). The opportunity to employ similar tools designed for assessing stalking is likely to have similar success. There are two other such instruments that have been developed for this purpose: the Stalking Risk Profile (SRP; Belridge et al., 2012) and the Guidelines for Stalking Assessment and Management (SAM; Kropp, Hart, & Lyon, 2008). These have the dual function of providing guidelines alongside evidenced risk factors that correlate to high stalking risk and requiring the person using the instrument to collect information and develop a comprehensive understanding of the stalking pattern, although the SRP requires additional input from mental health clinicians, making it less user-friendly for police. However, while both are evaluated as having high validity, they are time-intensive and difficult to utilise by frontline police who need to triage complaints efficiently and make quick decisions about what actions to take. The Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH) was therefore developed

as a rapid triaging tool (McEwan, Strand, MacKenzie, & James, 2015; 2017). The SASH has a high level of consistency even amongst untrained police staff, and, while imperfect, offers significantly less scope of subjectivity and consequent inadequate police response than when police are left to use their own judgement unassisted (Hehemann et al., 2017). This should not replace specialised training for all police, however, as Hehemann's et al. (2017) evaluation into the reliability and predictive validity of the SASH (which to date is the only such evaluation) still demonstrated significant potential for subjective decisions that highlight continued susceptibility to fallacies in thinking about stalking.

Literature on intimate partner stalking has increased prolifically over the past two decades. This literature gives important insight into the nature of stalking, the risks associated with specific tactics used by partner stalkers, the responses of police and the criminal justice system, and the misbeliefs that inform people's responses to intimate partner stalking. It is evident that this type of stalking can be perpetrated through multiple means simultaneously, is frequently minimised by others, and can be misconstrued as part of a romantic pattern of behaviour rather than an abusive one. However, there is no such research in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, and there is little known about how justice actors' responses to victims here impact victims' experiences and victims' safety when they have been stalked by an intimate partner.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Methodology

While many research projects into stalking have maintained a focus on gender (chiefly centring on identifying the disproportionate rates of victimisation for men and women and locating stalking within broader patterns of gendered violence), few have used a feminist approach. However, using a feminist lens to explore and analyse women's stories of violence enables us to elevate women's voices and to privilege stories of oppression (such as through gender-based violence). This is of particular importance given the ways in which women's attempts to speak about violence are routinely silenced within a patriarchal society that does not welcome a challenging of the gendered status quo. The literature also suggests that stalking, even more so perhaps than other manifestations of gender-based violence, is predicated upon an assumption of invisibility. Related activities are often insidious, unseen, and difficult to articulate. Promoting opportunities for women to share their experiences and attempting to maintain the integrity of these experiences as they are told is a contiguous goal of this research. We therefore used a qualitative-dominant mixed-method approach in order to both capture some scope of women's experiences and to focus on the individuality of these.

Methods

There were three phases to the research. We chose to give voice to women's experiences via two methods: surveys and interviews. Surveys, while offering less depth, provided the opportunity to identify commonalities and distinctions amongst told stories of stalking violence, while interviews provided for the whole-of-story gathering of experience and victim knowledge. Of secondary focus were then interviews with several advocates who lent their expertise to provide context and analysis to the phenomenon of stalking their experience as supporters of victims of gendered violence.

The survey was developed from its draft form in consultation with advocates from a range of specialist fields. This included kaimahi from Women's Refuge's Tangata Whenua caucus and Tauīwi caucus, specialist sexual violence clinicians, a psychiatrist, mental health clinicians, and Takatāpui support agency representatives. Each of the people/agencies consulted provided suggestions regarding wording and concepts to be included, and the survey was amended accordingly following each consultation.

The survey consisted of five parts. After explaining the purpose and asking for consent, we asked respondents their ethnicity, age group, sexual orientation, gender, and whether they identified as transgender. Next, we asked how they first became aware of the stalking behaviour, and what their first responses were when they found this out. Third, we invited them to select the stalking tactics that were used against them and to indicate whether this happened during and/or after or not at all/not applicable. As one respondent pointed out, this could have been strengthened by adding an 'uncertain' option. She stated "Lots of this I suspect or wonder if he did, but don't know for sure. That's so different to a definitive 'never'". Fourth, we asked them to describe their experiences, to give details about the support they sought and how they experienced this support and whether there was any additional support they would have liked to have been offered. Finally, we asked them whether they had reported the stalking and, if they had done so, to describe their experience of this, and the outcomes of doing so.

Interview questions for both victims and advocates were developed out of the initial findings of the survey. The victims who participated were asked to describe as much of their experience as they felt comfortable with, including the relationship context, the tactics, their attempts to stop it, and how it impacted their lives. Advocates were asked about their experiences of supporting victims, where they perceived the gaps to be in systemic responses to victims, and what improvements they could envision. Victims' narratives were kept intact and used as vignettes rather than used for short quotes, in order to capture the total and invisibilised experience of stalking rather than focussing only on examples and events. We have used these to introduce the various sections of the report.

Recruitment

The survey, once finalised following input from stakeholders and other support agencies, was publicised on the Women's Refuge Facebook page and posted elsewhere on social media (in particular, through women-focused social media forums). Respondents were offered the opportunity to enter the draw to win one of ten \$50 vouchers if they participated and were comfortable leaving their email addresses. They were asked to indicate whether they would like to participate in follow up interviews; more than half expressed interest in doing. After the survey closed, the first 30 respondents were emailed or sent text

messages reminding them of the opportunity potential for them to participate in an interview process and given information about what this would involve (including the time it would take, where it would take place, and the voucher they would receive as koha for their time). Eighteen of these respondents then confirmed their willingness to be interviewed. They were then screened for safety and informed consent by phone. Once we were confident they were safe and fully informed as to what their participation entailed, interviews were conducted either in person or by phone or Skype. Each were given a \$50 voucher as thanks for their participation. Finally, four advocates who had some experience in working with stalking victims were also invited to participate in interviews as key informants.

Participants

Of the 18 interview participants, half were Māori and half were Tauīwi. For 14 of these participants, the stalking was perpetrated less than five years ago.

Respondents

Below, we set out the demographic information of survey respondents, including ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and age.

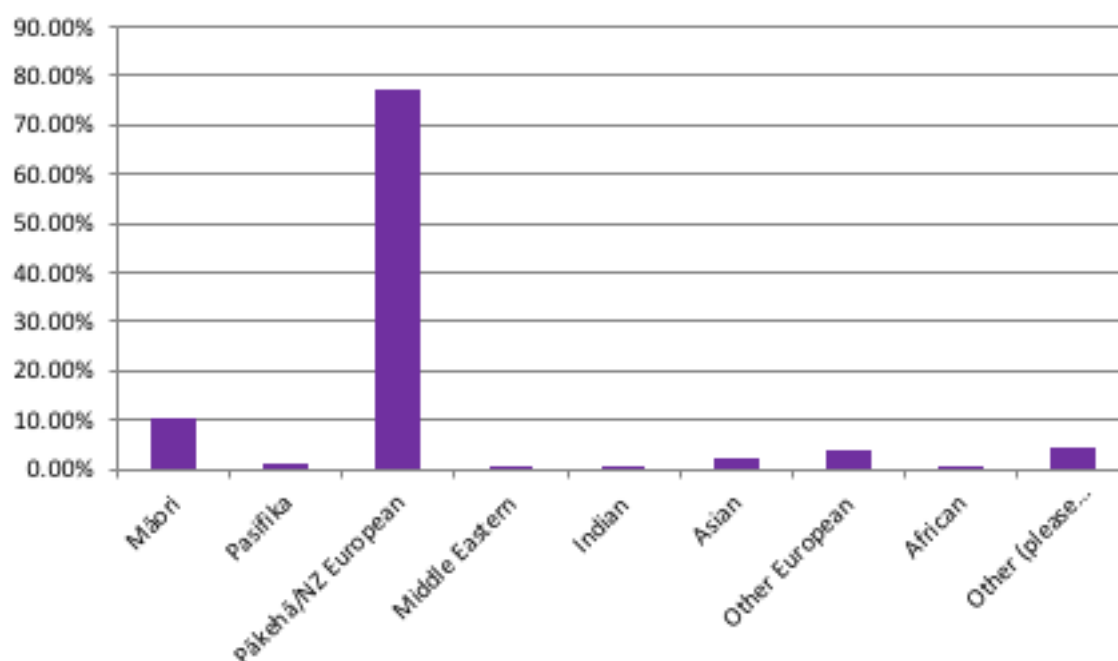


Figure 1: Respondents' ethnicities.

The most commonly reported ethnicity was Pākehā (77.33%), followed by Māori (10.33%), Other European (3.73%, although this included some that could also have been classified as Pākehā), Pasifika (1.43%), Asian (2.15%), Indian (0.29%), Middle Eastern (0.29%), and African (0.14%).

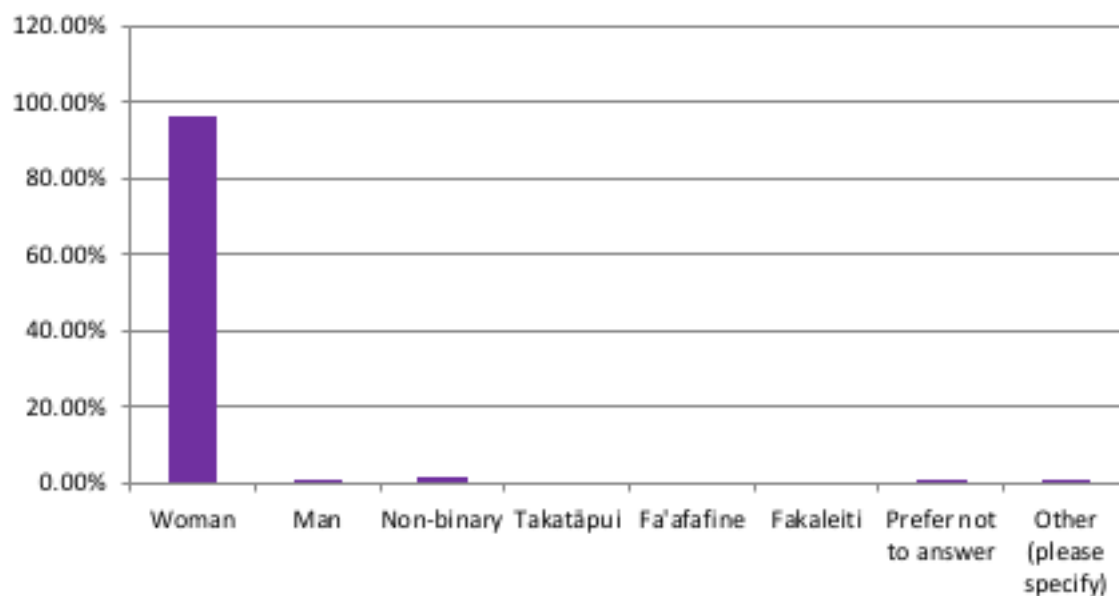


Figure 2: Respondents' gender identities.

The vast majority of respondents were women (96.13%). There were a small number of men (1%) and non-binary (1.87%) respondents.

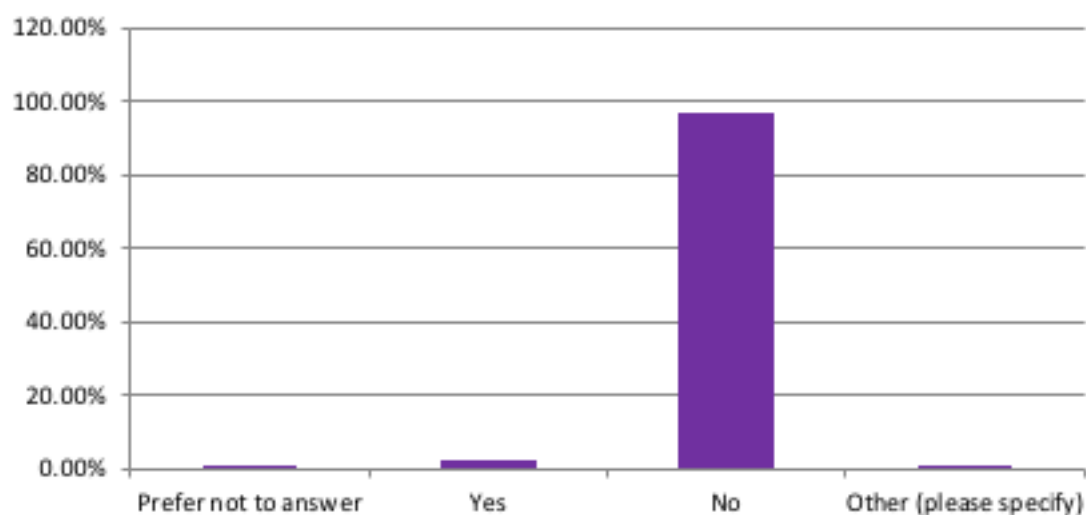


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents identifying as transgender.

Some respondents (2.15%) identified as transgender. A small minority declined to answer whether they identified as transgender or not.

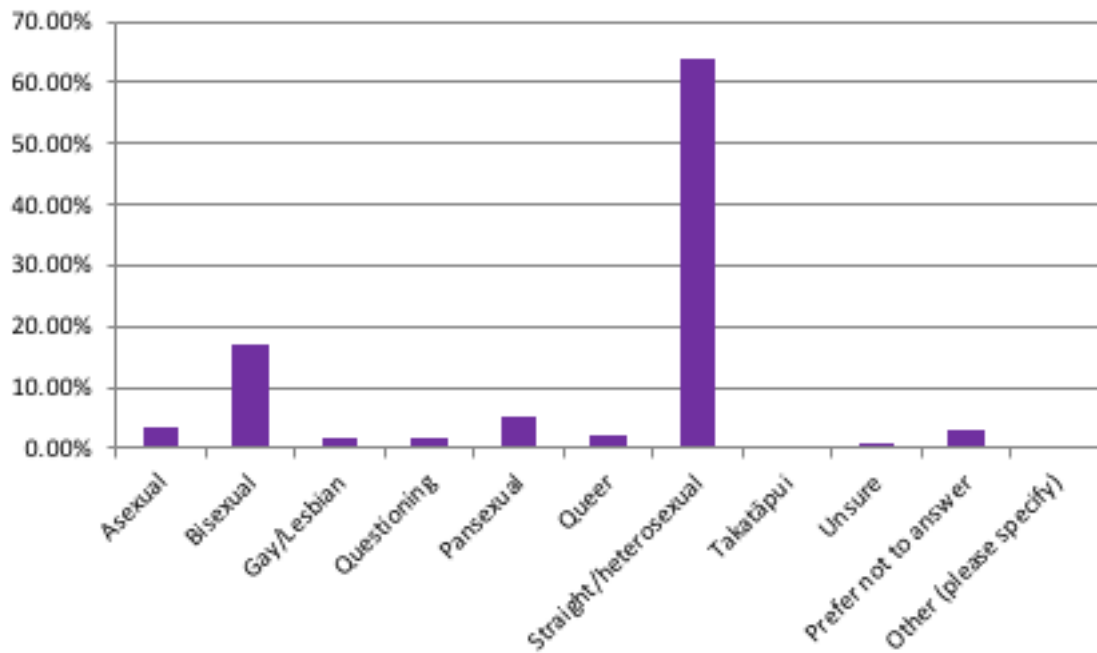


Figure 4: Respondents' sexual orientations.

A small majority of respondents (64.13%) identified as heterosexual. The next most common sexual orientation was bisexual (17.22%), pansexual (5.16%), asexual (3.30%), queer (2.30%), lesbian/gay (1.72%), questioning (1.58%), unsure (0.86%) and takatāpui (0.14%). The 'other' comments were objections to the breadth of options given, rather than descriptions of sexual orientation. However, we felt it was important to make visible all sexual orientations and to clearly represent these aspects of respondents' identities.

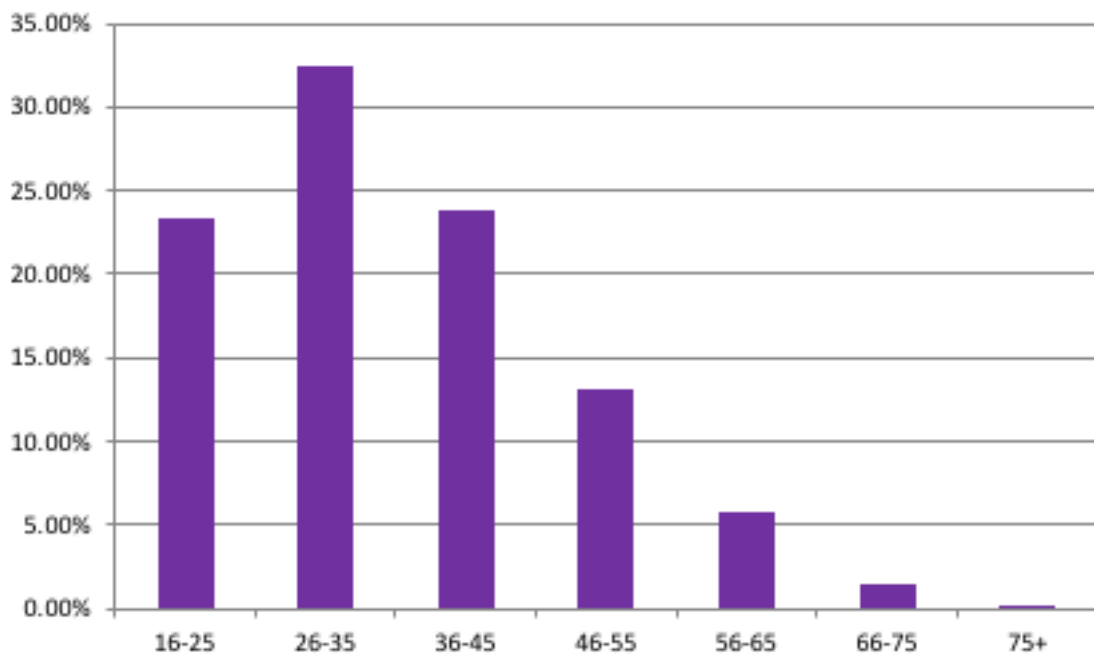


Figure 5: Respondents' ages

The largest age group of respondents was 26-35 (32.42%), followed by 16-25 (23.39%), 36-45 (23.82%), 46-55 (13.06%), 56-65 (5.74%), 66-75 (1.43%), and 75+ (0.14%). However, it is important to note that rather

than depict prevalence rates of stalking according to age group in the general population, this is likely to represent people within age groups that are more likely to have encountered stalking that fits more closely with a dominant public narrative, that often use technology and social media and therefore are more likely to have seen the survey advertised and be comfortable using the digital platform hosting it, and that have had sufficient opportunity to retrospectively consider their experiences in order to now classify these as stalking experiences. It should also be noted that as typically occurs with our research into victims' experiences, people who choose to respond to surveys often have either very positive or very negative experiences of asking for help; rarely is this equivocal.

Data analysis

Qualitative data from surveys and transcribed interviews were analysed using narrative analysis, assisted by NVivo and using an adapted narrative analysis framework. Quantitative data were analysed using a basic descriptive method.

Part 1: The Stalking Itself

1.1 Introducing the Stalking Story

We were together for about two and a half years before he revealed his true self and it was just the craziest relationship I ever had. His family, my family and his friends have all [talked about it], it was like they were trying to warn me right from the start, but not telling me so much info, but they were kind of frightened to speak [about it] much more... We have two kids now and every now and then after he did find out where we lived [he would come over]. Sometimes when he would come around, half the time I wouldn't know that he was there. So I would often just get a glimpse of something moving in the back yard and I'm having a look thinking 'what the heck is that' and nine times out of 10 it was him.

There had been some times where I have been standing out on the back deck and he was standing down there staring up at me, and I'm like 'what the hell are you doing down there', or other times when I have seen him walk past our back window. His excuse was 'you've got something to hide' and I said 'I don't have anything to hide and I don't have anything to justify to you, this is my house' and I said I shouldn't have to feel freaked out. It did freak me out, but at the same time I just thought it was really, really peculiar... just recently actually I had to call the police a couple of times for him being in breach of the protection order when he came over. One night he came over to our house after midnight, banging on the windows, this is when he was asking for his van back... He made threats [like] if I don't do what he asks, he will be like, 'I am going to get my friends and take them round to you or send them to you. I will give them your contacts and they will know your face'... He never specified exactly what they are going to do. I think it is [about hurting] me, to deal with me, he just says 'I am going to send them round to you and my family'. – Riana, research participant.

This excerpt from Riana's interview illustrates how stalking can be viewed in different ways at different times – stalking might just seem strange or feel 'off' to victims before the extent of it becomes known to them and it can be difficult to fully comprehend from the outset. Riana would not have classified this as stalking at that point. She was, however, deeply disconcerted and unsure how afraid she should feel, particularly when he alluded to the potential for violence if she did not cooperate with his instructions. This was consistent with many other respondents' stories – the precise pattern of stalking was highly variable amongst the sample and respondents' understandings of the significance of individual tactics was an evolving process.

The key distinguishing features of stalking across respondents' narratives were insidious regular contact, jealousy and control as the orienting features of perceived motivation for stalking, and cyclical patterns of perpetration that oscillated between affection or reconciliation attempts and destructive and malicious actions. Stalkers' behavior appeared on a very wide continuum ranging from very explicit stalking to very subtle/obscured stalking. However, although there was substantial variance in how respondents' experienced that stalking and were affected by it, subtle forms were frequently regarded as equally detrimental to victims' wellbeing. In some instances, subtle perpetration caused greater anxiety because of the corresponding lack of general acknowledgement of the offending, and accordingly, fewer options with which to establish safety.

The 'who'

People of all ages, genders, sexual orientations, and from a range of ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds are subjected to stalking by intimate partners. However, women are disproportionately subjected to stalking and men are disproportionately perpetrators, as with other forms of intimate partner violence. While we know less about who becomes a stalker, Part 1.4 sets out the information we can gain from respondents about stalkers (who are predominately men).

The 'what'

Stalking by intimate partners pervaded many different domains of victims' lives, including their capacity to enter into new partnerships, their employment and professional reputation, their relationships with their families and friends, their own and their children's sense of safety, their financial standing and access to appropriate housing, and their physical and emotional wellbeing. The tactics stalkers used seemed predicated on stalkers' instrumentalization of affection in a supposedly 'romantic' partnership (or previous partnership). The illusion of 'romance' and stalkers' concurrent attempts to disguise relentless stalking behaviour as affection that is consistent with romantic pursuit featured prominently in many respondents'

stories. This is consistent with other forms of intimate partner violence, where obsessive and possessive actions are relegated to a dominant narrative of love and concern within a relationship rather than abuse. Accordingly, many respondents commented on the way that the intentional displays of intense affection were troubling.

[A mixture of] affection, violence, obsession, adoration and hate.

He was showing affection, declaring love for me, sending flowers and making false promises.

They swung between two moods... Totally in love with me and begging me for another chance, and hating me, calling me names and making accusations.

Over the top text messages proclaiming his love... Then would be menacing by hanging around the carpark.

Some also described apparent affection that was forceful, manipulative, or performative. Given its centrality in the switch to aggression, respondents tended to regard stalkers' affection with trepidation and uncertainty, especially after stalkers had oscillated between the two.

Switching between affection and hate - not so physically violent but mentally and emotionally abusive, [and giving] constant affection, until I would say no and then it would become aggressive and violent.

[He was] showing affection, being desperate for attention, pretending to be someone he wasn't (fake profiles), constantly trying to get me to pay attention to him.

[It was] affection. He would constantly message me on all my different social media [platforms]. He found baby photos of me and saved them all to an album on his phone. He would call my house phone and my mobile phone and my friends' phones. He would post things on his Facebook about me etc.

Long after reciprocal contact ceased, stalkers would continue to attempt to elicit a response from victims by sending effusive affection and caring messages.

They kept on repeating that they loved me, asking questions, sending links to videos, trying different methods to get me to respond. They would make sure that the subject line of the e-mail said something that might make me want to open it.

Most respondents indicated that there was a cyclical pattern, where stalkers would show affection and attempt to make intimate advances. Once these were refused, they switched to using aggression or violence.

Switching from being loving to being verbally aggressive if I didn't respond in the way he wanted.

The switch between the two approaches made it difficult for victims to understand what was happening or to be able to anticipate the stalkers' behaviour. This inability to predict the 'pattern' of stalking gave rise to intense distress, fear, hypervigilance, and social withdrawal, and these impacts are discussed in greater depth in Part Two of this report. This unpredictability of the content of stalkers' messages, calls, and other intrusive contact, combined with surveillance, monitoring, and life sabotage tactics, was distressing, disruptive, and difficult to put an end to.

The 'why'

Because stalking is so rarely prosecuted, we know very little about who stalkers are, and how they rationalize their stalking of their partners. However, we can to some extent extrapolate from victims' experiences and their recounting of these. Later in this section, we talk about what is known about stalkers, and what motivations can be interpreted from their stalking actions. In the main, although there are some minor manifestations that are brief, non-invasive, and cause little distress or disruption to the victim, the majority is debilitating. Accordingly, stalking by intimate partners appeared motivated by the stalkers' (usually men) desires to restrict victims' (usually women) freedom, assert power over them by dictating what they are permitted to do or who they are permitted to see, or by punishing them for attempting to end the relationship.

The 'when'

In the literature review, we identified time-periods for stalking internationally. We did not ask respondents how prolonged stalking was perpetrated against them, but many expanded on this in their descriptions of their experiences. Most who did allude to time periods indicated that these spanned months or years post-separation. Gauging pre-separation stalking was more difficult, but most respondents (with several significant exceptions) looking at the stalking that was perpetrated within the relationship retrospectively indicated that it was a pervasive aspect of the perpetrator's behavior in that relationship, and had usually begun almost immediately after the beginning of that relationship (even if they had only identified it as stalking much later). Conversely, for some it began shortly after separation, or during the period of time where they began considering separation. Some respondents made it clear that the stories of stalking they were relaying had occurred over a decade ago; for most, especially the younger respondents, it had been much more recently (as indicated by their comments about the length of time that had now passed since they separated from the person stalking them). In an effort to distinguish how methods differed pre- and post-separation, we asked respondents to answer prevalence questions in relation to both pre- and post-separation stalking.

The 'how'

As illustrated throughout respondents' and participants' stories, stalking experiences did not follow a homogenous narrative but rather had common elements threaded throughout. Stalking could begin after a single date or after decades of marriage, could begin months after breakup or be a continuous feature of an intimate relationship and simply change form after separation, and could be devoid of physical violence or life-threatening. Most were represented somewhere between these extremes, and usually fluctuated in both frequency and severity of methods. It was clear that many of respondents' stalkers were repeat offenders – one even remarked that “he had told myself and my father about this happening with his ex but we kinda [sic] thought it was a joke... it wasn't funny when it started happening to us”, and another commented that the stalker had “a long history of victims along the way.”

Stalkers' positioning of themselves as loving partners of their victims contrasted sharply with the range of strategies they used to establish continued access to, or oversight of, respondents' lives. This was done physically, such as by following; turning up; loitering outside victims' homes or workplaces; driving past their homes, schools, or workplaces repeatedly; approaching their friends and family; and asking their own friends to also check up on the victim. It was also done digitally or by phone, such as by texting; phoning; emailing; direct messaging; checking personal accounts like bank, iCloud, OneDrive, or email accounts; installing spyware; using GPS trackers; accessing tracking applications; and forcing the victim to give them access to their mobile devices to mine information from. The next section introduces you to each of these tactics used by stalkers to maintain patterns of ownership and control over their victims.

1.2 Intersection with Other Types of Abuse

The role of violence

[The relationship] moved a lot faster than what I [would normally do], probably if I had known about red flags at the time I would have seen them, but it really moved quickly and I ended up being pregnant at about three months which was something that he was very keen on happening and I was at the stage I was ready to have children. So that was [the] kind of context, he was quite a charming guy. I had never been around someone who was violent or anything like that, so it kind of blindsided me to be honest. While I was pregnant, he started being quite abusive - psychologically and physically - and quite severely, I guess. For example, at about eight months pregnant, he said I had been out to a party which is kind of crazy because [at] eight months pregnant I wouldn't be out partying... Anyway he punched me quite hard in my head a number of times things, like that. He was not a very nice guy, and he also talked about killing me.

I was actually really struggling [with the idea] that someone could think that little of someone else's life, but you know, I was also in a really traumatic situation and I was just trying to basically protect and get out with my daughter because it had gone quite badly and the effects of the psychological abuse and trauma were having a deep impact on me. [The stalking] started when we were together, but I wasn't really aware of it. So like for example I would be going to an op-shop or something like that, well away from where I lived, and he would show up and [I would] be like 'okay that is a bit weird', you know, one time he showed up he was just shaking in anger. He was so angry at me and I'm guessing that retrospectively in his head he was making up some kind of [story], that I was doing something wrong in some way with another person, with another man, or something like that. It was all unfounded but that was how he saw it... He would [also] park his car outside the property and just be sitting there, and I guess just checking that I wasn't there with someone else.
– Vanessa, research participant.

Vanessa's story demonstrates how inextricable stalking is from the greater context of intimate partner violence, and the ways that a backdrop of violence can inform how victims respond to the stalker and the stalking behaviour. This section introduces the forms of violence that may be perpetrated concurrently to and as part of the stalking pattern.

Alongside the many tactics used to stalk victims, which were often perpetrated discreetly, covertly, or subtly enough to avoid social sanction, many respondents were subjected to violence as part of the broader pattern of abusers' attempts to gain power over victims and control their behaviour. The relationship between stalking and homicide is well documented, with most intimate partner homicides preceded by some form of stalking (Glass, Koziol-McLain, Campbell, & Block, 2004; McFarlane et al., 1999; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2002). In fact, it may be more of an indicator of the potential for lethal violence than any other form of abuse (Paziotopoulos, 2017). Stalking generally, and the repeated arrival of the abuser at the victim's home specifically, are both correlates for both serious violence and lethal violence (James & Farnham, 2003). In the United States, 76 percent of homicides of women were found to be preceded by stalking (McFarlane et al., 1999). Victims of intimate partner stalking are also considerably more likely to then become victims of physical violence than victims of stranger/acquaintance stalking (Farnham, James, & Cantrell, 2000; McEwan et al., 2007; Mohandie, Meloy, McGowan, & Williams, 2006; Resnick, 2007; Sheridan & Davies, 2001).

Respondents' accounts of sexual violence, verbal/psychological abuse, and physical abuse clarify how violence is used to establish control and victims' compliance, and how stalking intersects with this. We have also included threats of violence and holding hostage within this section, as these are fundamentally violent acts that use the prospect of physical violence as a means to control the victim. In an effort to focus more on the insidious nature of prolonged stalking abuse that relies on the maintenance of fear and restriction of freedoms rather than on gratuitous accounts of serious violence, we have used only a few examples to illustrate the role of violence in stalking. In this section, we set out the use of violence that was perpetrated concurrently with stalking, such as holding hostage, physical violence and threats of violence, sexual violence, verbal and psychological abuse, and the importance of paying attention to all types of violence. This will then set the scene to understand the context in which stalking tactics (discussed in the next section) were perpetrated against victims.

Holding hostage

While it is difficult to extricate stalking behaviour from other forms of intimate partner violence, behaviour relating to other forms of IPV provides important context to understanding the pattern of stalking. Some respondents had been held hostage by the stalker, such as by being forced into a car and taken for a drive despite wanting to get out or being held captive in a house despite wanting to leave.

The most distressing occurrence was when I broke up with a guy and he couldn't accept it. He broke into my house and kept me prisoner for several hours while berating me.

When approached, he would put on a good show of smiles and affection... [But] he would take me for drives and terrorise me. I jumped out of the car once when it slowed down and hid.

He used a [range] of behaviours. From trying to be the good guy and giving me a ride, but then threatening not to let me out.

Interestingly, this was never referred to as abduction or kidnapping, and usually was couched in terms such as “not letting me leave”.

Physical violence and threats of violence

While many respondents described sequences of stalking behaviour that involved physical violence, most of these found the disruption of other areas of their life more debilitating than the physical abuse. Threats of abuse, especially when given in tandem with assurances that they would be disbelieved or were somehow beyond help, were effective in limiting respondents' capacity to resist their violence.

[He was] sending people to watch my comings and goings from my place of residence and work, [and] siphoning my petrol so I would be unable to drive myself home from work and I ingering around to offer me a ride home, violent threats, and actual physical violence when he didn't get his way. [He also] knock[ed] on my doors and windows overnight.

[He had been] sending people to watch my comings and goings from my place of residence... [using] violent threats and actual physical violence when he didn't get his way. [He was] knocking on my doors and windows overnight.

He would express his feelings of love, and when I did not reciprocate, he would threaten violence. He has cornered me and threatened to kidnap, rape and kill me.

Threats of physical violence, [like saying]“I could hit you”. Smashing belongings of others I had been seen with. Repeated phone calls. Continuation of the psychological abuse tactics used in the marriage. “No one will believe you. People will find out who you are.” Etc.

As respondents mentioned, they were usually given a ‘choice’ by the person abusing them – to either perform affection convincingly and accept abusers' dictation of how they lived their lives or be subjected to violence.

It is difficult to ascertain rates of physical violence within patterns of stalking, particularly as ‘violence’ is a heterogenous construct spanning numerous levels of severity and significance (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019). Prevalence findings of violence within stalking ranges from 36 percent (Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, and Stuart, 1999) to 60 percent (Meloy, Davis, and Lovette, 2001). As both defined ‘violence’ broadly enough to encompass any physical and sexual assault, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which severe (i.e. with a high chance of lethality) is associated with stalking. Accordingly, James and Farnham (2003) separated violent acts into severe and less serious violence, finding that these are associated with different variables, reinforcing the need to differentiate between these when constructing risk models. Both were prevalent within this research – respondents reported physical abuse ranging from grabbing or pushing right through to strangulation and attempts to kill.

Sexual violence

While threats made in person or via anonymous digital mechanisms of contact often included threats of rape or other forms of sexual violence, these were rarely made in front of other people or on retrievable and identifiable digital communication platforms. As such, rape threats exemplified stalkers' tactics of capitalising on victims' general tendencies to conceal experiences of sexual violence out of shame or a fear

of being blamed or disbelieved. However, many respondents were subjected to sexual violence immediately post-breakup and after being followed or monitored, or after another notable event in the stalking trajectory, such as post-arrest or post-release.

[There was] severe violence, a couple of times were sexual violence. They would sometimes not say anything but make their presence known [around me].

My abuser was allowed to contact me from prison several times a day, [that] went un-noticed from corrections staff, then [he] raped me while on work release.

For many victims, the rape or other sexual assaults were experienced as a ‘marking’ of property – an attempt to bind the victim to the stalker. This seemed particularly stark in instances where the respondent felt the motivation for the rape was the goal of pregnancy, which would effectively create a permanent link between stalker and victim.

[He threatened] me with posting sexual photos, [and] threats to create a fake Tinder profile of me with sexual photos, [he] stayed outside a house I was in and tooted the horn consistently for 40mins, tried having my cats taken away, made me listen to love frequency videos on YouTube ,and then raped [me] to try [to forcibly] impregnate me.

He raped me, he used to show up unannounced at my house when he knew I would be alone and wouldn’t leave, and one time he raped me.

[He was] begging me to take him back, [and] had previously raped me when I broke up with him, [but was still] showing up unannounced, calling crying, professing love for me.

While for some victims it led to an immediate escalation of fear and a perception of increased risk of further assault, others experienced it as a nuisance rather than frightening.

[It was a] weird mix of intimidation, flattery and friendly/loving words, sexual coercion, assault and defamation/isolating me from my friends. Sometimes he would just stare at me, other times he would approach me wanting to ‘talk’, but I mostly managed to slip away.

[He kept talking about] sexual actions & talking about sexual things he wanted to do to me.

It was after the breakup so, generally with remorse, desperation and mania. E.g., “I’m only following you because I need you to know how sorry I am, if you think about it this is romantic actually!” Occasionally with attempts at intimidation, e.g., threatening me with our old flat. Also with sexual violence - times he managed to find a way to be alone with me usually involved forced sexual contact of some kind

However, victims also found that attempts to disclose sexual violence often backfired and resulted in further backlash against them.

He was always coming across as affectionate, yet pushy. He finally raped me, threatened to kill me. Once I tried to tell the school I was at, he made everyone believe I was lying. He continued to harass me.

Verbal/psychological abuse

Despite often being deemed unremarkable by stalking victims, when asked for examples of stalkers’ conduct toward them, many disclosed critical, insulting, and hurtful comments that comprised an important part of the ‘affection to abuse’ cycle that was continued for extended periods beyond separation and perpetrated in conjunction with excessive, unwanted, and intrusive contact. These insults generally targeted aspects of appearance, desirability as ‘partner’, sexual conduct, and motherhood. Insults such as ‘slut’, ‘fat’, and ‘ugly’ were frequently reported.

I broke up with him, and he progressively got nastier and nastier. He would send really abusive messages like I was a slut and he was going to ruin my life etc. He never threatened to kill me but threatened with everything else. I got a lot of put downs like I was ‘fat’ and ‘a bad mother’, etc.

[He] showed affection and was really sweet when he knew I was alone at home, and then got really aggressive when I wasn't home, asking who I was with and calling me a slut, and it was worse if I went out at night time - he would sit outside my house until I came home.

Calling me names such as cunt and bitch for not responding to his compulsive messaging.

Aggressive and threatening and called me names while saying that he loved me e.g. 'I love you fatty.'

Stalkers' possessiveness and subscription to beliefs about women being the property of their (male) partners appeared to be the principal driver of this verbal/psychological abuse.

He would go between bouts of professing his love, and telling me he was protecting me, to making me feel worthless and like I was this horrible person for spending time with friends. I was a slut, or a whore, or worse, if I spent time with any male.

Similarly, women who rejected men's advances despite the men's beliefs that they were 'nice' and somehow automatically deserving of women's affection often experienced an immediate escalation of unwanted contact.

I had gone on one date with the guy after being part of the same uni film club for a few years, and the day after had met him again and let him know I wasn't really interested and didn't want to pursue any further relationship. He was initially understanding in person, but later that day I came back to instant messages on Facebook talking about that he was fine without me, over sharing about his life (we weren't close at all), then going on to rant about women and how he was a 'nice guy'.

Blaming the victim for the abuse, on the apparent basis of their perceived deficits, was also common.

He would always tell me he loved me and that things would be perfect if I was nicer and spent time with him and didn't make him so frustrated.

When approached he would put on a good show of smiles and affection. If people weren't within earshot he would be saying all these terrible things that related to what a terrible person, mother, wife I was. He could grab me by the elbow where it looked loving but in fact he was hurting me.

Paying attention to the risk of violence

Most of the severe violence that respondents experienced occurred after a failed attempt by the stalker to reconcile. They also reported either violence or an escalation of the stalking after involving other people, talking to other people without permission, or after a perceived betrayal. Not all respondents gave information about whether the stalker had used violence against them before. The role of prior violence is yet to be conclusively established. James and Farmham (2003) theorise the equivocalness of the role of prior violent histories as representing the difference between habituated and socially normative expressions of violence (i.e. lower-level perpetrators who repeatedly hit and show aggression to partners) and catathymic aggression (i.e. perpetrators who are obsessively preoccupied with a perceived transgression against them by a partner but who do not otherwise tend to behave violently, and who then exact an emotionally fuelled revenge). This is consistent with the notion of stalkers as fixated, controlling, possessive, and enraged at the prospect of separation (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019; Mullen, Pathé, & Purcell, 2009; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Schlesinger (2002) suggests that such catathymic aggression, such as the severe violence or attempts to kill that respondents described, may be triggered by separation and the subsequent failure to either restore the relationship or preclude ex-partners' freedom to move on, despite numerous attempts to do so.

Importantly, Sheridan and Roberts (2011) found that victims' fear is the most accurate indicator of whether an intimate stalker will use serious (requiring medical treatment) or fatal violence against them. This is consistent with other forms of intimate partner violence – the accuracy of women's assessment of their own risk is equal or greater to any other risk measurement assessment (Bell, Cattaneo, Goodman, & Dutton, 2008; Gondolf & Heckert, 2003; Heckert & Gondolf, 2004; Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). The significance of this cannot be overstated – regardless of whether this has been violence, whether there have been explicit

threats, or whether there is evidence of the stalking, if a victim feels that there is a high risk of violence, then there probably is. It is therefore paramount that first respondents (particularly police) and helping agencies take victims' feelings seriously and act protectively, even if there is little evidence to objectively justify their fear.

1.3 Stalking Tactics

The person that stalked me I had been in a relationship with for five years prior. We had a daughter together and I left the relationship because it was an abusive relationship. So on leaving the relationship... I maintained a level of contact, but his behaviour after I left the relationship got worse and escalated and he became just extremely [aggressive]... he had always been very obsessive and controlling, but that just became a nightmare. So he would turn up at my house in the early hours of the morning. He would get dropped off [at] my house, he was known to go through my wheelie bins and see [what was in there], he was convinced I was having mad parties and things.

He spent probably a good half of his day texting me. So he would be on WhatsApp, and you can see [that] someone [is writing a message] when they are typing. And he would type messages for two hours, which was awful, because I would know that he was typing and I never knew what the message was, and invariably... it would go on a cycle of 'I love you, I miss you, why are you doing this to me', to 'I hate you', you know, 'you are terrible, I'm going to take our daughter from you' and then it was escalating threats to the point of threatening to do harm.

It went on for two and a half years of my life, and that was after a five year relationship, which was a nightmare. So the stalking and the text messages - I always thought at the beginning that he would eventually tire of them, that he would leave me alone, and if I could just ride it out then he would stop, and that he would begin to just focus on our daughter. But that never happened and it got worse and worse. It was very, very scary. It was extremely isolating, and it quite honestly got to the point where I couldn't function anymore. So I was struggling to go to work. By that time I was back at work fulltime. I was not eating, I couldn't sleep and the stress triggers - it just made me unwell to be honest... So life got really, really hard because he was relentless in what he was doing to me, and it was every day, every night, early morning, late at night, there was never a time that I could escape it, ever. – Emily, research participant.

In order to paint the picture of stalking for particular groups of victims as accurately as possible, we chose to set out the quantitative depiction of tactic prevalence by age group. In addition to portraying how stalking tactics may be more frequently drawn upon for particular victims, setting out tactic prevalence by age also allows us to look beyond methodological flaws. For example, we asked respondents to select all of the tactics that had been used against them, but we did not provide a 'not applicable' option or ask for the timeframe of the stalking. Consequently, as many of the older respondents may have been stalked prior to the advent of social media, we cannot differentiate between methods that are simply not often applied against older victims, and methods that simply did not exist at the time they were being stalked. With this in mind, however, we can look at the younger age brackets for estimations of current prevalence of digital or online tactics, and can see how these experiences differed from older victims, who likely represent both victims who were stalked a long time ago, and victims who were stalked very recently. At the end of this section, we look at some of the key differences between the experiences of victims in different age groups, while keeping in mind the time-specific limitations of the data.

As many of the tactics emerged through qualitative responses, only some categories have a corresponding statistical depiction of prevalence within the sample of respondents. Specifically, prevalence was measured for the following categories: phoning often; sending dozens of unwanted messages per week; phoning employers/colleagues often; logging into the victim's social media; checking location via social media posts; tracking location via online banking; setting up device tracking applications; loitering by school, work, or home; questioning children about adults' whereabouts; incessant calling from different numbers; making fake social media accounts to track or connect with the victim; repeated leaving of unwanted notes or gifts; following by car or on foot; often questioning the victim's friends or family; engaging friends or family in the stalking of the victim; repurposing home surveillance; breaking in and moving belongings; breaking in and tampering with property; deliberately damaging property; and posting threatening or degrading content online. As you will see below, respondents have added additional categories, or have given descriptive answers that enabled us to capture common aspects of the stalking experience both within and beyond the tactics that were measured.

Making contact

The first tactic explained by nearly all respondents who chose to give more details about their experience was the stalker contacting them by phone, text, direct message, social media, or email.

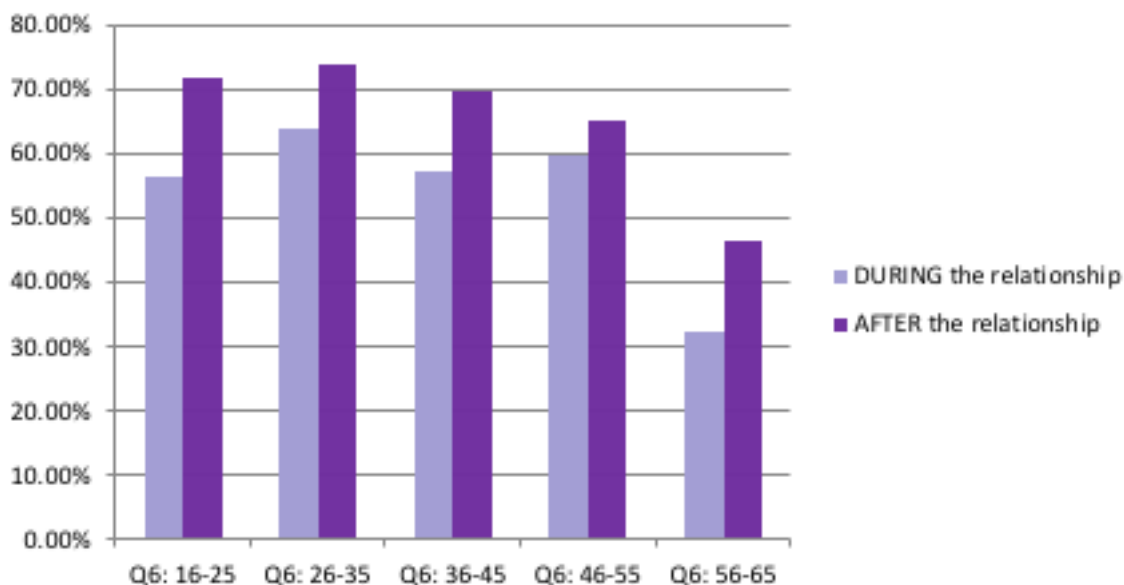


Figure 6: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers phoned often.

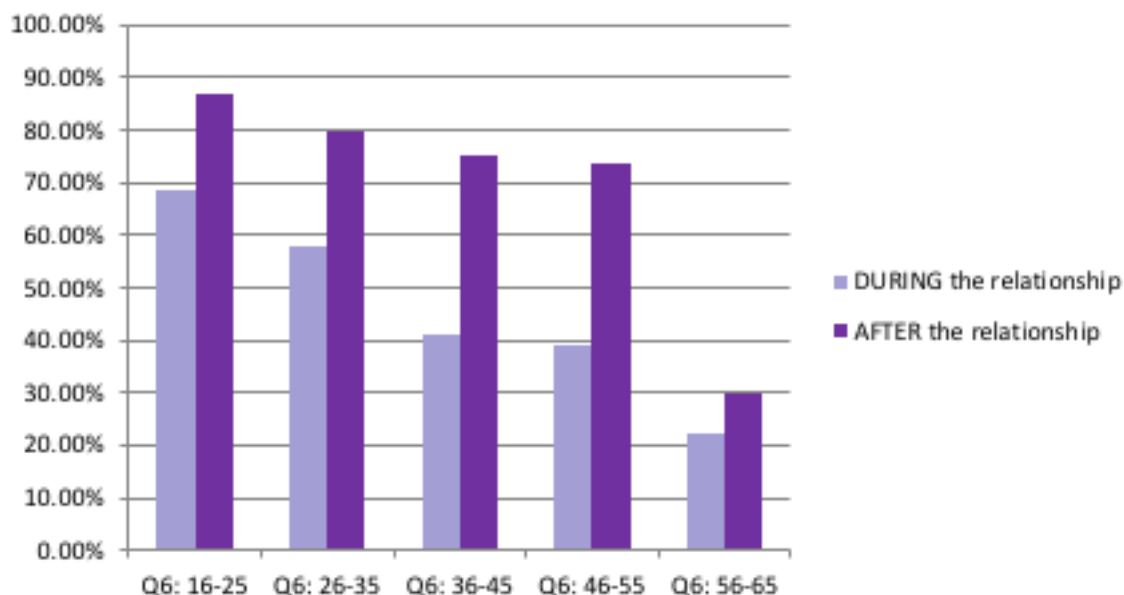


Figure 7: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers sent dozens of unwanted messages per week.

Calling and messaging, too, were commonly reported and difficult to avoid, given the opportunities for stalkers to obtain secondary phone numbers or to conceal the number they call from. Digital platforms provide virtually unlimited mechanisms through which to harass, threaten, and perpetuate contact. One respondent described it as being “more harassment than stalking - he didn’t follow me in real life but harassed me digitally. He kept calling/messaging me even though I blocked his number and his social

media accounts - he'd make new ones." Others referenced the phone calls as reminders of stalkers' ability to monitor their actions and reassert their power to maintain contact and described 'tirades' that were predictable and wearying. They rarely managed to identify effective means of stopping this unwanted contact, as new channels (such as switching to social media platforms or using new phone numbers) would be forged as quickly as they could act to block the initial ones. It was noted by several respondents that the effort required to block or prevent continual messaging from any avenue was prohibitive. Further, if they did succeed at blocking one form of contact, they not only continued to be subjected to incessant contact via other avenues, but also often lost contact details for important members of their social circle or became less reachable to other people. This represented an additional form of isolation beyond that already experienced as a by-product of the intimate partner violence.

He used to call me saying he was outside my house. [Or that] he liked my new car. [Or] liked what I did with the curtains.

Lots of phone calls, demanding to see me, social media monitoring

I was getting constant emails and phone calls and drive bys as well as interceptions on the street

I received over 300 messages in one weekend.

Constant phone calls up to 16 times a day. I never answered and when I blocked his number he called twice more off a new phone and once I picked up because it was private

Incessant texting and calls which I treated as almost normal until a girlfriend tried to get me to go to woman's refuge. That helped change my perspective on how serious it was getting.

Attempting to block these calls was made difficult by the stalkers' resourcefulness – if the number was hidden, or if they used several different phone numbers, it became impossible to stop them.

He continuously contacted me by phone, email, and then would turn up at my door without even telling me he was travelling to Auckland. He wasn't interested in our baby - just obsessed with me. Then my flatmate let him in one day while I wasn't there. He went through my entire room opening drawers chucking everything onto the floor. He bugged my room and one day I gave my landline out to someone and asked them to call back in 20 minutes. Exactly 20 minutes later I picked up my landline and it was him calling from Sydney. From then on I received calls throughout every night - he never spoke - just rang and rang. I called Telecom and they told me I couldn't block the number from calling me as I couldn't tell them the phone number that was calling.

[There were] calls and texts to my phone from multiple different numbers. It was always him. I was getting 30 or more calls and 40 or more texts a day from 4pm to 1am.

My ex created new Facebook profiles every time I blocked him. I ended up blacklisting his number with Vodafone. When he called, the number would show up as him, I just couldn't answer (which was good). He ended up using his flatmate's phone, his mother's phone, or new SIM cards to call and text me. He called me 63 times over a couple of hours one day. At a do I went to, one of his friends and ex-wife flatmates had been talking to him and warned me that he'd expressed an interest of turning up at my house. Even before we broke up, he'd show up at my university and my lecturers had to ask him to leave.

Lapses in their methods they used to prevent victims from being able to prove their identities proved useful.

I started getting frequent calls from a no caller id number. They were quiet, I could hear breathing but no one answered when I asked who it was. Then, one night, the caller forgot to turn off their caller id, and I was able to look up the number. It belonged to my ex-boyfriend.

However, for many respondents, these calls were made while they were at work, and considerably disrupted their abilities to concentrate on their work without intrusion by the stalker.

[There were] daily notes, changes at my property, phone calls at work and home and to my friends and family

He would ring my work 50 times a day, started turning up to my work and house and then started following me around when I went out.

Multiple means of contact

Similar to calling, texts, emails, and hand-delivered notes all represented ways for continuing unwanted contact.

He kept texting, emailing, and putting letters and notes etc under my door and other things

Constant abusive phone calls, [and] notes under the windscreen wipers of my car when it was parked on city streets.

He left things on my car for me to find when I came out to it after work or in my lunch break. I saw him driving past my work, my home.

These often seemingly benign actions acted as a precursor to more assertive demands for contact, such as showing up in person or following up with more aggressive emails, texts, direct messages, or phone calls.

[It began with] constant emails being apologetic declaring his love and wanting to work on our marriage and meet in person.

It was a person I was seeing casually who would not respect boundaries I tried to put in place, I noticed drive-bys, following, all night calls/messaging, [and then] forced attempts to communicate like notes under the door.

He was desperately trying to get me back, so it was mostly declarations of love, except when he saw me with my new partner. That time he waited for my partner to leave, and shook me by my coat collar, yelled in my face, and ripped up the card he had bought for me. He came into the house we had previously occupied together (I had stayed on), and begged for another chance, one weekend morning. He revealed that he'd taken a garage remote when he left, so I then felt more threatened. He emailed me up to 40 times a day. He constantly invited me out, to convince me to give him another chance. One time, I was naive enough to agree to see his new apartment (about 100 metres from my workplace). He tried to seduce me, and it took some convincing to get him to stop and let me leave. He guessed my email password and watched my email conversations, including my first and second meet ups with my new partner. He got a new job about 20m from my workplace. He wrote a letter to my parents, which they didn't open. He called constantly too.

He would call up to 40 times a day, [and then] he asked friends about my movements.

Many stalkers switched between methods of contact in order to circumnavigate their victims' strategies to avoid or obstruct contact from them, for example by switching from calling to texting once the number used to call is blocked, and then to social media messaging once text messages are also blocked.

I was contacted repeatedly by an ex-partner. Starting with a letter in the mailbox, followed by numerous texts and Facebook messages. When I blocked his phone number and Facebook Messenger account, I received emails to my personal and work accounts

He constantly harassed me on my cellphone bombarding me with calls and texts. I changed my number 3 times but he kept getting hold of it.

It wasn't well hidden - it was deliberate and intentional behaviour. Showing up where I was, without any previous discussion about where I would be or what time, making sure he wangled an invite to anything I would be at, repeated text messages, showing up at my house uninvited.

[It turned into] social media stalking – [the stalker was] adding/friending on social media accounts.

Breaking in

Although many of the methods of communication or harassment were perpetrated via digital means, the old-fashioned physical presence was generally regarded as more frightening, more ubiquitous, and much less anticipatable. The adage “these aren’t your grandparents’ stalkers” from the literature on digital stalking does not seem wholly consistent here – most respondents described physical experiences and if digital means of contact were used, this was typically alongside rather than replacing physical forms of pursuit, monitoring, threats, and incessant contact.

I was unaware until he climbed through my window at 1am, and I woke to him standing above me. After this, I put two and two together and realised other events that had happened were due to his tampering, and some of his text messages began to make more sense.

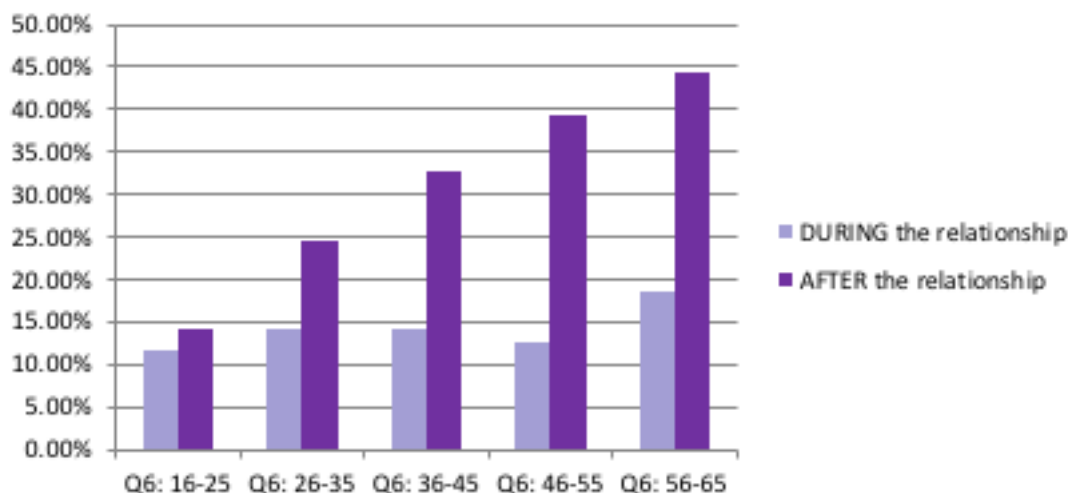


Figure 8: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers broke into their houses and moved their belongings.

‘Breaking and entering’, while not traditionally regarded as a ‘harassment’ crime, was often described as occurring prior to or following physical violence. The symbolic violence perpetrated through an offender entering a victim’s house at will, simply to prove the ability to do so or to remind the victim that they can create access to them, their homes, and their belongings at any moment, is arguably one of the most powerful methods at a stalker’s disposal.

[He] broke into my parents’ house in the middle of the night while everyone was asleep, ‘just to talk’.

He broke into my house when I was there.

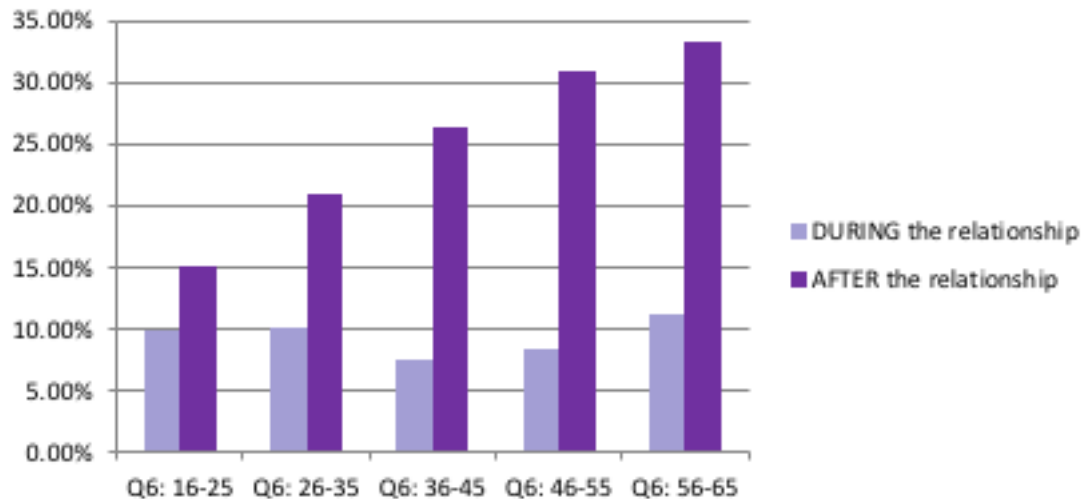


Figure 9: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers broke into their houses and tampered with their property.

Often, this would be accompanied with signs of apparently meaningless tampering; actions that were not in of themselves necessarily harmful, but which demonstrated the reach that the stalker could still execute over the victim's home and wellbeing.

He would stick pictures on my bedroom window that I'd find in the morning.

They] took personal items like a hair brush, notes scribbles on paper. Bed sheets, and my contact lenses and threw one out. Also spiked my cough medicine.

For others, however, the demonstrations of control over victims' lives were overt, violent, and dangerous, such as contaminating medicine or mouthwash, or setting fire to belongings.

He threatened to burn down the house, threatened to take kids away and see how I feel, threatened suicide, set fire to all my clothing and personal belongings, leaving me with nothing in my bedroom etc. [He] ramped up his anger/rage control once he knew he was losing control.

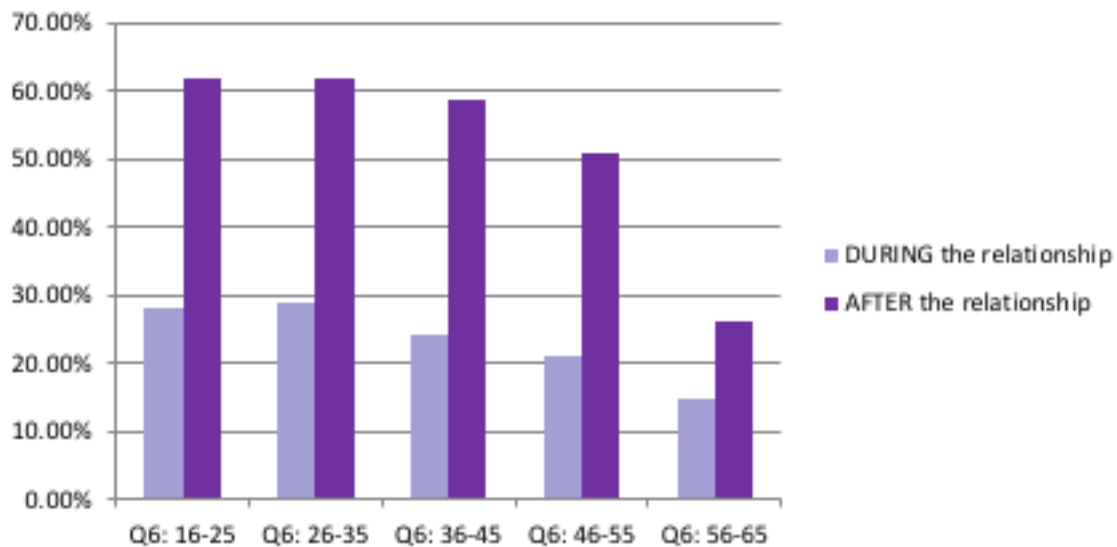


Figure 10: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers called them incessantly from different phone numbers.

For many, the sheer volume of contact attempts was overwhelming.

They never left me alone after the end of our relationship. Constant calling, texting, turning up at my house without warning or invitation, all sorts of invasive behaviour like that

[There was] obvious contact, 400 plus calls a day, and [him] running me off the road when [I was being] followed.

Its was very obvious. Being called/texted/emailed literally hundreds of times a day. Turning up at my place uninvited. Sitting outside in his car. Monitoring online activity

He was overt in his stalking - would call me repeatedly (50 times in a row at 1am if I didn't pick up), text me with constant updates, use friends we had in common to find and or harass me.

[He sent] 90+ text messages in six days.

After ending a casual relationship he would not leave me alone I received over 300 messages and missed calls in a four day period he would also just sit in his car outside my house to make sure I had no male company turned up.

It was also common for this contact to be demanded, so that the victim felt pressured to engage or feared that the attempts to have contact would escalate if they refused to allow them. The initial attempts to engage were often couched in affectionate terms but carried an unspoken threat of further abuse.

He would text things like "you shouldn't wear that top, you look like a slut" just as I had parked in a mall carpark. There were instances where I would see him (unsure whether he meant to be seen or not) and he would ask me what I could do about it because it was a "public place" or it was "just a coincidence". Other times he would just start speaking loudly saying "are the kids being looked after while you sleep around?" And I couldn't call him out because the once I did, he made a big deal of asking ME to stop following HIM! However, he would always give me a chance to "apologize for what you (i) have done and we can go back to how things were. "I (him) can forgive you (me) but you have to show me you are sorry".

He called several times a day, for a couple of months. This was years after our split, he was violent and emotionally abusive when we were together. Once I realised it was him who was behind the calls, my husband started answering the calls. This only seemed to fuel his fire and

he started texting as well, nonsensical sentences like “mother buys tobacco”. It was frightening and bizarre. It stopped when I finally went to the police and they contacted him, telling him to stop. However, I heard from a mutual friend that he’d been furious, saying “this is the last straw”. This confused me as I had made no contact with him whatsoever after our split, was happily married and hadn’t seen or spoken to him for years. He then started showing up outside our house, even after I moved. I have no idea how he found out where we lived.

Manipulation was a common feature of such messages, and stalkers often used the guise of romantic interest, affection, and apology to attempt to compel victims to engage.

He was pleading for me to talk to him, he defended his actions by saying he just needed to speak to me and why wouldn’t I just stop and listen / get into his car for a private conversation

It varied. He began with affection. When I asked him not to attend events or refused to talk to him at events he would get angry. And if friends (or my employer) spoke to him, asking him to leave me alone he would try to guilt trip me.

Contacting others

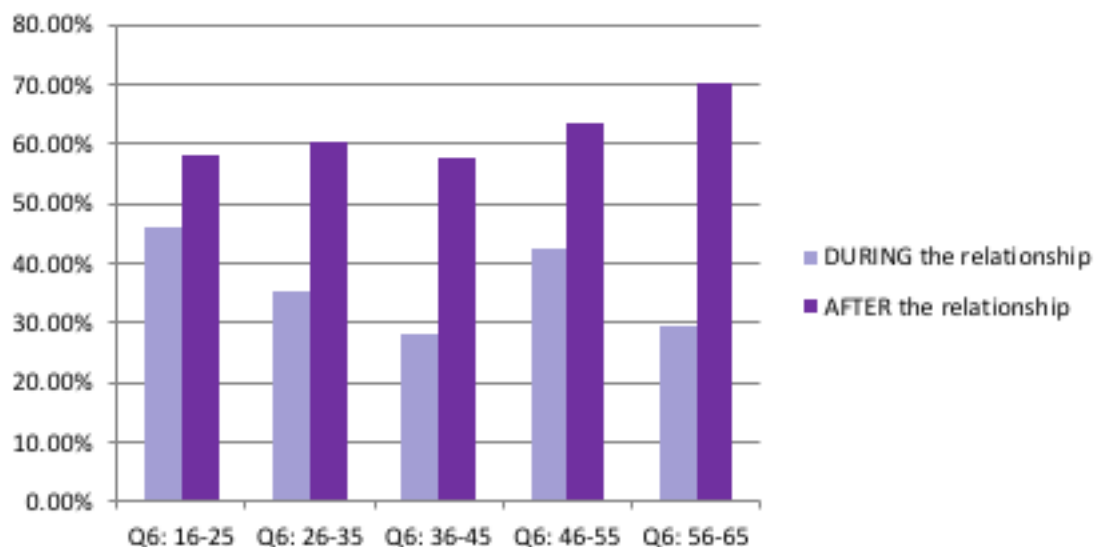


Figure 11: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers often questioned their friends or family about their whereabouts.

Attempting to forcefully re-establish contact was often in conjunction with contacting others in an effort to ascertain the victim’s schedule or to ask others to pass on information or facilitate contact.

He started using other people to get to me when I wouldn’t reply to him - contacting my boss to ask about my work roster, my friends to see who I was spending time with, turning up at my house when I wasn’t home to talk to my flatmates etc.

[My] ex-boyfriend followed me and used to try and find out from others/flatmates if I was out with other guys. He got a new girlfriend and thankfully it stopped.

I often didn’t see him. It was only once that I actually managed to catch him trying to follow me. Most times, he would tell people that he was an old friend and press for details as to where I was or had gone.

[He was] contacting my friends to try and find out where I was.

He would constantly show up at my house, flood my phone with messages, contact mutual friends to ask them to get me to talk to him and even stop me if he saw me in town.

My ex-husband tracked me online when I left him due to IPV. He would email me every few months to try and get back together or to meet up, [and] he was enraged when I moved to a new flat and I wouldn't tell him my new address. I ended up blocking him on all my means of communication. He went to see [my] family and friends and tried to get them to convince me to consider going back with him, which mostly made them feel sorry for him, but I thought it was creepy.

As is evident above, for some respondents, finding out that the stalker had been in contact with friends or family set off alarm bells and prompted them to begin to acknowledge patterns of harmful behaviour, with one participant stating “it was when my friends started to tell me all the things that he was asking them... [that made me think it was stalking] and then I started to see all different ways that he was making contact and appearing at places”. In addition, contacting friends, family, or work colleagues was often an explicit or implicit threat of reputation damage.

After I stopped all contact [he] continued to send the odd email for years, tried to contact via Facebook, and threatened to spread personal info about me to my friends and family so I finally went to the police.

He was very persistent in showing affection and wanting to maintain a relationship. I would get cards and notes in the mail, and requests through mutual friends to unblock him on social media. He was always very intense about his emotions and how he cared about me. Later, I think he became angry, and spread sexual rumours about me among our mutual social circles.

If the victims themselves did not respond favourably to these demands for contact, the stalker typically widened the circle and approached a variety of others who were proximal to the primary victim.

[He stalked me] a number of times through different avenues. There were posts made about me on public Facebook pages, including my organisation of work. Friends saw posts and let me know. He directly messaged friends about me. He stalked my though Facebook pages of other friends/families. He went to my home when I wasn't there and sent me text messages about the house to let me know he was there. He would turn up places he knew I was going to be.

Being followed, house drive by, anonymous phone calls about me, my children approached at or [on their way] to and from school. Information removed on joint personal accounts and property.

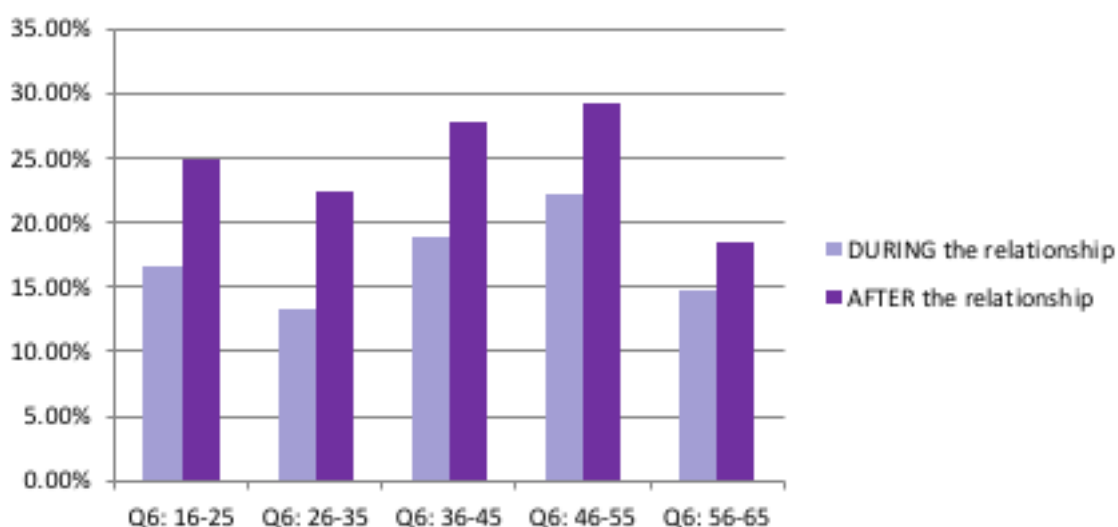


Figure 12: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers phoned their employers/colleagues often.

In some circumstances, the people the stalker contacted were professional colleagues, or the contact was motivated by the stalker's desire to attempt to destroy the victim's reputation through informal means.

My ex left me comments on my TradeMe listings and started writing negative things to upset me that way.

He continually drove past my house, sat outside my house, [and] made complaints to my manager about how I was unprofessional. He told people he was suicidal because of our break up [and] sent me flowers and letters.

I started receiving unwanted, unsolicited text messages and emails from my ex which were abusive, and contained threats to contact my employer in an attempt to get me fired.

When we were together it was a form of control, afterwards he would randomly show up at places he thought I might be, and try to talk to me, leave hundreds of messages on my phone and spread wild rumours about me. He would start out cajoling and affectionate, then escalate if I ignored him or didn't give [him] the reaction he wanted. He told people I was working as a prostitute and other crazy stories, to the point [that] his friends would track me down to check I was OK and let me know what he was doing, and that they couldn't align what he was saying with what they knew to be true.

The attempts to damage the victim's reputation were frequently successful, and respondents reported having to manage humiliating, untrue, and malicious disclosures to their managers, colleagues, and social network.

He would say either horrible or concerning things about me to other people, setting me up.

My ex threatened to disclose very personal/damaging information about me on social media and associate this with who I worked for at the time.

I am self-employed, [and] he emailed every one of my clients [with] a huge rant about how untrustworthy I was. [I] lost a lot of work. Not because they believed him [but] 'cause they just didn't want to be involved in drama.

Many of these disclosures centred on the victim's sexual conduct.

[He] turned up at work as a customer where I had to respond to him, got me fired by calling my boss and telling him I was sleeping with more than one guy at work, was always late and [that] I would cause trouble (None [of this was] true).

[They] met with my employer and discussed [our] sex life et al.

Some stalkers resorted to physical means of communication with people to spread malicious rumours.

[He] created fliers with my photo and phone number, and threatened to distribute [them] in my town.

He is much older than me and is not internet savvy. He spread rumours about me through our community and told friends lies, which isolated me.

At the extreme end of this, stalkers' destruction of victims' reputations extended to making false reports to the Police and child protection services.

[He sent] abusive texts to myself and my preteen sons. [There were] earth work trucks idling outside my house, [even] when there is no works being done in my street. [He made] false allegations to the Police and Oranga Tamariki as a distraction

[He was] threatening, abusive, lying to police and other agencies, using violence, using force, [and] getting others to harass, threaten, and lie for him.

My ex would ‘suddenly’ show up in the same places as me; appear close to my house; I’d see him driving past me in areas I knew he had no friends and didn’t live; or else he’d contact me about my whereabouts, when I hadn’t told him any of my movements. Six months later he told me he was hacking my emails. My sister was concerned he’d placed a tracker on my car or mobile phone.

Following and driving past

Although the uptake of technological forms of communication has proliferated and most victims relayed stories of being besieged by multiple, changeable, and relentless digital forms of contact, stalkers’ physical means of intimidation, monitoring, and reminders of both presence in and access to victims’ lives usually occurred alongside. Although digital contact is touted in the stalking literature as being harder to attribute accountability due to the many anonymous platforms, nearly all communication platforms leave some form of digital record (such as a private message or a photo) that can be retained to evidence the experience, if not the perpetrator. Conversely, stalking methods that are methodically fleeting and are only significant in the pattern of perpetration (and often only evident to the victim) do not lend themselves to an equivalent record, and were therefore experienced as much more frustrating. According to victims, it is notoriously difficult to successfully challenge a stalker’s right to drive down a street, or to prove that they did drive down that street.

He pretends he is just driving to a destination, he denies stalking, but when he has been seen driving down the street he has turned around in the neighbour’s drive and driven off again. He denies being on my property.

As instances of being followed or having a stalker drive past were unpredictable and represented an unknown quantity in terms of actual physical danger (especially by stalkers who had previously perpetrated physical violence), they also induced significant fear in their victims. One respondent who had been repeatedly confronted with the abuser’s ongoing infiltration into her life by way of repeat night-time drive-bys commented: “I had heard of stalking from movies and shows, but didn’t understand the fear that victims experience until I went through it myself.” Stalkers themselves seemed confident in their abilities to keep their offending marginally outside of that which could be successfully reported.

I saw him. He followed me on the bus driving behind in his car. He followed me when I walked. He would drive round and round the block. He parked outside my house or just down from my house so I could see his car but not his registration.

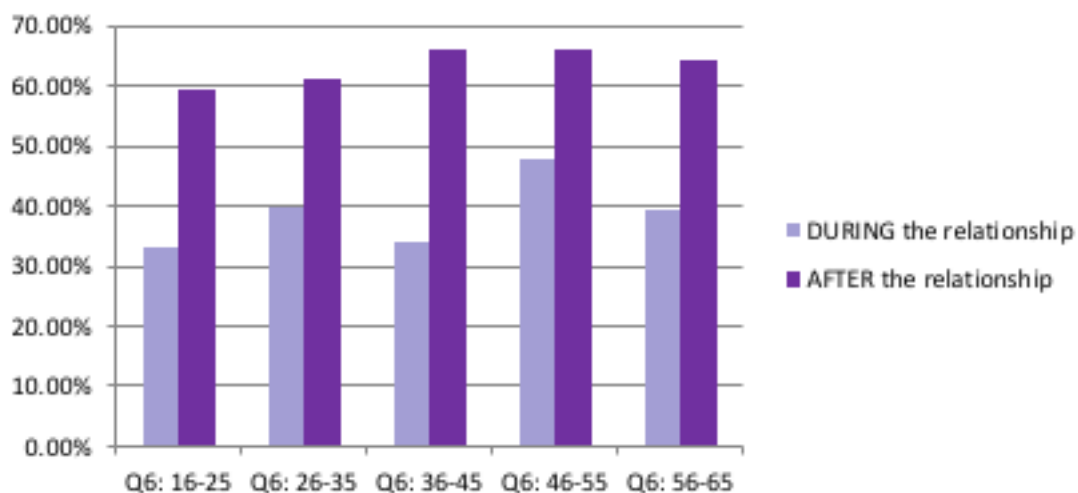


Figure 13: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers followed them on car or by foot.

Often, victims only knew they were being followed because it would be evident in the digital contact from the stalker.

Through his texts and phone calls and many, many “coincidences” I knew I was being followed... [I] started getting strange texts about places I was, when he would not [have] been aware [of] where I was if he was not following me.

However, not all stalkers were quite so conscious of the boundary line between (identifiable) illegal behaviour and stalking behaviour that would be unlikely to attract a law enforcement response. Following in person, refusing to leave the victim’s property, hiding on the victim’s property, and physically obstructing someone from leaving were amongst these examples.

My ex-boyfriend lived around the corner from me and would knock on my front door at all hours of the day refusing to leave, and he knew my work hours so would follow me in his car as I walked to and from work.

I was followed through central Wellington, with my ex-boyfriend physically blocking my attempts to get into a taxi or onto a bus to leave him. When he finally left and I went home, I received a text from him saying he’d been hiding in the bushes outside my house and had seen me arrive.

Remaining ‘just inside the law’ was also a source of frustration for advocates.

Rather than turning up at the door constantly and banging on the door it is more like “I’ll drive past, you can’t get me in trouble for that”, or sitting on the corner... if they have got bail conditions not to associate within 100 metres, they’ll sit at that 100 metre mark and just wait for the other person to drive past... [or] following in the car, that is [also] really popular.
– Key informant 2

I see that quite a lot too where he has got another number and he will continue to harass her and she knows who it is or this person will say things [like] “I saw what you did”, you know, and she’ll go that “has to be him”. It is incredible how common it is. – Key informant 4

For a minority of respondents, being followed was occasionally accompanied by physical or sexual violence. This added to the psychological distress they experienced on subsequent episodes of following, since the accompanying abuse was unpredictable and so each time was viewed as potentially very dangerous.

[My] younger ex-boyfriend would turn up at my new flat... and try and climb into bed with me when I was asleep, followed me and used to try and find out from others/flatmates if I was out with other guys. He got a new girlfriend and thankfully it stopped.

He would express his feelings of love, and when I did not reciprocate, he would threaten violence. He has cornered me and threatened to kidnap, rape and kill me.

Showing up

As with driving by, it is difficult for victims of stalking to assert that someone showing up at places where they are is malicious, or even that it is more than coincidental.

My ex turned up to many events that I was attending, and I figured out that information was unwittingly being passed to him through people seeing “events” on Facebook I was involved in. I had blocked him on all social media at this point so it was weird that he should be aware of my whereabouts. One night in particular, was an opening of an exhibition of mine and he came to the opening, so I left, and he followed me to four different locations where I was going to escape him. I had left my bag on a table and he went to stand by that bag so I couldn’t get my stuff and leave.

Correspondingly, the purposeful showing up at places frequented by the victim ends up orienting victims’ behavior, as they struggle to find grounds on which to exclude the stalker from those places.

It varied. He began with affection. When I asked him not to attend events or refused to talk to him at events

he would get angry. And if friends (or my employer) spoke to him, asking him to leave me alone he would try to guilt trip me.

Trespass orders and protection orders did not always discourage the turning up, with respondents saying “he turned up on my street when on bail, [even though] the PO [protection order] prohibited that”.

Other times, victims were unaware that the stalker had turned up until they noticed signs of tampering indicating his presence.

I became aware that he was at my house watching me when an ashtray disappeared from my back doorstep.

Using other people

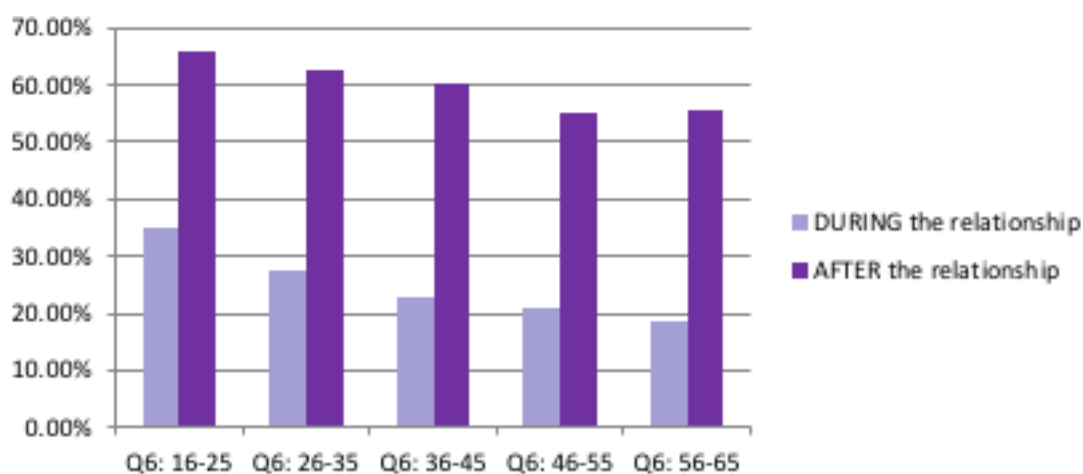


Figure 14: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers asked their friends and family to make contact on their behalf.

Many respondents described a pattern of stalking in which the stalker was reliant on using other people to carry out the stalking behaviours. Usually, these people were the stalker’s friends or family members.

The abuse at first was obvious then covert, often using others to harass and intimidate [me].

[I noticed] when he started to use my friends to check in on me.

I saw his friends’ vehicles go past my house regularly. He used them to spy on me because I had a protection order [against] him.

Occasionally respondents recounted ways that the stalker used children to unwittingly participate in the stalking by relaying details of victims’ actions and whereabouts.

The house was broken into, [but] nothing taken, [and I found his] cigarettes left in [my] car... I don’t smoke. [There was a] spanner put in [my] engine oil. He got women friends to befriend myself and [my] daughter in person and via Facebook, despite privacy settings. [He] told [my] child he knew which bedroom she was [in], and my bedroom.

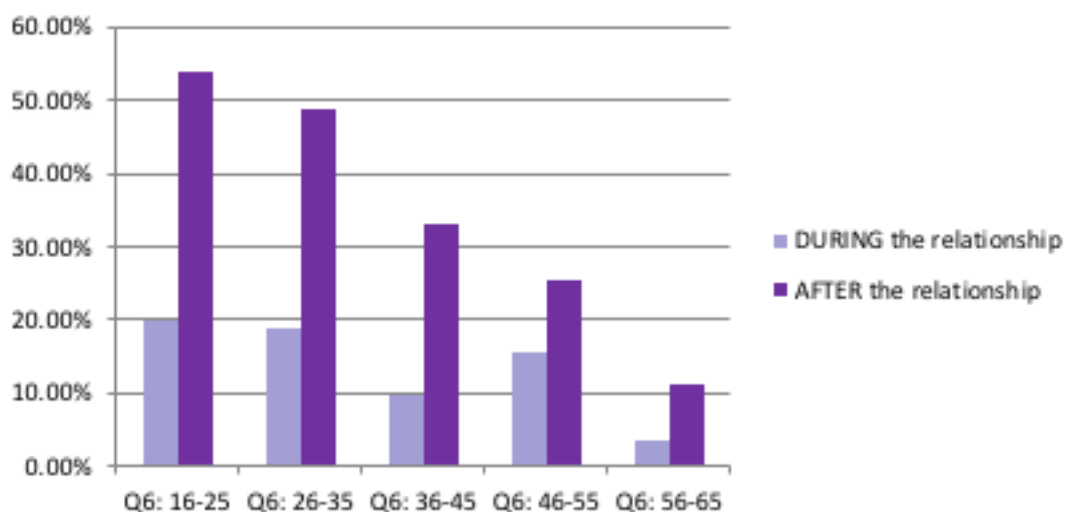


Figure 14: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers made fake social media accounts to contact or imitate them.

Victims' online presence was mercilessly mined by stalkers for further access to victims' lives, opportunities to attempt contact, and platforms through which to damage victims' reputation. Making false profiles was the most commonly reported method, with stalkers posing as different (often multiple) people on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and various dating websites and applications.

An ex-boyfriend who I only dated for about three months harassed me online for around three to four years after we broke up. He would send me threatening emails, would contact me through online sites like review sites where I once was stupid enough to use my whole name and [he would] pretend to be someone else, however it would become evident it was him. I had to change my email address, and also my phone number because I would get lots of calls from a blocked number with heavy breathing which I think was also him.

The stalking happened throughout the relationship, and for years after it ended. When we were together I was always being 'monitored'. If I didn't reply to text messages immediately or answer phone calls I was berated for cheating. If I couldn't verify where I had been at any given time I would be accused of cheating. When I left, he would contact me through fake social media accounts but it was always quite obvious it was him, and I got to the point where any friend request or message I didn't know got blocked, just in case.

After blocking a Facebook account I noticed comments and likes coming from an account with a new last name but same first name and picture. I blocked this one.... he opened more. He began following all my business pages when I continued blocking him and created eight accounts over seven years.

There is a protection order in place, so I was aware he was frustrated that he couldn't contact me anymore. I was vigilant with my social media so it was a Instagram account that I created to talk about psychological abuse he started to message me under a fake account and name asking me out on dates saying I was hot and I was completely aware it was him, [because] it was over the top messages from a so called stranger, and of course I know his history of dishonesty.

Using false accounts appeared to be used to discern both where victims were, and how they were using their time. This information then fed into other methods of communication.

I discovered my ex-boyfriend had made a fake Twitter account to continue following and engaging with me online after I had blocked him on Facebook and blocked his phone number. When I found it and blocked it, he began searching me out and engaging with me on social media channels he'd never previously followed me on. When I created new social media channels, he'd start following me within a couple of days - like he had a Google alert out for me or something. Before I blocked his phone number, he'd text me about things he'd seen me doing on social media like "if you've got time to tweet then you've got time to talk to me"

I signed up on a dating website and received an email from a guy around the same time. [My] ex-husband later admitted it was him using a fake name, an anagram of his own name.

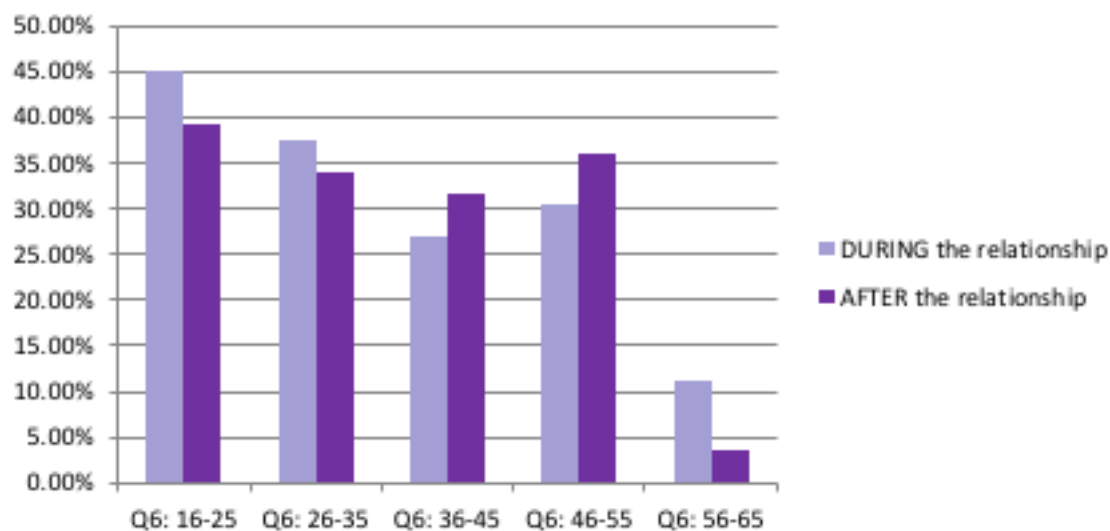


Figure 15: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers logged into their social media accounts to track their activity.

Using their knowledge of victims' passwords to continue to access their email or social media accounts to find out personal information was also common.

The first time he threatened me with information he'd gained from accessing my accounts without my permission. The second time I just pieced things together over time as there were more indicators that pointed at him.

Some stalkers also resorted to creative methods to obtain their victims' latest details.

My ex-husband got my mobile number from a real estate agent's list I filled in at an open home.

Others simply collected a vast amount of data about the victim using stored information, or used their own material to pester the victim.

I was being pestered at all hours on every messaging platform. This was someone who had a PhD in computer science and compulsively backed up every single interaction and photograph of me (yes, including nudes) online and offline, and had all that information with which to spam me, find obscure accounts I had on forums from ages ago, and build a comprehensive network of my online friends to befriend under fake identities over months to get information about me.

Personal social media accounts were often being accessed by stalkers, and this was rarely immediately apparent to victims.

Things disappearing on Facebook, [direct Facebook] messages being 'read' that I hadn't.

[There were] threatening emails, silent phone calls, weird stalking online behaviour impersonating other people.

Excessive attempts at contact despite me making it clear I didn't wish to hear from them. They then tried being kind and apologetic before then attempting to hack into all my social media accounts.

Inserting self into life

Aside from the unwanted contact perpetrated through multiple avenues and the reminders of presence signalled by driving by, following, or showing up where the victim was, stalkers went to extreme lengths to contrive ways to remain involved with victims' lives, including cultivating friends and interests that aligned with victims' activities. Memorising victims' schedules to engineer supposedly coincidental meetings at public places or at social gatherings was common, and respondents reported that stalkers would 'show up' at places such as supermarkets, house parties, favourite cafes and bars, doctors' waiting rooms, job interview settings, university campuses, and outside children's schools.

[He was] turning up randomly when I was at the shops or supermarket and even [at] a job interview where I was parked in a really obscure place.

[He claimed] he wanted to talk, [and was] inserting himself into places where I was with others and he wasn't invited.

Other respondents described stalkers who loitered at places they knew were frequented by the victim in order to either accost or keep tabs on them.

I would see their car outside my house waiting, I would have to drive away and come back later as I was afraid to go home. Sometimes they would enter my home (a shared flat) invited in by another flat mate, and go through my belongings. I knew they would do this as things would be purposely moved or they would leave an item of theirs like sunglasses on my side table. It felt like a warning like I wasn't safe at my own house

[He was] sitting lurking at closest cafe by the window knowing when I was arriving home or leaving... [and] appeared at places he knew I might be at suddenly and unexpectedly.

[He] kept showing up everywhere I was, including my house and workplace.

He went to my home when I wasn't there and sent me text messages about the house to let me know he was there. He would turn up places he knew I was going to be.

As with the incessant contact, respondents' attempt to thwart stalkers' abilities to locate them at these places ultimately necessitated changes to their routines that detracted from their sense of normalcy and precluded regular social contact. Despite these pervasive impacts on victims' lives, the supposedly coincidental showing up at places where respondents were was generally passed off as unintentional, and thus rarely attracted any punitive response if reported. In short, so-called 'chance-meetings' could perpetually be engineered with relative impunity, and for some respondents, were still occurring up to a decade later.

Interference

While the majority of episodes of contact were non-invasive and not explicitly threatening (though often representing implicit threat), some stalkers actively interfered with victims' possessions or activities. These were usually oriented towards stopping the victim from exercising their freedom; such as going to work, meeting up with family or friends, or seeing a (suspected or actual) new partner.

[He was] sending people to watch my comings and goings from my place of residence and work, [and] siphoning my petrol so I would be unable to drive myself home from work and lingering around to offer me a ride home, violent threats, and actual physical violence when he didn't get his way. [He also] knock[ed] on my doors and windows overnight.

In some cases, the interference was symbolic, such as in the stalker’s replacement of a bed that the stalker had previously shared with the respondent.

[My ex-boyfriend was turning up at other work sites and going round to work friends’ places. Trying to be their friend. He would creep around my house at night. [He] even broke in and took my bed and swapped it with another. He would not go away but he did it in a way at first that I couldn’t really do a lot about it.

Interference with personal security measures, such as by having keys made to the victim’s house or taking remote controls to automatic garages, also frightened victims.

He was desperately trying to get me back, so it was mostly declarations of love, except when he saw me with my new partner. That time he waited for my partner to leave, and shook me by my coat collar, yelled in my face, and ripped up the card he had bought for me. He came into the house we had previously occupied together (I had stayed on), and begged for another chance, one weekend morning. He revealed that he’d taken a garage remote [control], so I then felt more threatened.

Several had had security cameras or security lights removed from outside their houses, which, while difficult to prove, was almost always interpreted as representing an impending escalation of violence. Finally, at its extreme manifestation, stalkers interfered with victims’ activities (and in particular, their ability to attend their employment) by attempting to run them off the road with their vehicles or by jeopardising the safety of their homes.

[He] once sat in front of the house and office on a daily basis, and tried to ram me off the road

[He became] aggressive and violent, causing damage at home, [putting] sugar in my petrol tank, [and putting] weed-killer in the water tank.

[He] swapped [my] medication around, randomly opened garage doors at night with a remote he still had, [and] rammed my car off the road.

[My ex-partner] tried running me off the road, [and] tried breaking into my house.

Leaving notes, gifts, or tokens

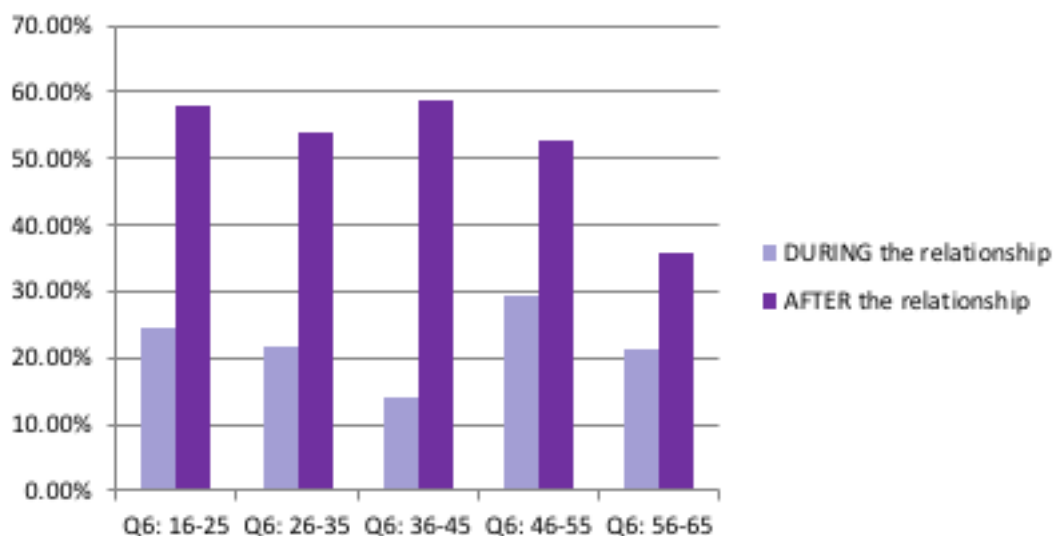


Figure 16: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers repeatedly left notes and gifts.

Leaving notes or gifts was similar to ‘interference’ tactics: a subtle method through which to continue to intrude in victims’ lives. This was often regarded as a deliberate act of visibility – behaviour that would incite a reaction in victims and make apparent stalkers’ reach and intention.

When he wanted me to know he was stalking me, he would leave things in my mailbox or car late at night or in the early morning hours.

They found my address and sent me mail, cards, notes and unwanted gifts for attention.

[I became aware of the stalking] when he use[d] to leave gifts outside my house.

He left things on my car for me to find when I came out to it after work or in my lunch break.

Some respondents did not experience a sense of fear from these notes, gifts, and other methods of contact, but rather regarded it as a nuisance that they had to manage following a breakup.

Around the age of 22 I had broken up with an ex-boyfriend... After a few weeks of being broken up, he decided he wanted me back so proceeded to ring me, write letters, send flowers, happen to drive by and visited my friends trying to find out what I was up to. It was really obvious when I was getting phone calls from friends who described feeling uncomfortable with his behaviour.

[He is] sometimes leaving ‘I love you/miss you/want to talk to you notes, and other times making demands.

[He left] notes under the windscreen wipers of my car when it was parked on city streets.

Leaving gifts was a further source of discomfort, as it was often an important indicator of the continuation of an affection-to-abuse cycle that respondents were already familiar with. Gift-giving signalled supposed attempts at apology and an attempt to win back affection and trust; equally, respondents were aware that the refusal to accept these was also rife with risk.

[He gave] me unwanted gifts and [then] abusive threats.

[It started over with] gift giving, put downs, [and then him being] angry if I rejected the gifts.

Anger at first, chasing/following my , [and then] abusive ph[one] calls and emails... then affection having gifts and apologies delivered.

Sometimes, the nature of these gifts also made respondents uncomfortable.

[He was] leaving tailor-made under wear for me as a gift.. [and then used] any excuse to show up at my house outside in his car.

Similar to notes and gifts (although somewhat less adherent to scripts of ‘romance’), small tokens to indicate presence being left around the victim’s property or amongst their possessions functioned as subtle reminders of continued assumed power over the victim. Some of these tokens were performative – for instance, one respondent described her stalker coming over, getting inside her house, and shaving her dog to demonstrate his continued reach into her life. While to her this represented a significant transgression given the effort and intrusion involved to carry out the task, she was aware that to report that someone had shaved her dog would be regarded as ridiculous and felt it was unlikely to be taken seriously. Others detailed small tokenistic signs of presence that had been deliberately placed.

After I had moved out, he use[d] to come around [to] my house at night. Every night! And leave evidence he was there[;] i.e. a flower on my windscreen, [or a] drink can outside my bedroom window, [or] junk mail on the back porch. [Or he would] draw a smile in the dust on windows. Just a little something so we knew he had been there. My daughter was a mess. I would have to get up extra early to find and get rid of whatever he left.

He would show himself to me when I left the office, and talk to my colleagues when they were out of the office too. He left a flower and note on my car (the only way he could have known where I parked was to follow me).

The impacts of receiving these notes and gifts were twofold: victims expressed a feeling of hopelessness stemming from the experience of the scope of perpetration being wide and insidious, and they added to their perception that to report would be futile, as taken alone, the leaving of apparently innocuous gifts or notes (such as cards left inside) did not appear to represent any kind of threat and were unlikely to be crimes that could realistically be proven. One, for example, described how she had found “a rose on my pillow when I’d moved into a new flat, and none of my friends knew my address”, leaving her profoundly unsettled and wondering how he had found out her new address and how she would ever escape his reach.

Monitoring activity and communication

One of the principal indicators that intimate partner violence had evolved to include stalking tactics was being monitored. This could be perpetrated digitally and remotely as well as physically in real-time.

[I] received phone calls... early hours of the morning... [he] would tell me where I had been and what I had been doing. [He] had told me what he wanted to do with me.

The constant phone calls and messages are pretty obvious, but also aware of other stalking as he was constantly Facebooking me and when I would block him he would create another fake account. [Once when I] turned a corner and saw [a] person from the corner of my eye. [I became aware] by seeing the person outside my home – [there were] constant calls and [there was] intimidation.

He was very open about the stalking, texting me saying he had been sitting outside of my house, sending me photos of my house, texting me constantly when I didn’t reply, asking my friends where I was when my car wasn’t parked outside and stalking my new partner.

There was never a single method employed by stalkers; rather, they utilised a constellation of methods to create an often unavoidable and unescapable pattern of knowledge-gathering and surveillance. As discussed previously, this often appeared chiefly motivated by a sense of ownership and possession over victims, combined with stalkers’ conviction that victims were likely to be lying or to be unfaithful or moving on with a new partner.

My ex would ‘suddenly’ show up in the same places as me; appear close to my house; I’d see him driving past me in areas I knew he had no friends and didn’t live; or else he’d contact me about my whereabouts, when I hadn’t told him any of my movements. Six months later he told me he was hacking my emails. My sister was concerned he’d placed a tracker on my car or mobile phone.

I saw him sitting outside my house in his car when I told him not to come around . He would constantly check up on me to see where I was or to make sure I was where I said I was.

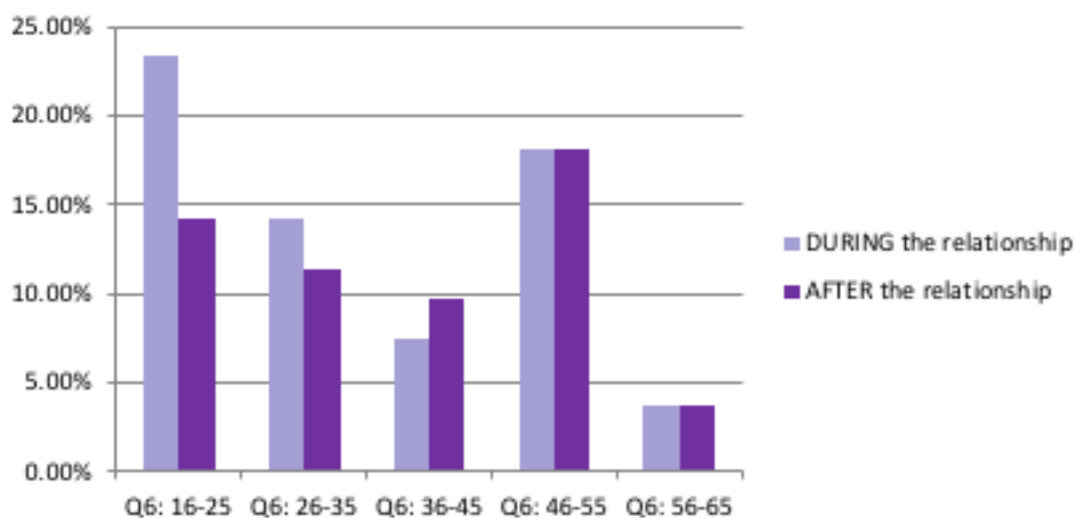


Figure 17: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers set up device tracking applications.

The proliferation of mobile applications offered fertile ground for tracking strategies to become embedded with little risk of exposure or consequence.

I was “stalked” via mobile - numerous texts/phone calls. The person also used an app to track my location and would inform me they were doing so and deliberately cross my path.

My ex turned up to my workplace, my new flat, left things in my letterbox, turned up at my parents’ house, called my mum, kept calling and texting me etc. When I tried to block him at the phone store, I found he had been using an app to track me.

My ex-partner had apps on my phone to hear my conversations and could see me [on his phone].

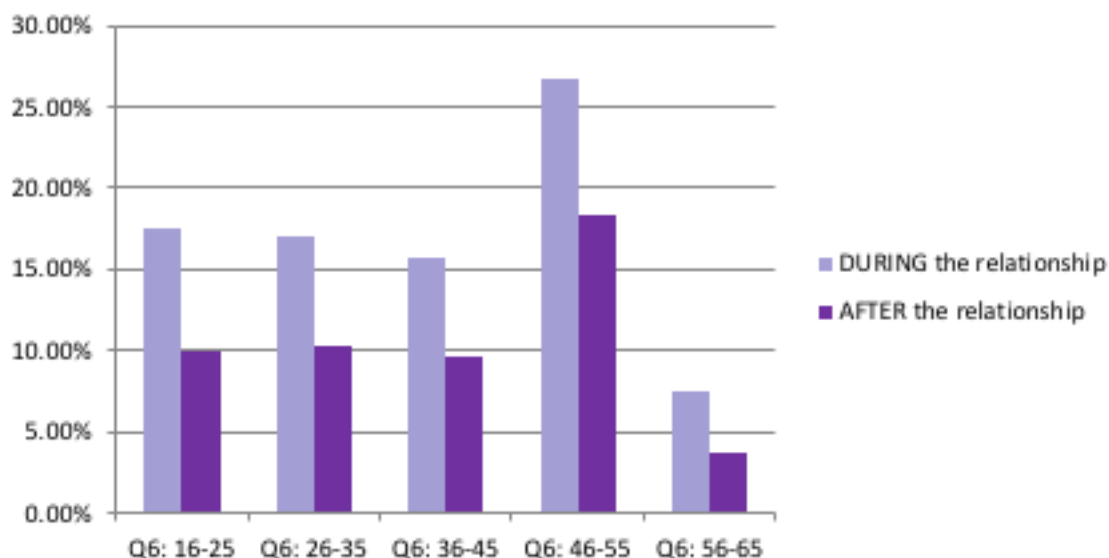


Figure 18: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers tracked their location through online banking.

Accessing victims’ emails, online banking, and social media direct messaging history was also a favoured strategy to discern the victim’s whereabouts, the current state of their relationships, and any communication about the abuser between victims and people in their social network.

My ex-contacted me at a hotel, he only could’ve known [I would be there] by reading [the] confirmation email.

[I kept seeing] emails being deleted or ‘read’ in my inbox. He would show up places that he wouldn’t know I was at without tracking me somehow.

He admitted to monitoring my online accounts and placing tracking devices on my phone as well as installing key tap software.

When we were together he told me he could track me by the phone he gave me, he followed where I went via bank transactions if I went shopping, [and] he kept getting my unlisted phone number.

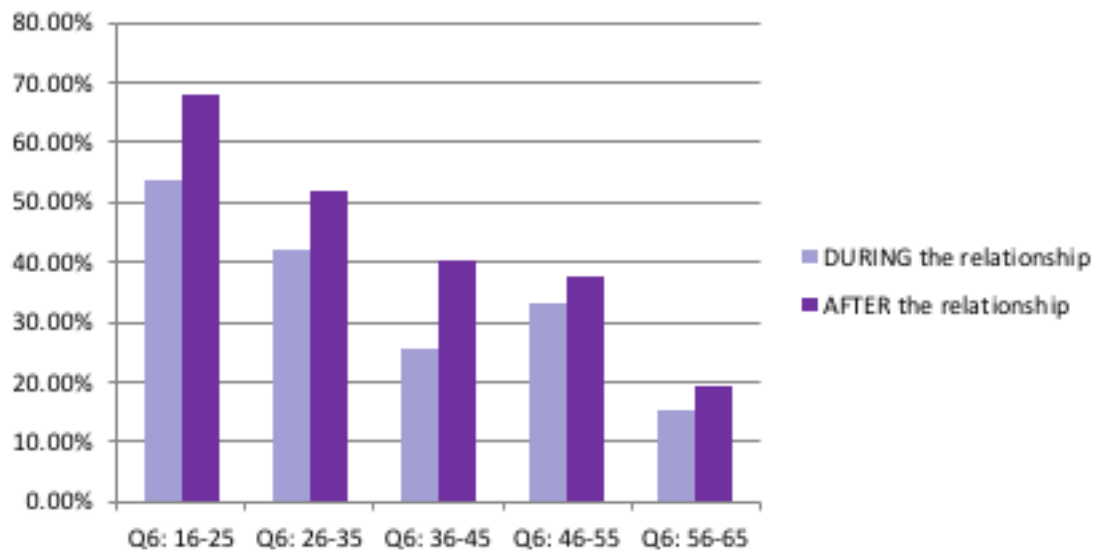


Figure 19: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers checked their location via social media posting.

Innocuous online/digital activity on the victim's phone could also be capitalised on for its location-capturing potential, for example Facebook check-ins, Snapchat locations, and Instagram tagging. Often, it was the discovery of this tracking that prompted recognition of the stalking by victims.

He was using meth and had psychosis. He wasn't always 100% polished when trying means to stalk me. E.g. [The] Find My iPhone [app] would be activated by him remotely to locate me, 2) [My] apps didn't seem [to be working] right; 3) I saw [a] flashing light in the darkness of a GPS tracker in my car; [and] 4) a spare phone he used to try to track me in my car started beeping in my boot when I drove home.

My ex and I had split up- I didn't feel the same about him as I used to and was unhappy in the relationship. I first became aware of it when he found me through Snapchat location settings while I was in town with work friends.

Some stalkers used the online presence to demand further contact or question the absence of contact.

My former partner would walk past my house a couple of times a day and always check my active status on Facebook.... I was aware [of it] because I saw him, and he would tell me I'm ignoring him while I'm online.

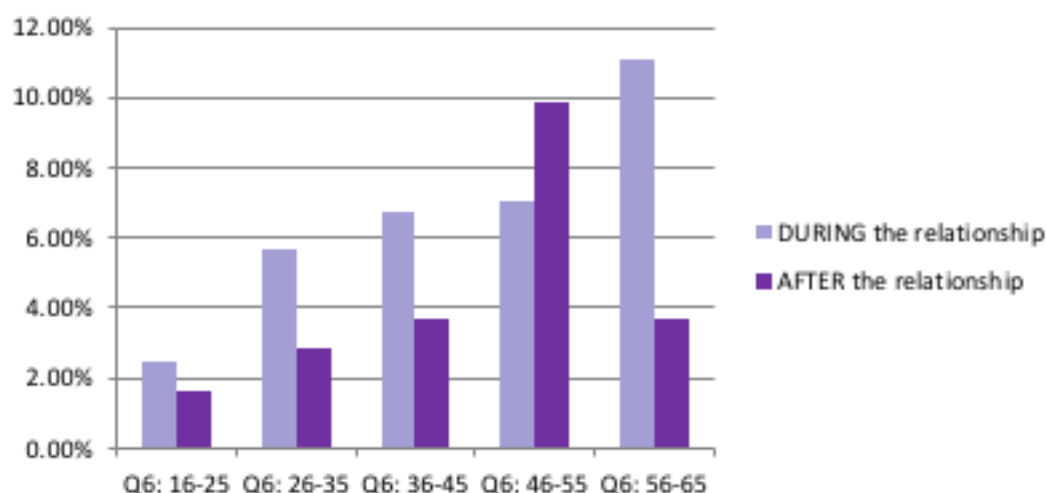


Figure 20: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers repurposed home security devices to spy on them.

Several also identified various innovative mechanisms their stalkers had used (both during the relationship and subsequently) to monitor their actions.

[He] installed Teamviewer remote login to my laptop and spied on my real time usage, installed remote access on my phone and then locked it remotely so I couldn't use it, [and] expected me to video call in the car and prove no one else was in it.

While the request to use video to prove location and company was common amongst respondents, most did not allude to technology such as Teamviewer or other methods of remote access. However, many did refer to their stalkers as using technology to assist in the monitoring of victims (such as via baby monitors or hidden listening devices).

[I] had my phone tapped and a tracker on my car. Also listening devices and cameras in the house that was discovered later.

Advocates did not routinely encounter victims who were aware of hidden cameras, but also commented that they would not necessarily know about it as victims may either be unaware of cameras or accustomed to their presence and thus not view them as noteworthy. However, it was something that they dealt with occasionally, and one of had enlisted police to sweep a victim's house for cameras after an prolonged stalking that had involved physical assault.

[There was one] client where police actually did go through and sweep the house and see if there were cameras everywhere and they did find a couple, but she believed there were more.
– Key informant 1

Photos and images

Sending images or using the potential sharing of images as a threat was less common than monitoring or digital harassment, but was experienced as deeply distressing for victims.

This was online stalking, I was sent a private photo of myself from a site where my ex was supposed to be banned from.

My ex-husband would park outside my child's school and record me on his phone. He would drive by my work several times per day, and my house. He would often park a few houses up from my home.

I went on two dates with a guy when I was 17 before deciding I didn't want to see him again. After telling him this, he messaged me every day on all my different social media accounts, he would send pictures of me that he had found, all [from] the internet and downloaded. [For instance] he send a screenshot of an album of photos of me, including pictures of me as a child.

The phenomenon of revenge porn² often played a key role in image-based stalking abuse.

We had a brief relationship. During that time he kept close tabs on me, even after he left to live in Australia. He would message and call me constantly and if I asked him to stop, he would threaten me with revenge porn.

[He] compulsively backed up every single interaction and photograph of me (yes, including nudes) online and offline, and had all that information with which to spam me.

[He] sent me secret recordings of us having sex from during our relationship, I didn't know that they existed.

I had mentioned it to friends during the time, but no one really took it seriously or believed me because he was "such a nice guy". I also tried to get support from my employer, but they weren't interested either. It wasn't until six months later I found out he had stolen numerous nude photos of me and put them on the internet that I finally went to the police.

As illustrated by these quotes, most of the time stalkers made victims aware of the potential for 'revenge porn' by threatening to post nude, intimate, or sexual images or videos online if they did not comply with their wishes or behave in a sufficiently friendly or caring way. However, for a minority, they did not become aware of the posting of images online until much later, and had sometimes never even been aware of their existence, or that the stalkers had had them in their possession.

Property damage

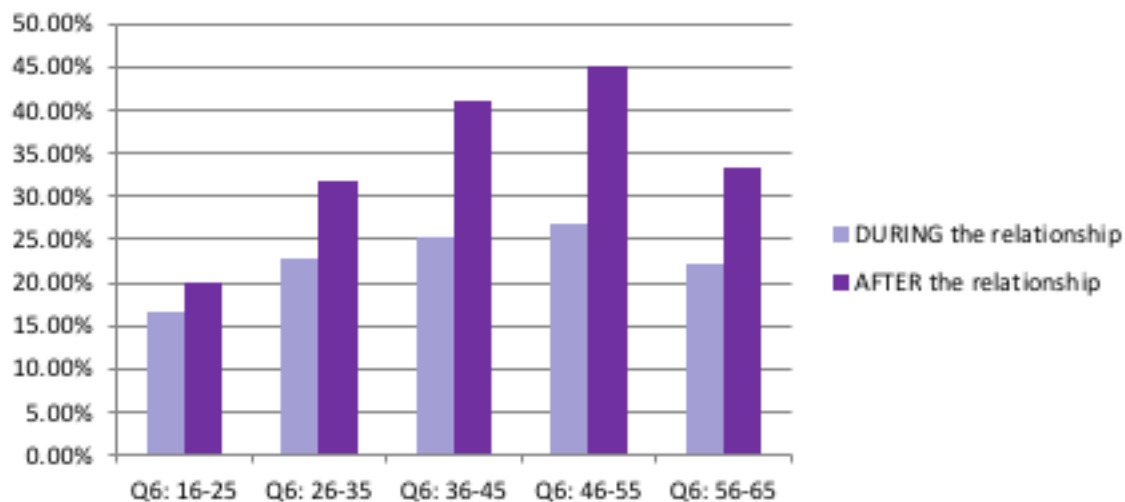


Figure 21: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers deliberately damaged their property.

In addition to tampering with belongings to send an implicit message regarding ease of access, victims described intentional and potentially dangerous examples of damage to their property. Destroying the property of others, especially previous partners or male friends that the stalker believed the victim may partner with, was also considered to send a message of deterrence to the victim regarding the potential for disclosure or for re-partnership.

² Posting nude or sexual images online for others to see as revenge for not obeying.

Threats of physical violence, [like saying]“I could hit you”. Smashing belongings of others I had been seen with. Repeated phone calls. Continuation of the psychological abuse tactics used in the marriage. “No one will believe you. People will find out who you are.” Etc.

Damaging cars and the insides of homes, on the other hand, appeared motivated by stalkers’ destructive anger at the refusal of victims to comply with their wishes and re-partner. Car damage in particular tended to be perpetrated after unwanted contact was initiated by the stalker, and through which victims reiterated their refusal to resume a relationship.

He was only ever physical with me once. The time I left him for the last time. He broke many of my belongings. Destroyed a lot of property. Damaged cars. Damaged ‘things’ that were irreplaceable - deliberately. But the emotional and mental abuse carried on for many years.

They then tried being kind and apologetic before then attempting to hack into all my social media accounts. They also caused damage to my car.

Slashing tyres was particularly prevalent and acted to disable victims’ transport to work or to support people.

My car tyres were slashed, my car windows were smashed, and he use to wait outside my work.

[My] tyres were slashed, [and there was] constant harassment via phone and Facebook and email.

He would be banging on my front door at 5am. I had my tyres slashed at the pools with “I love you” written in the dirt on the car window. [I] also had anything that was outside my house taken - the hose etc.

Breaking into cars and houses and causing significant destruction generally went hand in hand with threats of assault or with actual assault.

He repeatedly called and texted me with abuse, he followed me, waited outside my place of work, [and] went to my house etc. When I agreed to talk to him he attacked me on two separate occasions. He also broke into my house and trashed it, and smashed the window of my car.

[It started with] threats - subtle and obvious, the intrusion into my safe place (my home) and the removal of some of my belongings which was then used against me as a bargaining chip... black mail.

Threats

Threats frequently encompassed others than the primary victim and contributed to pervasive feelings of fear. Threats alone, however, especially if not recorded, rarely attracted a law enforcement response.

He openly threatened me and the kids... [using threats of] stabbing [us], [or] killing us. He used to watch me...just sitting in his car.

I would wake up in the morning and would have received between 10-50 emails overnight. Never knew what they contained some could be very loving but then when I wouldn’t engage contact with him he would get really angry and threatening. Threatening my life and my daughter’s life.

In some instances, violence preceded threats, and in these circumstances the knowledge that the violence can and had been actualised served to strengthen the emotional impacts of the threats.

[He was] violently initially then very threatening. He threatened to hurt my friends and family in addition to myself.

[There were] threats - subtle and obvious, [and] the intrusion into my safe place (my home).

Many of the threats related to suicide. These were usually communicated as the responsibility of the victim – implying that if the victim did not welcome their contact or agree to resume a relationship, then the stalker would end their own life.

[They were] blaming me for his problems, [and] verbally aggressive but also [using] manipulative language, i.e. saying they'd commit suicide if I didn't give them my time.

[He was] emotionally manipulative, pleading, threatening [to kill] himself, jealous rants. This is someone I had broken up with and had been living with.

[He was] threatening, [and] suicidal towards me not replying – [as if it] would be my fault if he went over the edge.

[He used] manipulation [and] threats [like that he was going] to kill himself if I stopped talking to him, as well as jumping manically between insults, affection, apology and depression.

[They were] emotionally abusive, [such as by] threatening suicide, involving family members through manipulation and emotional abuse, [and] intense anger/violent outbursts.

Not all of the threatening behaviour was explicit; for many, actions held a symbolic threat (such as the demonstration of access to a home as an unspoken threat of potential later violence), or nonspecific language such as “you’re going to regret this”.

I broke up with him, and he progressively got nastier and nastier. He would send really abusive messages like [saying] I was a slut and [saying] he was going to ruin my life etc.

These nonspecific threats precluded any opportunity for law enforcement or legal protection: notes saying things like “I haven’t forgotten what we talked about” were not deemed threatening enough to warrant a police or Family Court response. Further, many of the threats included not just violence toward the victim, but damage to their freedom, reputation, or employability.

[There were] threats to report me to police and agencies for false things.

In addition, the power of the threats was strengthened by stalkers’ capitalisation of pervasive societal beliefs about violence; in particular that the victim would not be believed, that they could be made to appear crazy, or that people would blame them for the violence.

[There were] threats of physical violence, [for example saying] “I could hit you”. [There was also] smashing [of] belongings of others I had been seen with. [There were repeated phone calls and a] continuation of the psychological abuse tactics used in the marriage [like saying] “No one will believe you. People will find out who you are.” Etc

[He used] emotional blackmail and verbal abuse to make me feel worthless, [along with] threats that he was the police and could do what he wanted, [and] finally violence that required his workmates in the police intervening.

Initially I challenged and resisted, but his reactions to my non-cooperation were so extreme, that it became easier just to give in to his requirements. He systematically isolated me from my friends and family, so I had nobody else validating my feelings about his actions either. He’d repeatedly blame me for his obsession - I wasn’t trustworthy, I had too many male friends, I was naive and didn’t see their true intentions, nobody else made him angry like I did. I stopped trusting my instinct and began wondering whether I was the crazy one.

Typically, these threats were solely communicated in private, further contributing to victims’ belief that they would be disbelieved if they attempted to convince others of their fear.

[In] texts and in front of other people it [the dialogue] was all about staying friends, [like to] do the right thing for the kids. But in person/[in]private [it was about] how he was going to get me for leaving him. [He used to say he would] never forgive me. [And use] threats, [like that] I had better watch out. [I would] never know when it’s coming.

Living under threat, especially when the threats were communicated in secret or worded ambiguously, was debilitating for many victims. This was compounded by the shared experience of many, where myths about what constituted stalking – and who was likely to be a stalker – rendered the likelihood of responsive methods of protective support elusive.

Turning up

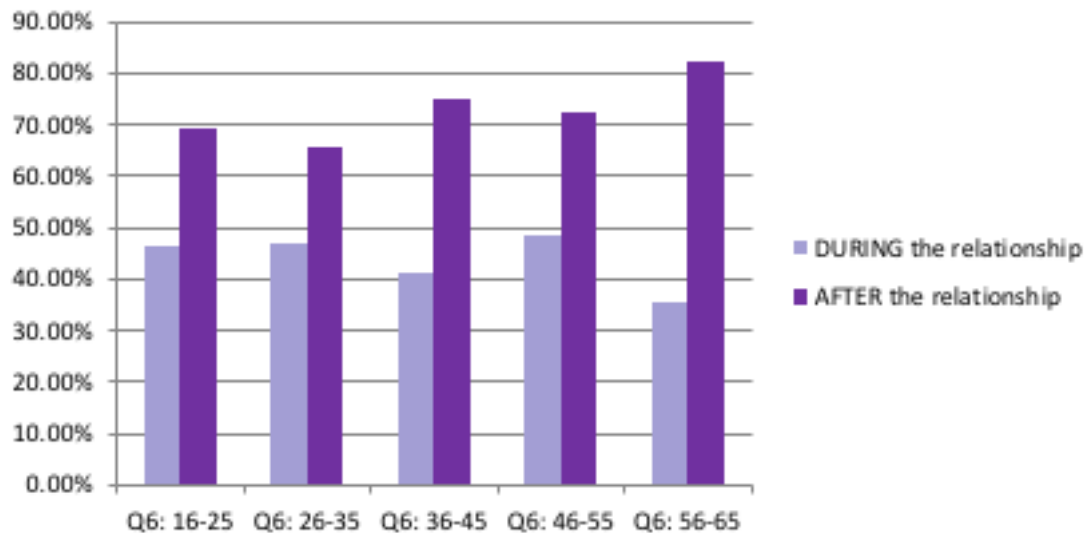


Figure 22: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers loitered by their homes, workplaces, or schools.

Showing up at the victim's house or work, as with incessant or continuous contact and drive-bys, signalled a continued fixation on the victim and, for most victims, the stalkers' continued perception of ownership or control over the victim's life. The stalker turning up at the victim's home often engendered intense fear, triggered memories of past violence, and was often associated with opportunistic perpetration of violence in respondents' narratives of the stalking violence trajectory.

[It was] making sure he wangled an invite to anything I would be at, [sending] repeated text messages, [and] showing up at my house uninvited.

I became aware when my ex[-partner] knew things about my life that he shouldn't have and I saw him hiding behind trees on another occasion.

[There were] cars pulling up beside me, pulling into my driveway and sitting there, [and] car lights shining into my dwelling at late/odd hours.

My ex[-partner] would drive past the house and I would see him go past, then he would text me. I have also had a friend text me [to tell me] that he is on my property, and also neighbours inform me that he has been at house. Or, if he has had the children for a visit, he has often been back prior to the drop off time and left their belongings strewn up the path to the house.

However, for some abusers, it was simply another mechanism through which to satisfy their suspicion about the victim's romantic or sexual activities.

[My] ex-partner used to hide and creep around my home. He used to admit he was listening as he was paranoid I was cheating.

He would constantly show up at my house, flood my phone with messages, [and] contact mutual friends to ask them to get me to talk to him and even stop me if he saw me in town.

Showing up at victims' homes was not always carried out with subtlety or secrecy – often, it was in daylight and overt.

My ex-boyfriend lived around the corner from me and would knock on my front door at all hours of the day refusing to leave, and he knew my work hours so would follow me in his car as I walked to and from work.

As is evidenced above, the places the stalker turned up often encompassed work locations as well as personal homes.

I saw my ex parked over the road from my work several times a week for 3 months after I left him

[I became aware of the stalking] gradually over time. I started seeing him everywhere I usually went... all of a sudden I he was turning up and bumping into me. I thought it was random at first, then he would park outside my office window at work, and outside my house and stand there waiting for me to see him. I didn't think it was stalking [at the time].

It was very unnerving. He came into my workplace one day just to see me then walked out again.

At the time when respondents became aware of the stalker's presence, many became immobilised by fear or acquiesced with the stalker's wishes in order to minimise the likelihood of severe physical violence or confrontation, particularly if children were present at the home.

[The worst part was] when I would catch a glimpse of him pass the window and even caught him ducking under my window. Sometimes [I'd] spot him through the trees in my backyard looking up at the house [or receive] texts he sent telling me what's going on at my house at the time while he sits outside in his car. It's an uncomfortable feeling, sending chills [of fear].

For many, this was simply a continuation of a pattern of showing up that had begun during the relationship with the stalker.

Even when we were in a relationship, if I didn't answer the phone, he would come looking for me and turn up where he thought I may be.

He called me 63 times over a couple of hours one day. At a do I went to, one of his friends and ex-wife flatmates had been talking to him and warned me that he'd expressed an interest of turning up at my house. Even before we broke up, he'd show up at my university and my lecturers had to ask him to leave.

An ex-partner asked to speak with me one night in person, and turned up with a huge bunch of flowers declaring he was in love with me still. I declined to get back together with him and he didn't take no for an answer. All incidences of stalking continued from that date on, he was very blatant. It culminated in him coming to a concert he knew I was going to, but just standing at the back in a mask watching me. I didn't recognise him, but other friends did and told me straight away. Once he'd been recognised, he left.

Often, it was a third party that alerted the victim to the perpetual presence of the stalker.

A neighbour came to my door and asked if I knew a man had been standing at the fence, staring at my house. Another neighbour then told me he often closed my gate in the mornings upon finding it open (I always closed it when I got home).

My friend was having a cigarette outside my house and noticed someone hiding in the alleyway between my flat and the garage, [and] when I turned the outside light on, he was crouched down with his arm holding his face trying to not be seen.

Some third party witnesses to the stalking did not initially contextualise it as stalking behaviour, particularly if they were unaware of the broader pattern of the stalker's actions toward the victim.

My flatmates didn't know what was going on so [when he turned up they] would just tell him I wasn't home or was asleep and he left at that. One unlucky day I was awake, and answered the door to him - I asked him what the hell he was doing, he said he just wanted to talk. I said I didn't want to, and he then tried to force his way in the door - I repeatedly slammed the door on his foot until he jumped back and slammed and locked it closed. One of my flatmates was home and then told me what had been happening.

The legality of entering the victim's home was ambiguous in cases where the victim had cohabited with the stalker. Even if it was long after separation, and the victim was not living separately to the abuser, the stalker could use the ready excuse of 'needing to retrieve belongings' to justify their presence, perpetuating the exercising of their power over the stalker by ruling out any police or justice response to the unwelcome entry to the victim's home, irrespective of informal property agreements.

My ex would enter my property while I was out to look through my belongings and take stuff, we had already sorted out his stuff after he moved out, as he was living close by it was easy for him to drive past to see if I was home, I called the police they said he was allowed to enter the property as he still owned half of it.

As is later discussed, although protective measures such as trespass orders are available to victims, these are seldom useful in preventing stalkers from continuing to turn up, especially if the locations are varied, the stalker is showing up at places of work, it is not yet identified as a pattern, or if they are likely to continue undeterred by such orders. Instead, respondents' reactions to the sudden presence of stalkers was often that of alarm or uncertainty, and their focus was usually on the best way to defuse the specific episode that was occurring, with as minimal conflict as possible.

Using children

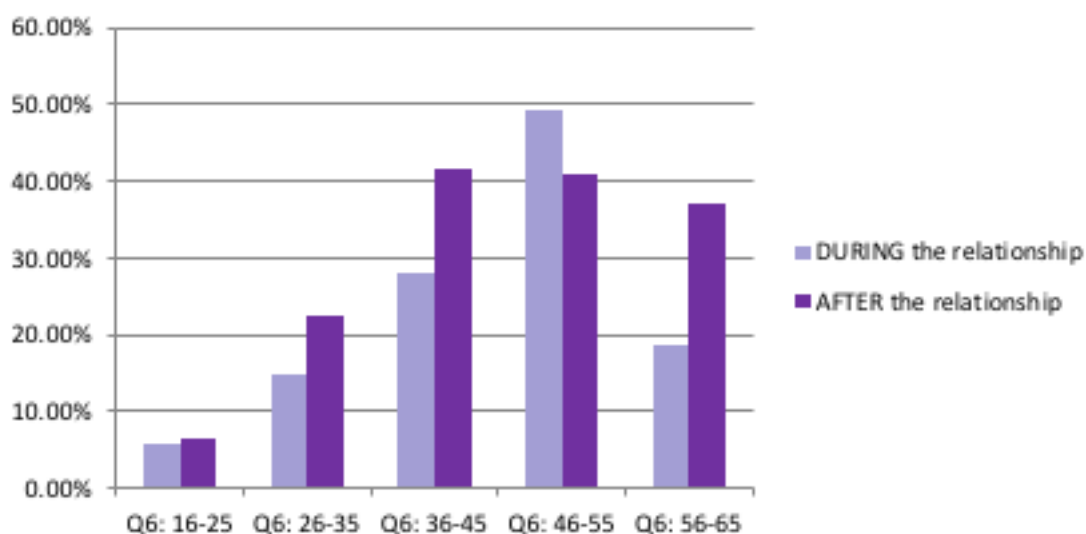


Figure 23: Percentage of respondents whose stalkers questioned children about adults' whereabouts.

Many respondents had children with their ex-partner stalkers. Handover of children was a minefield to navigate if they were attempting to conceal information of their lives that they believed may be misused by the stalker.

This was online stalking, I am was sent a private photo of myself from a site where my ex was supposed to be banned from. And I asked him to not contact me about non-essential things, most specifically to stop harassing me. He openly let me know he did this by sending me information he wasn't permitted to know. He also used our son's Facebook account to collate information in his mind about what I might be up to.

Others had children prior to beginning a relationship with the person that would eventually stalk them. Children were then targeted alongside the primary victim, and respondents described terror about the potential for their children to be abused by proxy if the stalker became violent.

The stalker was someone I dated for a week or so. I ended it and he wasn't happy. I became more vigilant when he bailed the kids and I in our own home, walked in uninvited. He followed me around town and "accidentally" would run into me. Then he started sitting outside my girls' school. [I] got a protection order. Eighteen years later he has become obsessed with my 25 year old, tries to add her on social media and turned up at her work. CCTV proved he was loitering for an hour before she finished. She just got another protection order.

[He used] intimidation and threats of sexual violence. Threats of physical violence to my children (adults).

Having shared children also gave rise to additional scope for threats about their removal.

[There was] intimidation, [and] threats to take the children from me - we share two children together, [and also] threats to get rid of me [and] smothering me.

Occasionally, children would notice and convey details of the stalking.

My son told me he seen him around the corner. Then I started looking and seen him.

Enforcing court orders that dictate non-contact provisions was regarded as virtually impossible where care of children was shared. Respondents found that stalkers would initiate contact that was ostensibly about the child or children, but which would then morph into using the access to the victim that conversation about children or handover time presented in order to further abuse or gain information about their mother.

I had just split up with my child's father and so his behaviour at that time alternated between cajoling and trying to convince me to come back, and very verbally abusive and aggressive. [He was] also very emotionally manipulative about our daughter and her care. I tried to have as little contact with him as possible during this time as I was quite frightened he could become violent, so it was mostly over text message.

[There was] verbal abuse of myself in front of child to scare her. Took car, car keys after pretending to repair car. Emotional abuse of child Grooming of child Assault of child Manipulative... [He] told child lies and told child to lie [about] where he was taking her. [He] stopped my earning potential to keep me in [my] small rural town with court orders. Spread rumours around school to discredit me as a mother and made false reports to [child protective services]. [He] stopped me from being close to family 3.5 hours away, by without notice [parenting orders].

Advocates also identified children (and care of children arrangements) as representing an additional avenue for stalkers to gain access to victims' lives. Children do not tend to recognise the significance of sharing general details about their mothers' everyday lives, and if care is shared, abusers often have a legally sanctioned reason to be entering the property to pick up children or children's belongings.

[In one example] he started to drop the kids off and now he walks into the house, and [so he is] walking in with the children, and talking to the children... basically wheedling his way back in but very subtly and then I've realised what he's doing. He is stalking me and is watching what I do and just, you know, kind of invading my life again. So it can be done quite subtly.
– Key informant 1

It is very insidious... my colleague has given me another example of a very recent one of a client she saw this morning, and she said this client has got a protection order out against the ex and they have got children together. She said when she goes to watch the child at soccer practice he is there, but he makes a point of coming over and talking to her friend. So he ignores her, but he will talk to her friend to get to her. It seems like they are doing everything just outside of what it would take to have him breached – Key informant 4

As this example highlights, predicating attempts to contact victims on supposed and court-legitimised 'involvement' in children's lives such as attendance at sport or school events effectively circumnavigated the restrictions that protection orders otherwise imposed on stalkers.

Even with a protection order, even with a parenting order they still have to deal with the male perpetrators and this is the main way they do it because they use their kids against them, the access through guardianship is basically keeps them trapped because they can't move. So it makes stalking easier because the perpetrator needs to know where the kids live, needs to know where the kids go to school, [their] doctors, [et cetera]. – Key informant 4

The agreement might be that he can text her but it can only be about the children. So he will text her and say how are the kids and she will say blah, blah, blah this happened at school today and then the next text is "who are you fucking at the moment" or "who are you seeing, I know that you have got a boyfriend". So that just destroys the communication because she is like "[this] is not what we agreed on in the protection order". – Key informant 2

In sum, interrogating children or capitalising on the interactions with the primary victim that are made possible through handover in shared care arrangements or through contact pathways instituted to facilitate communication about the children is not commonly conceptualized as a stalking behavior. However, this is a notable point of vulnerability; it allows stalkers to harass victims and monitor their behavior while disguising it as function of co-parenting.

Insidious methods witnessed by advocates

Despite the proliferation of technology-facilitated stalking, advocates that were interviewed reported that physical forms of stalking typically occurred alongside. They argue that this evokes fearful responses from victims who do not know what forms of protection or security they might need to enact, or who attempt to enact these only to have the methods change as the abuse continues to be unpredictable.

[It happens through] Facebook, text messages, email messages and even if they are blocked there are still the drive bys, you know. I have got one young client, her ex was turning up late at night rattling windows and she would get up [to look] and he would go. – Key informant 4

[Mostly it's] him turning up places where they are not expecting him. So they might just do a run to the shop, and he is there, going to school and he's waiting outside school. [Or] going to work, [but] he's waiting outside work. I've had women think he's ringing and hanging up on them at night, like constant ringing and hanging up when they answer it. Drive-bys are really popular. – Key informant 2

Another client he turned up and at work and yes it is definitely seeping into work definitely. In fact I would say more often than not now I hear women say he has driven past work, or it might not be that he walks in, but he drives past and the drive past is enough to make her feel scared and intimidated. - Key informant 4

For some, the continued perpetration of stalking was regarded as inevitable, and victims had to continually try to stay 'one step ahead' by anticipating which methods the stalker might use and make decisions about which security measures would increase or decrease both danger and comfort. Closing off avenues, for example, could either be a source of comfort or a source of anxiety, as it meant a likely change in tactics.

She could tell that he had been at her house because whenever she was there he would run his finger along the edge of [the house at night]. She had to get all the trees trimmed down at the back of her property, because he would send her text messages about what she was wearing, and she backed onto a school and so he would sit at the school... and then watch what she was doing in the house. So she trimmed all these trees so that she could see, [and] we went through a safety plan [including] whether she wanted the trees for privacy or whether she wanted to be able to see where he was seeing from. [In another case,] she would come home, and where she usually keeps the shoes he would move them, [but there was] no evidence that we could [use to] say it was him, but the fear in these women... you can kind of believe the stuff is happening regardless. [For another,] she got home one time and... the spare key had been picked up – it had been left out - but it was just one of those things she had forgotten about, and he had gone inside and moved all of these personal items, like moved her toothbrush and put a knife under the pillow. So then she had to get her locks changed. – Key informant 2

Finally, advocates noted that clusters of risk were often associated with age; younger victims (with younger perpetrators) were more likely to be principally targeted through technology-facilitated methods, while older perpetrators tended to choose more physical or pursuit methods.

[With] the younger ones definitely [it] is cyber and technological. However they also do drive-bys and they do it direct[ly]. So I think drive-bys are common right across the life span. Hard to know really. There have been older ones that have also, you know, done the text messaging and basic cyber methods of barraging with texts and emails. – Key informant 4

Many methods of contact did not require digital means at all; conversely, they fulfilled conventional popular stereotypes of stalking methods, such as sending letters from prison, opening victims' mail, tampering with car security, asking mutual acquaintances for details about the victim's life, or sitting outside work or school. An advocate described moving a client who was at imminent risk of severe physical violence from a safe house in one small town to a safe house in another. In the new town, within a few hours, the abuser turned up at the shopping centre closest to the safe house, which the advocate later reflected was almost certainly as a result of him having accessed her online banking to track transactions and ascertain her location from those transaction details. Other advocates gave further examples where private information was used to exercise control or perpetrate further abuse.

[He did] endless things like going to her lawyer's [office] because when he gets served the protection order [the information he is given] has got [the details of] her lawyer on there... [or] another time she was in the family home, and he said he had the right to [open her mail] and she was getting something like a [cervical] smear result... and he was like you slut of course you had to have an STI check. [She said] "no I just had a run of the mill check"... that is the sort of stuff that they do. – Key informant 4

Victims rarely had any way to make these forms of stalking stop, as they were difficult to prove and were not overtly threatening.

[One] time another client's car got damaged and she said "I know it's him, I know he has come round and damaged it, but I've got no proof, what do I do?". And again the police can't really act because where is the evidence? – Key informant 4

Another client told her the abuser was in prison, but he was still managing to contact her from prison using other inmates and so was sending her letters which had been sent out because he must have had a protection order and non-association and everything else, but he was using these other inmates to actually by letter or letters. – Key informant 2

In addition, impersonating the victim in order to gain access to employee records, details of expenditure, and money, or in order to damage their economic security by alleging dishonesty to state agencies (particularly if they engineered this dishonesty in the first place), and constantly turning up or driving past were frequent features in stalking patterns.

There's all kinds of this kind of shit going on, like dobbing them in to like Work and Income, the IRD, [and] going into banks withdrawing all their money with the eftpos card, but that is not impersonating because the banks see it as [the victim] giving him your card. – Key informant 2

The role of perceived 'consent'; for example, the bank's stance on the victim not having prevented the stalker from taking the Eftpos card to her account, serves as an impediment to disrupting the stalker's methods. If the undertones of coercion and stalking are not made apparent or are unable to be articulated, stalkers can continue unimpeded.

They are fearful, they feel really fearful, they feel violated, they become very hypervigilant, you know, they want help. They want someone to look after them, and they want validation of their experience which is what we give them, but at the same time it is quite tricky because if there is no protection order or there is not enough evidential information to obtain a protection order it is a real tricky situation. – Key informant 4

As explained by this advocate, the impacts of this constellation of stalking behaviours is debilitating, and support and a cohesive justice system response is not always attainable.

Differences in stalking tactics by respondent group

We compared the responses of transgender respondents to those of cisgender (people for whom assigned sex is consistent with their gender identity) respondents, compared responses of groups according to their sexual orientation, and compared the responses of each ethnicity group. The small number of respondents who identified as transgender (n: 15) or as ethnicities other than Pākehā precludes statistically significant conclusions. We also compared the responses of different age groups, as the variance in age amongst respondents was enough to make these differences statistically significant.

There were no major differences between transgender and cisgender respondents regarding the tactics used by stalkers. However, it was an interesting (although statistically insignificant) finding that each of the transgender respondents answered yes for almost every tactic listed in the survey (other than contacting the victim's friends or family, which could be interpreted as indicative of the victim's social precarity and consequent vulnerability to stalking). There were also no significant differences in the stalking tactics reported by heterosexual and non-heterosexual respondents.

As anticipated, respondents who had grown up with social media (particularly the 16-25 and 25-35 age groups) reported much higher rates of victimization through digital means (specifically, logging into social media accounts, making false social media accounts, and sending large numbers of messages). However, other digital tactics showed no difference by age (such as tracking online banking transactions and posting threatening or degrading content to social media). Until age 55+, there was also no major difference in the likelihood of respondents' stalkers using different numbers to call them from. We also anticipated that the likelihood of having children questioned was likely to rise with age, which proved correct – presumably because older women were more likely to have (older) children.

Other age group trends seem less explainable. Younger age groups were progressively more likely to have the stalker sit outside home, school, or work. Conversely, there was a progressively higher likelihood per age group that the stalker had used tactics such as breaking into the house and moving/tampering with belongings, breaking in and leaving signs of their presence, and damaging property (until the 55+ groups).

Exploring differences by age is important to considering risk for every individual victim, as some victims may be more vulnerable to certain tactics (such as young women and fake social media profiles). In the next section, we look at how digital tactics specifically create particular dynamics of harm to some victims.

The vulnerability of the digital self

Then he needed my computer, which he said at first he couldn't do it on then, and he was on that for about four hours and then he needed to download apps on our phone and of course you want to trust him and he was a computer geek and you [are] kind of 'okay no I don't really want it on my phone' [and he says] 'oh no I will connect all of the devices.' So I trusted him and then it all started all these weird things happening on my phone. My phone heating up, running out of battery overnight when I wasn't using it really fast and then the next kind of big red flag was we went to his place in [a small town] and was staying with the kids and he had a net server there, and the children were looking for a movie. He had about 800 movies on it and out come up all [these] files from my daughter's computer, and she freaked out and said 'oh my goodness, what is this doing on here'.

If you fast forward to when we parted, I found out all [of it] when we started litigating with lawyers. I found out that he had a remote control my phone and my computer, and turns on the location. I found out on all the days that I would leave him, he would turn on the location on my phone and basically track me everywhere I went right down to an op shop, what houses, the street address. It was quite scary really that I had been followed for four years and everything tracked.

He also downloaded any emails. He used a thing called Banana Tag which is a tracking device on emails and mainly used for sales and for people who are in marketing tracking emails that basically whenever I opened an email he would log onto this app and he would attach it to emails and would log on and it would show where I opened the email, where I was, what time I opened it, [and the] location, which made sense because there was so many times I would be somewhere and he would ask me where I was and what I was doing in a very loving way.
– Lizzie, research participant.

When considering the role of technology-facilitated direct abuse, such as relentless texting, direct messaging, and social media posting, and emailing, advocates suggested that while it often played a fundamental role in the pattern of stalking, it was more often than not perpetrated alongside additional (physical) methods of stalking. Contiguous complexities such as third-party perpetration and diverse tactics could impede the identification of such abuse.

So in regards to cyber abuse I hear it often how women feel they are being stalked on Facebook and so they will block that person, but then that person will indirectly stalk them either with a new alias and/or they will use another person i.e. a new girlfriend to stalk them and to abuse them. So that is quite common to the point where one client recently showed me a barrage of messages on Messenger from the girlfriend of the ex and they were quite abusive. Well they weren't abusive enough to go to the police, but it was harassment, but it wasn't perpetrated by him, but you could tell it was indirectly she was being coerced by him to do it.
– Key informant 4

Yeah I would say [that for] the younger ones [the stalking] definitely is cyber and technological. However they also do drive-bys and they do it [stalking] direct. So I think drive-bys are common right across the life span.... There have been older ones that have also, you know, done the text messaging and basic cyber reviews of barraging with texts and emails. However this other man that ordered the pizzas [to be delivered to the victim]... had gone on and ordered a funeral for his ex. Yeah that was really high level stuff, you know... But I think although younger people do use technology I think it is becoming quite normal now [for all ages]. – Key informant 2

The degree of access an ex-intimate partner stalker has to a victim's life is drastically divergent to that which a stranger stalker might. As they typically cohabitate prior to separation, they are enmeshed in the victim's life and may be familiar with habits, routines, home and work addresses, frequented websites, social media patterns, passwords, security questions, credit card details, and software use. Much of this is retained upon separation, and affords them easy access to everyday information about where the victim is, what they are doing, who they are talking to, what they spend money on, and what secrets they may have that could be used to intimidate or humiliate them. In addition, it means placing spyware that secures continued access to data about the victim's life can be a quick and simple process.

So clients are like kind of trapped in the web of what the abuser gets the rights to, and it makes it so easy for him, because he knows all this stuff already because of the relationship being there. It is not like being stalked by a complete random, it is [where] they know things about you. They know where your parents live, they know where your sister [is], friends, everything, [and] there is no escape from that. - Key informant 2

Scripts consistent with other forms of supposed 'love' relationships that exhibited dynamics of power and control were also recognisable in advocates' recollections of victims' stalking experiences. As explained by one advocate, requests for digital access to personal devices or location data was disguised by apparent concern for safety and wellbeing, before progressing to a more explicitly monitoring demand.

Obviously there are heaps of location apps out there and that kind of starts early on in the relationship when they are starting to get that control and power over [the victim]. It is all about love, so [saying things like] "I want to know that you are safe, and I want to know that where you are, or what you are doing"... but they make it about being in love with them. So what we find is often women have those apps and they are linked to his phone. So one of the first things we do is get them to do is remove those apps , [and] turn off location settings on their phone as a precaution because he could be tracking them anyway. But heaps of it is around passwords - like they get each other's passwords and check in on each other, well not even each other, but he gets Facebook, she is not allowed her own Facebook, [and he checks her] emails, [and her] work emails. He basically uses any tool that he can to identify where she's at or what she's doing. – Key informant 2

Advocates rarely addressed the potential for spyware explicitly; similarly, their reflections of victims' concerns about technology-facilitated surveillance and tracking suggested victims, too, were unlikely to know for certain whether spyware has been installed on their devices, but that it was certainly a possibility for many of them.

I don't see as many women as I used to, but [from] the [technology-facilitated stalking victims] that I have seen [it] is more and more common, [where] they are wondering if something has been put on their phone. They don't really know, and they are like "but how does he know that I've done this?" and "then I did something and then this happened", you know, [saying] "there must be something on my phone, and he always said, I will follow you." – Key informant 4

It is that wondering whether firstly if it is the phone, [like] if he has done something to it, and [also] I have had a woman recently who is wondering whether he put cameras up outside and also a woman who was sent [intimate recordings]. Once they broke up, she was sent film of them together [from] before they broke up. – Key informant 4

Home security systems were also amongst the hardware appropriated for surveillance and tracking purposes.

It is just like purchase your own and people use it like a detection if you have been broken into and he had set up... a camera in the lounge and in some other room, and if he checked in on her and couldn't see her, she had to go back in because it is all [through] Wi-Fi [so] you can check from work that no one is in your house. She had to then go back into the space [where] he could view her to make sure she was at home, which was horrendous... The other thing is checking mileage, that is a control tactic, but it is also like a way of knowing where she has gone and what she has done. – Key informant 2

Finally, advocates expressed frustration that legislation relevant to stalking is fragmented and limited to specific offensive actions rather than contextualised within a pattern of intimate partner violence and recognised explicitly within family violence legislation.

At least now with that Harmful Digital Communications [Act] the constant barrage is actually taken seriously rather than having to be explicit... before that came in, there was actually nothing we could do about a guy texting her [the victim] 25 times an hour, but now at least there is something we can push for, like they can get warnings, and if they do it they can be arrested, but it still doesn't hold any weight in the courts system under family violence. It is not flagged as family violence, it is flagged as harmful digital communication or whatever. So when you look at the whole system, while it does sit under multiple acts, [the pattern] is [the thing] impacting someone. – Key informant 2

Respondents described a range of technology-facilitated stalking methods, many of which provided them with the data they needed to subsequently harass them in person. Despite Tapp and Daulton's assertion that in contemporary stalking patterns the stalkers "aren't your grandmother's stalkers" (p. 76), there is general consensus that if someone is stalking their ex-partner online, it is probable that they are also doing so in person (Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, & Cratty; Sheridan & Grant, 2007; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). This rather defies our lacklustre approach to online harassment, since victims' reports of constant digital contact or denigration through online platforms are rarely met with proactive responses from police or other agencies. The change in landscape from a pattern of behaviour requiring proximity (and therefore straightforward to escape from) to one where a stalker can contact, monitor, track, or denigrate the victim from the comfort of their own homes (although this is rarely solely digitally perpetrated) makes it difficult to effect any kind of escape. This happens in two main ways: firstly, by the ease with which the victim's digital self can be bombarded with contact requests or online attacks, and secondly, by appropriating access to the victim's digital self in order to obtain more private data about them. We discuss each of these below.

The victim's digital self is much harder to protect than their physical self. Avoiding someone in person, for instance, can necessitate substantial personal disruption, especially if it requires changing routines or even houses or workplaces, but attempting to evade the attention of someone online – or to contain the damage to relationships and reputation that stalkers create online – is almost impossible (Keynes, 2010). Equally, it is almost impossible to be certain (or to convince others of the certainty) that the stalker is ultimately behind the new 'friend' requests, the texts from new numbers, the derogatory anonymous feedback comments, the fake dating application profiles in victims' names, and the spam emails.

Appropriating access to victims' digital selves also makes victims intensely vulnerable to ongoing surveillance. The existence of a personal intimate relationship with the stalker (whether present or past) complicates people's perception of the violation inherent in stalkers' access to victims' stored information on digital accounts, such as banking, email, or social media. As a current or ex-partner, stalkers have access

to much of the personal information needed to access these accounts without this being noticed or challenged – they often know victims’ passwords, have forced them to expose these accounts to them in the past, or are familiar enough with victims’ lives to easily answer security questions and reset passwords themselves. If they have been living together and shared any digital storage such as iCloud, OneDrive, or even Google Play, they may even have a steady stream of information to access at their fingertips without expending any extra effort. The impacts of this level of familiarity with victims, and therefore the digital access to victims’ lives, prevents first responders from recognising how their casual use of information then enables them to monitor victims’ activities, track their locations, disrupt their attempts to rebuild their lives, and contact either the victims themselves or the people that stalkers have seen the victims being in contact with and that are important to their lives, such as employers.

Discerning stalking from everyday activities

Digitally or physically, stalking of intimate partners is usually disguised and justified to others. Being responsive to victims’ reports of stalking inherently does require the willingness to take women at their word when they say they are distressed or afraid. Attempts to define stalking precisely have largely failed (Mullen, Pathe, & Purcell, 2001) because the classification of unwanted attempts at contact or unwanted oversight over victims’ lives is so dependent on the context of the relationship. Volume, frequency, message, and mode alone given little indication about whether contact is abusive or not (McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2014). Just as some partners enjoy being in constant contact and engage in this very regular contact willingly and joyfully, others resent being under the constant scrutiny of a partner who is continually evaluating their perceived compliance in what they do and who they see, or are distressed by a refusal by an ex-partner to cease the incessant contact. Similarly, just as some partners may be gratified to be told in a text message ‘you look sexy today’, for a partner who has recently left the relationship and was finally experiencing a sense of relief that she was somewhere she believed he could not find her, this could induce considerable fear, anxiety, or anger. Finally, just as in some relationships, both parties might openly utilise tracking applications for harmless reasons, such as to see when the other person is leaving work so as to coordinate dinner, partners who are not permitted by an abusive person to exercise autonomy in what they do with their time or who they see are experiencing the use of this technology in a very different and distressing way.

As illustrated by all of victims’ descriptions of the tactics used by the people who stalked them, most individual actions, taken alone and out of context, signify little other than a desire to be in contact. Recognising patterns of harm, therefore, requires us to look beyond the individual act and the meaning it represents at face value, and to examine the environment-specific actions as a set of sequential and impactful actions for indicators that these are motivated by a desire to limit the victim’s freedom, autonomy, and sense of safety. Not all stalking is inherently threatening or perceived by the victim as an intention to cause distress (although for the majority, the stalking did induce fear and unease). Equally, however, it rarely represented a genuine ‘difficulty to adjust’, but rather almost always signified the stalker’s need to control or limit the victim’s activities and to override a victim’s choice about how they live their lives and who may be part of their lives. The expanse of domains affected by this desire for control was part of our rationale for constructing the four-domain model below.

The total picture and four-domain model

As pictured in figure 24 below, both digital and physical stalking tactics were amongst the most commonly reported stalking tactics. Most frequent were sending dozens of text messages, phoning, using different numbers to call from, loitering outside home or work, following the victim, asking someone else to follow them, contacting friends and family, and dropping off unwanted gifts and notes. Least commonly reported tactics were using monitoring and home surveillance, and checking odometers. Checking online banking and installing covert software also have low prevalence rates, but it is important to note that (as with cameras and odometer-checking), these do not have many pitfalls in terms of alerting victims to the fact that they have been accessed or used, so it is possible that some respondents were unaware of them happening.

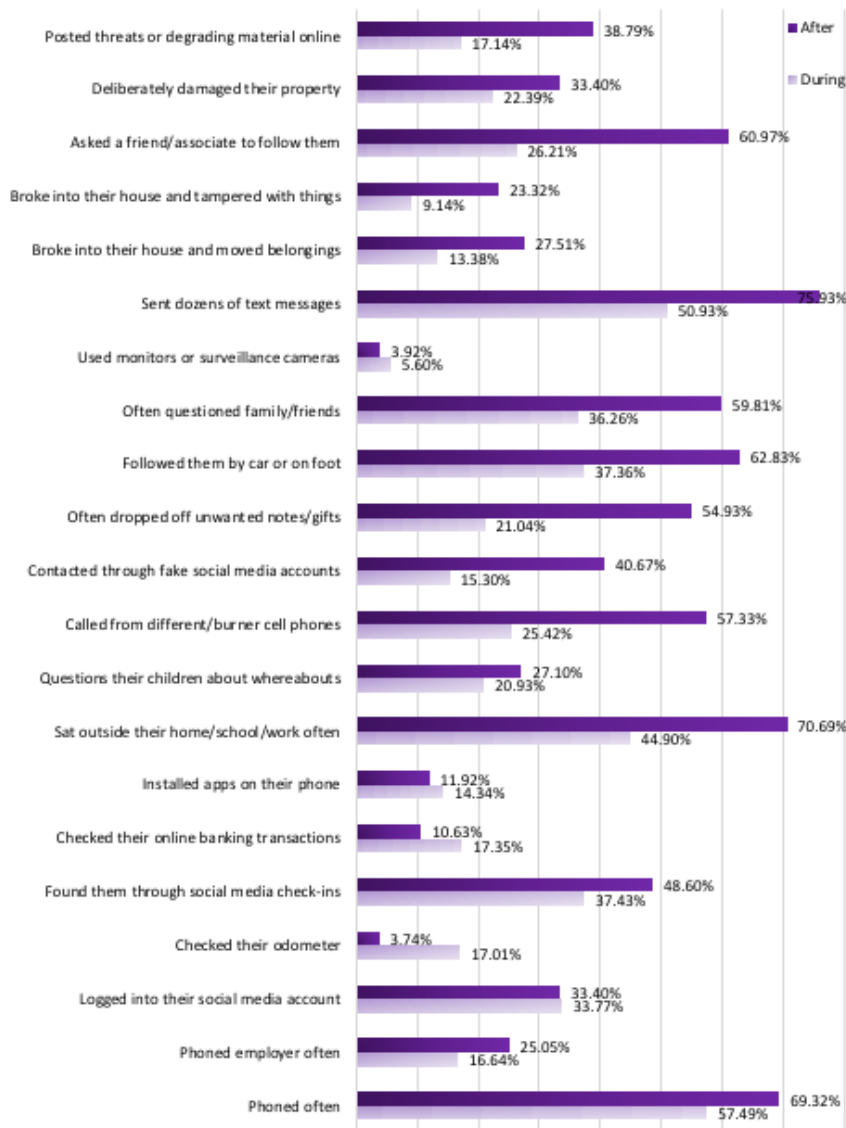


Figure 24: Prevalence of tactics used against all respondents.

Many authors have identified the futility of attempting to create an exhaustive list of possible stalking tactics (Finch, 2001; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014). Identifying tactic function therefore lends itself to greater utility. These broader groups then enable the easy classification of tactics, even when the specific method is highly variable. Of the tactics we asked respondents to select, as well as those that emerged as themes from their experiences, we created a model of four principal classifications of stalking behaviours in order to capture the multidimensional pattern of stalking. The model we developed bears some parallels to one developed by Logan and Walker (2015), who also constructed a model involving four tactic classifications (surveillance, life invasion, intimidation, and interference). Separately, we identified four very similar classifications, but organised these according to impacts rather than by stalkers' intentions.

These classifications are intrusive contact, surveillance and monitoring, intimidation and violence, and life sabotage. We discuss each of these in detail below.

The first category is intrusive contact, and this refers to all unwanted contact, especially that which is relentless. As we have seen throughout Part One, calling, texting, direct messaging, social media posting, contacting friends and family, and leaving notes, gifts, or tokens were all common features of respondents' stalking experiences. This contact invades all aspects of victims' lives, but especially the private sphere of their lives, which undermines their sense of personal (and often emotional) safety. This invasion into the private sphere is well documented in prior research (Kropp et al., 2002; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Spitzberg, 2002b; Sheridan et al., 2001). Often, this contact can be subtle, sporadic, or disguised as affection, concern, or other legitimate motivators, and again this is consistent with previous findings (see Emerson et al., 1998; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Nicastro, Cousins, & Spitzburg, 2000). The impacts of this tend to also pervade professional and interpersonal spheres of the victim's life, such as their relationships with social groups and with employers and colleagues, and this has been associated with victims' acute distress (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000; Nicastro et al., 2000). This was consistently documented by respondents, many of whom felt unsafe or constantly anxious as a result of having to manage frequent (unwanted) contact at all times, in all places, and via various means simultaneously.

The second category, surveillance and monitoring, refers to tactics such as following, driving by, locating tracking applications, obtaining access to social media or phone accounts without the victim's permission, using spyware, installing GPS trackers, or monitoring movements by interrogating victims' friends or children or through information gleaned from victims' personal email and bank accounts. Surveillance and monitoring is, when discovered, very distressing for victims, is usually perpetrated using multiple avenues, often involves some (reluctant) complicity on the part of victims themselves, and creates a sense of being trapped and restricted (Blaauw, Winkel, Arensman, Sheridan, & Freeve, 2002; Canter & Ioannou, 2004; Kropp et al., 2002; Logan, 2010; McFarlane et al., 1999; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2000; National Center for Victims of Crime, 2007; Sheridan et al., 2001; Spitzberg, 2002b). Victims are often unaware of the level of access stalkers have over their private information, and this is typically 'doled out' gradually to them to demonstrate stalkers' ongoing power over their lives.

For many, experiences were threaded with 'proxy stalking', which refers to the use of others, such as the stalkers' friends and acquaintances or the victim's friends, colleagues, children, or wider family, to provide information (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Mullen, Pathe, & Purcell, 2000). Much of this stalking was digitally perpetrated. Electronic surveillance removes the need for physical proximity and can often be performed covertly without the victim knowing how the stalker is getting information about their activities (Southworth, Dawson, Fraser, & Tucker, 2005; Southworth, Finn, Dawson, Fraser, & Tucker, 2007). Often, monitoring and surveillance is performed under the guise of 'romantic pursuit', which we discuss in the Parts Three and Four. The ready justification of 'romantic pursuit' means stalkers professing their ongoing affection for and desire to communicate with the stalker as the basis for their actions (Amar, 2007; Baum et al., 2009; Beatty, 2003; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Ngo, 2011; Sheridan & Davies, 2001; Spitzberg, 2002a; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2008).

However, being continually monitored has been correlated to the intensity of victims' fear (McFarlane, Campbell, and Watson, 2002), and severe violence (McFarlane et al., 2002; Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). Victims also disclosed feeling constantly hypervigilant, and identified this constant fear, distress, and overwhelm as reasons to accede to the stalker's wishes and return to the relationship just to escape the unpredictability of the stalking pattern, evidencing the intense harm of seemingly insignificant monitoring and surveillance.

The third category is intimidation and violence. Intimidation included direct and indirect threats of harm, property damage, forced confrontations (other than attack), threats or actual harm to self, and threats to target about harming friends and family members. It often also involved symbolic violence, such as entering the victim's property or workplace and tampering with their belongings, including personal things such as medications. All of these behaviours are common features of stalking, with property invasion, allusions to the stalker's ability to harm or kill the victim, and interference with personal belongings each representing the ultimate power of the stalker (Kropp et al., 2002; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Sheridan et al., 2001; Spitzberg, 2002b). Both threats and damage to property are associated with an escalation to physical violence (Groenen & Vervaeke, 2009; McFarlane et al., 2002; Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). Relatedly, actual violence included actions such as holding hostage or kidnapping, and physical and sexual attacks, such as rape, strangulation, and running the victim off the road, as discussed earlier in Part 1.2. These acts, aside

from being inherently abusive and high-risk, pose wider implications for public safety and represent extreme violence (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Logan, Shannon, Cole, & Swanberg, 2007b; McEwan et al., 2007). While it is important to note that most of these constitute criminal offences, it is equally vital to recognise that they can form a small (and unusually explicit) part of a much broader pattern of stalking.

The final category is life sabotage, and of all the domains, this is the least theorised in extant literature. Victims of intimate partner violence who have been stalked are much more likely to be subjected to these interference tactics than victims who have not also been stalked (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006). Sabotage is often enacted using a combination of direct and legal means (such as tying the victim up in prolonged litigation), resulting in a raft of substantial financial and relational costs (Amar, 2006; Kuehner, Gass, & Dressing, 2007; Sheridan, Blaauw, & Davies, 2003; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012; Spitzberg, 2002a). Life sabotage can also involve sabotaging employment prospects or new relationships, for instance, creating situations where the victim may feel shamed or humiliated in front of others, such as by sharing degrading stories or rumours (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000).

Accordingly, many victims found that they experienced substantial financial loss as a result of court action, lost or jeopardised employment or employment prospects, found their ability to care for their children being questioned (principally as a result of rumour-spreading) and experienced impediment to many of their relationships. In previous research, approximately 40 percent of stalking victims experienced professional or interpersonal sabotage (Mohandie, Meloy, McGowan, and Williams, 2006). For respondents in our research, this manifest through interrupting conversations with others (digitally or in person), using private information to create barriers to work or social lives, damaging reputations, or preventing attendance at work, as is set out earlier this section. Victims of intimate partner violence who are stalked are also forced to more than three times the amount of time off work to deal with the practical issues created by the stalking compared to victims who are not also stalked (Mohandie, Meloy, McGowan, and Williams, 2006). The impacts of life sabotage were often the most debilitating for respondents, who felt humiliated, ashamed, embarrassed, and afraid, and who frequently alluded to lost opportunities or forced exile from parts of their lives from which they had previously sought comfort, pleasure, safety, and fulfilment.

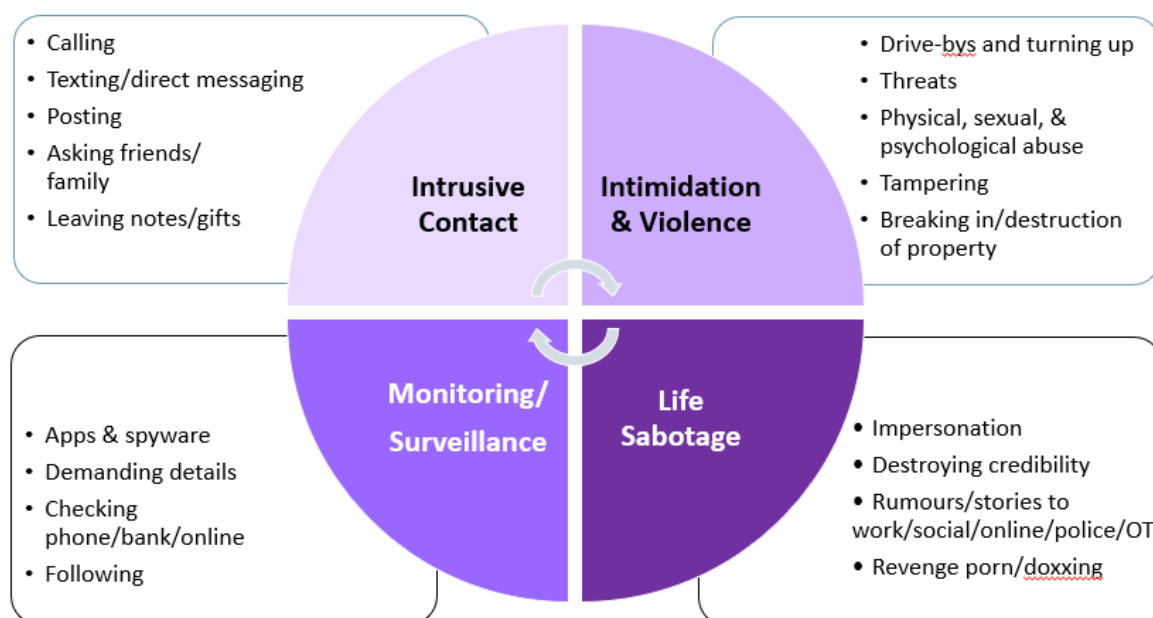


Figure 25: The four domains of intimate partner stalking patterns.

The combination of stalking tactics from each of these domains creates an overall pattern that is insidious, difficult to identify, hard to evidence, and unlikely to attract a serious safety response unless there is apparent violence or explicit threats. In the next section, we look at how the power of these insidious and pervasive stalking dynamics are reinforced by different types of violence that, for many victims, occurs alongside the stalking.

1.4 What We Know About Stalkers

Learning about the stalker mindset

The weekends were worse, he would start contacting me on a Friday to ask me what I would be doing. I felt I had to tell him because if I didn't tell him what I was doing, I felt he was going to find out anyway, and I wasn't doing anything [bad], you know. I remember one particular incident - I took my daughter to the park. We went for an hour and because he just contacted me all the time, I decided to leave my phone at home. I felt sick the entire time I was there, and when I got back the phone had been ringing and ringing and I had 20 missed calls, and all these accusations [with him] accusing me of doing something... It was always that I was doing something wrong, but for me just to get up and have breakfast and give my daughter breakfast by 9 o'clock I would be getting messages that suggested I was doing something wrong.

So it was just this constant monitoring of where I was, what I was doing, who I was talking to, and I actually ended up telling him a lot of it because if I didn't tell him he would be angry. [Eventually it] almost it ended up working the other way. So I would drop my daughter at day care and on the way to work I would call him, because if I didn't he would be angry. So then I would call him and part of the rationale for me calling him was that I would be so nervous that I didn't know what kind of mood he was in, [so] I would need to check. So it almost became self-monitoring, because I would always be telling him what I was doing, because otherwise he would say I'm lying and 'what are you doing', 'who are you with?', 'why haven't you called me?', 'well what are you doing this weekend?' and 'why are you not spending time with me?' and 'I should be there', you know. It was just this constant feeling that I wasn't doing the right thing.

He was similar [in that behaviour] when we were together, but his behaviour was way worse [after the breakup] in that sense of a stalking perspective. He was violent when I was with him, and he wasn't violent after I left, but his behaviour became even more frightening because it felt more out of control... For me it got to the point where I thought 'I can no longer work out rationally if this man is going to kill me' and at times that is what I thought, that is where I thought it was going to go, and besides, even if he didn't, he had controlled my life to the point where I felt guilty for getting up and having breakfast. There was no life [for me] really. - Emily, research participant.

This research involved analyzing accounts of stalking by victims, both through a survey and through interviews, and the accounts of practitioners. We did not attempt to talk to stalkers themselves, and as such are limited in the conclusions we can draw about their motivations, behavior, and experiences. We can, however, attempt to set out the insight of victims into their stalkers' behavior (such as with Emily's story above), and to use these to inform our understanding of the stalking story and how we might begin to confront stalkers' behavior. In this section, we discuss stalkers' sense of entitlement over victims' lives and freedom; the unpredictable use (and weaponizing) of affection, especially when interspersed with aggression; stalkers' use of jealousy and control; and finally, their adherence to stalking schemas to justify and rationalize the stalking to themselves and others.

Entitlement

People who stalk their victims, especially with violent or controlling intent, generally believe that they are entitled to victims' acquiescence and that they should have the right to demand this from them (Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). Regardless of whether it is principally perpetrated digitally or in person, the act of stalking usually begins with compiling information on victims – information they believe they are entitled to (Sheridan & Grant, 2007). Often, they dedicate many hours to compiling this information, and resort to numerous tactics to get it. In respondents' descriptions of the stalkers' behaviour, we can see the dedication to obtaining information at all costs, and stalkers' belief that they are righteous in these actions.

[He was] being demanding and persistent to get what he wanted, smothering me with affection, standing in my way or using his force to not let me get away... he wouldn't take no for an answer.

He just blatantly told me he had gotten into all of my emails and texts and messages and didn't even feel bad about it, [he] just kept accusing me of doing things wrong.

Sitting lurking at closest cafe by the window knowing when I was arriving home or leaving, followed me to another city without notice, moved back into the local area once the trespass order was removed, driving up at night and viewing the house, appearing at places he knew I might be at suddenly and unexpectedly, coming home from work at strange hours parking on street and frightening me with [his] sudden appearance.

Isolating victims from other sources of validation precluded alternative belief systems from taking hold; in other words, positioning the victim to have a singular, powerful source of messaging meant that the abuser had carte blanche to create, reinforce, and embed blaming narratives about why they used violence, and who was accountable for that violence.

Initially I challenged and resisted, but his reactions to my non-cooperation were so extreme, that it became easier just to give in to his requirements. He systematically isolated me from my friends and family, so I had nobody else validating my feelings about his actions either. He'd repeatedly blame me for his obsession - I wasn't trustworthy, I had too many male friends, I was naive and didn't see their true intentions, nobody else made him angry like I did. I stopped trusting my instinct and began wondering whether I was the crazy one.

Using unpredictable affection

Stalkers used the guise of affection as a rationale for the stalking.

He would be a combination of threatening and scary and [then] appearing contrite and professing undying love in an entirely contradictory manner.

Stalkers' affection was generally contingent on victims' willingness to reciprocate; consequently, several described being conditioned to be 'nice' or 'affectionate' in order to circumvent stalkers' propensity to become aggressive if the affection they required did not eventuate.

Very affectionate until I had to do something else and he would get upset.

They would always show affection and caring. Trying to get me to feel insecure enough to believe they're actually good guys when they're not. Because when I'm actually with them it's terrible. There was one case of violence when he was so overwhelmed with emotion that he chased me down the street in a car.

It changed over the course of the contact. It started being fairly affectionate but soon turned nastier. There were never threats but the constant contact made me feel uncomfortable and unsafe.

Violence and affection depending on whether he got his way. He was nasty when I stood up to him.

Alternately with affection and devotion, then with anger, derision and violence. The change was unpredictable, and instant, like a switch. It was very confusing and caused me to question myself constantly.

Perceived rejection was often the catalyst for this sudden aggression; seemingly because stalkers resented victims' ability to refuse to accept a relationship with them.

At the start [it was] affectionate, normal, and very friendly, then starting to get angry when I wouldn't want to hang out with him etc, and very angry when I tried cutting all ties.

He was extremely controlling and rather affectionate. But when I would try to stop it [intimacy] he would become very abusive.

At times [he was] sweet to start some communication and then soon turned intimidating using threats.

[He was] trying to kiss or touch me then becoming violent because I wouldn't allow it.

Equally confusing for respondents, stalkers often then switched back to affectionate messaging.

[I became aware of the stalking] by sending semi-threatening, abusive messages, then following through with longing, loving messages shortly after.

He would randomly turn up with a contrite attitude begging for me to come back and telling me he would do anything for me.

[After abuse he was] apologetic at first, then affectionate, then violent [again] when rejected.

Begging [me for another chance] in the start, then immediately became aggressive and violent when he didn't get his way. He would switch between the two quite frequently all within one incident.

This was almost always centred on the (lack of) potential for reconciliation, usually involving submission to further monitoring/surveillance while in the relationship.

[He] showed affection and was really sweet when he knew I was alone at home, and then got really aggressive when I wasn't home, asking who I was with and calling me a slut, and it was worse if I went out at night-time - he would sit outside my house until I came home.

He would express his feelings of love and when I did not reciprocate he would threaten violence. He has cornered me and threatened to kidnap, rape and kill me. He tried to manipulate and guilt trip me because I no longer wanted to be with him.

This switching between affection and aggression was then commonly passed off by the stalkers as being the fault of the victim – for refusing their advances, for not complying with their stringent constraints they placed on victims' freedoms, or for choosing to spend time with other people.

He would always tell me he loved me and that things would be perfect if I was nicer and spent time with him and didn't make him so frustrated. He'd message me incessantly and want to see me every day, and turn up at my work if I said no to hanging out or blocked him online. He'd follow me home and act gentle and concerned when I was upset as though it wasn't because of him, he'd say he'd never be able to hit me because he cared too much but he tried to quite a few times, and [he] hit a male co-worker of mine for talking to me. He would seem to black out when angry and become sort of nonverbal and shaky which made his punches easier to avoid. He was back and forth, between acting like everything was nice, then getting angry when I didn't play along.

Manipulation, gaslighting, and deceit

Manipulation and gaslighting, or the attempt to position the victim's voice as 'crazy', were threaded throughout these experiences of physical stalking. Stalkers gave many excuses, with varied initial credibility, for their acts of monitoring, surveillance, pursuit, and intimidation. One respondent said of the stalker's frequent unexpected appearances: "he made me feel like I was wrong. He was acting like he was coming to check on me, to make sure I was safe... Being caring and protective". Another said her ex-partner would have "sporadic outbursts and accusations, [while] pretending that they were breaking into my house 'to show how easily it could be done/for my own safety'." Others described 'guilt trips' as their ex-partners tried to persuade them to give them full digital or physical access to their lives.

[He showed] intimidating, unprovoked rage [and] jealousy, [as he was] rifling through my personal things, [and] stealing my computer and hacking it.

Attempting to induce guilt in the victim was a common tactic, often accompanying threats of suicide.

Trying to make me feel bad for breaking up, threatening suicide.

[He] used emotional blackmail to try and get me to talk to him. [He] threatened to harm himself and said he was in a dark place and “needed” me but only after I told him he needed to stop trying to get in contact with me.

[There were] threats to kill himself if I stopped talking to him, as well as jumping manically between insults, affection, apology and depression to get my attention.

[He used] guilt [and] pressure. Said things like I was ignoring him to hurt him and said weird things about suicide to make me worried.

She would emotionally blackmail me by saying that my actions in ending her relationship were making her contemplate suicide.

Threats of suicide rarely occurred in isolation, and generally occurred alongside other forms of manipulation or psychological abuse.

They would be loving towards me to hook me in but as the conversation went on they would talk about killing themselves if I didn’t do as they wished, twisted my arm to begging them not to so they had satisfaction. Lying to me and making fake accounts to be horrible to me just to put me down and feel like I had nowhere to go.

Duplicitous means of contact were also used to increase the likelihood that the victim would engage in contact.

[He] would make phone calls off other people’s phones pretending to be someone else. I had to change my number, and moved house soon after that, and didn’t let anyone except two friends and my family know where I was living or what my number was for a long time. It made me feel scared.

A sense of the stalkers’ chilling and seemingly unbreakable sense of entitlement pervaded these experiences.

He acted like he was still entitled to me... That he could do what he wanted, when he wanted. He kept promising that he would become a better person, so I would fall in love with him again, but he never did. Through all that time and promises, he kept stalking me and trying to control me.

The first night that I started working in a local pub, and my first night of work, my phone was going off all the time. I had to turn it off, like, when I turned it back on after I had finished work I had like over 50 missed calls. And there was like continued texts, like every minute, do you know what I mean, saying ‘where are you?’ ‘Why aren’t you here, you said you were going to finish at this time, you are not home’, ‘Where are you?’ and all stuff like that. – Callie, research participant.

Using threats of violence and persuading the victim that no one would believe them were also frequent methods of manipulation employed by stalkers.

Threats of physical violence [e.g.] ‘I could hit you’. Smashing belongings of others I had been seen with. Repeated phone calls. Continuation of the psychological abuse tactics used in the marriage. ‘No one will believe you. People will find out who you are.’ Etc.

They were manipulative, showing affection and remorse but also making weird accusations and other strange behaviour, [like] threatening violence, intimidating me, threaten[ing] to burn my house down.

Jealousy and possession

As mentioned above, jealousy – usually as part of greater gendered/relationship schemas relating to the subordinate position of women and their status as property of their partners – was a constant theme threaded throughout almost all respondents’ narratives. For many, stalking was an omnipresent feature of their relationship with the stalker both prior to and post-separation, and pre-separation was focused almost exclusively on monitoring who the victim was with.

He was my boyfriend at the time, and he was really nice but really jealous and not trusting. I had never cheated on him but he had cheated on me. After the second time of him cheating on me I wanted to break up with him and he became violent and I was scared.

I had kids, he did nothing with them... [and] he was really insecure, he didn't trust me. There was no trust between him towards me. I don't even know why and where that came from. [And then came] the stalking, so he used to be able to jump through my window many times and creep from one end of the house to the other without me even hearing him coming... he would park his car like a couple of streets up so I didn't see it and none of my neighbours seen it and then he would come round, and he would walk around the house and into the house, and he would come in with a bat in his hand ready to beat me up because he would think that I was sleeping with somebody. [One time] he was drunk, at the time he said 'I will put you on the block' and I was like 'go on then, if you want to go on then I might just like it' and I went along with him and he didn't like that so I ended up getting a hiding. – Te Amo, participant.

He would slip in and out of trusting comments, e.g. 'I love you' [and then] suspicious comments asking me repeatedly to tell him where I was, calling and checking up on me at work on my mobile, having the switchboard at work track me down, [and] asking me to send [him my] GPS location.

While we were together, it was an awful cycle of me being unable to convince him of my day, to him accusing me of cheating and getting extremely angry, he would yell, break things, hit or push me around, and I would feel so guilty and try to convince him I would never cheat because I loved him. Then he would eventually calm down and apologise and tell me he just cares so much that the thought of it being unrequited was too much to handle. After the relationship ended, I was subjected to calls from him from random or hidden numbers, friend requests and messages from fake Facebook or Instagram accounts he would create because I had blocked him across all social media. Around 3 years after I left he contacted me through WhatsApp, an app I wasn't familiar with and had got to create a group chat with my flatmates.

Advocates readily recognized the desire to assert power, control, and ownership as the driving motivation for stalkers' behavior. The behavior frequently spanned years, and sometimes only subsided or decreased once the stalker had a new intimate partner, who then becomes the principal target of the stalking.

It kind of signals like an obsession and an unhealthy obsession... yeah the obsessiveness and the jealousy and lack of control. – Key informant 1

It is complete ownership, so that next level of the power and control, like the fact that they are watching your every move means they are solely theirs. [Victims] can't deviate, they can't see people they don't want them to, they can't associate with new people, get new relationships, they can't do anything. I think that is just their way of keeping them completely trapped in the cycle of violence and not having an escape.... [and] it is always about [the suspicion that the victim is] going to see another male or [suspicion that] they have always got a different partner on the go.... So it is like this kind of paranoia that these women are going to leave them, but framed in a way, especially at the start, that "this is how much I love you". – Key informant 2

I think it is intimidation and I think is power and control. It is totally about [the stalker thinking] "I have got the power, I have got the control, you haven't beaten me, I will intimidate you, [and] I will break you", and I think it is that ongoing part of the cycle. – Key informant 4

For some of our clients it's been years, some of them, to make a generalisation, I would say until they have got a new partner and even past then as well. Just because they feel this [sense of] ownership over the woman... and until their point of manipulation goes onto someone else they are feeling the full force of it. – Key informant 2

Respondents acknowledged this jealousy and sense of stalkers' assumed ownership in various ways and at varying stages of the stalking, with the initial signs of possession typically being interpreted as proof of love, affection, and concern.

He was my boyfriend at the time. I initially consented to him being with me at all times, thinking it was a sign of love and devotion. We lived separately, but he would pick me up in the early morning for breakfast and drop me off at work, come back to spend our lunchtimes together, collect me from work and then we would spend the evening together, until the early hours. I realised I was being watched when, on the days he didn't meet me, he would know who I had had lunch with or who had stopped by my work to talk to me. He had either seen it himself or had friends reporting to him. He'd get very angry and I'd feel guilty, like I'd done something wrong, seeing friends or family.

Accusations of infidelity, however unrealistic or unlikely, were commonplace.

[He was] pretending to go out then watching me in the house or using listening devices. There was yelling and distrusting comments, [and he was] sniffing me to see if I'd been with someone else. He was eventually diagnosed with psychosis, (drug induced), with paranoia about me cheating.

The stalking happened throughout the relationship, and for years after it ended. When we were together I was always being 'monitored'. If I didn't reply to text messages immediately or answer phone calls I was berated for cheating. If I couldn't verify where I had been at any given time I would be accused of cheating.

Focusing on imagined betrayal

[The police] asked if I wanted a protection order put in place and I said yes, because death threats have been made. But prior to all that happening, when we were together when we would be drinking with friends, if [the stalker] got a bit too drunk and I'd go off to the bathroom to freshen myself up, there were times where he would follow me into the bathroom and grab me by the neck and push me up against the basin or the mirror that was in the bathroom at the time, and accuse me of his friends looking at me or me looking at his friends, which was never the case. He had been messing around with a 17 year old girl, a couple of them, behind my back and I pulled him up about it and he slapped me across the face and threw me to the floor. And by that stage, I called my mum and Women's Refuge and I was out of there. And he would call me at all hours of the night. He would call me drunk calling me all the names under the sun and ask when I'm coming back and that he needs to see his kid.... And scream at me down the phone asking when am I coming back and [when] I said I wasn't, he would just call me a fat bitch and [say that] no one would want me, and [that] I was going to be all alone and I was going to be a shit mum, and all this stuff under the sun. And then [his new girlfriend] started coming onto my property harassing me, and they both started painting messages on the walkway next to my house just at the end of the driveway next to my house with black paint which really sent me into hysteria last year. – Ashley, research participant.

Occasionally, and as evidenced in Ashley's story, stalkers went to extreme lengths to attempt to verify the truth of their allegations of victims having new or multiple sexual relationships, even in the absence of any proof, and even if they were no longer partnered with the victim.

[The stalker] hacked into my emails, created multiple social media accounts in my name trying to find out who I was in contact with, slept outside my house in the neighbours bushes, showed up at the university where I was studying to see if I was in class then insisted we talk making me miss a lot of my classes, took me to hotels so he could confront staff members to see if I had stayed there before and with who

Even after the end of the relationships, the stalkers continued to regard any potential re-partnership by the victim as a betrayal and much of their stalking appeared oriented toward obstructing supposed or actual attempts to form new relationships.

He would tell me [he was watching me]. [The] majority of the stalking happened while we were separated and he wouldn't take no for an answer. It would usually come out in arguments, or confrontations about where I had been and who I had been with. He would sometimes call me to inform me he knew my exact whereabouts and who I had been with over a period of time. He would often demand explanations of why I had been to 'X' place with specific people. I felt like

he had no right to the information because we weren't together, but he would wind me up until I felt I had to explain, as his scenarios were so far-fetched and painted me in a bad light when the actual truth was usually very innocent. I hated him making me feel like my life was under a microscope constantly. He would call daily, beg to meet with me, [and] would turn up randomly if I refused to see him or tried to not answer his calls.

[I got] hundreds of text messages from [the] stalker (before I changed my number) and visits to my street to check who was at home. [They were often] accusing me of being with other men.

After ending a casual relationship, he would not leave me alone - I received over 300 messages and missed calls in a four day period, [and] he would also just sit in his car outside my house to make sure I had no male company turn up.

Forms of contact that were framed by the stalker as attempts for reconciliation usually began with expressions of contrition but quickly shifted to fixations on the victim's sexual partnership with others.

[He] apologises for hurting me and [says] he still loves me, then asks if I'm in a new relationship and if I had slept with anyone.

Some respondents minimised the intention behind these attempts to ensure that they never re-partnered, referring to the stalker as feeling "insecure" or "overprotective" and believing this insecurity precipitated the stalker's desire to keep tabs on them. However, stalkers' presumption of their right to 'truth' about victims' activities was often powerful enough that victims would acquiesce and report all of their daily activities to the stalker.

Even [seeing men who were] family or people who were like brothers to me [made him angry]. And he would throw everything in my face if I tried not to tell him the truth. Sometimes I just didn't want to hear him yell and rant, and I'd try not to tell him things but it seems most of the time he already knew. He would randomly turn up with a contrite attitude begging for me to come back and telling me he would do anything for me. And in the next breath when he didn't get his way he would threaten those I cared about, and threaten to ruin me. [Threatened] to make my life hell. He would in one sentence go from claiming to be protecting me, to letting me know I couldn't breathe in that city without him knowing.

While it may seem counterintuitive to the people supporting them, who, if aware of the depth of the stalking, usually discouraged ongoing contact, respondents explained that pre-empting exhaustive interrogation by keeping the stalker up to date with all of their activities was safer in that it reduced the potential for escalation of the stalker's aggression. If they did try to conceal any activities that they felt would be perceived as suspicious and may displease the stalker, they encountered an immediate escalation of anger and unpredictable violence. This then acted as a further incentive to make all actions transparent and cease those that attracted adverse responses.

Throughout respondents' descriptions of their stalkers' behavior, we can see an unyielding entitlement to ongoing updates about a victim's life, and all of their activities within it. This defies reason; victims rarely described circumstances where partners or ex-partners were accepting of their decisions to move on, or where there was any discernible basis for concerns about infidelity. Ultimately, their attitudes signified a deeply entrenched sense of superiority over their (almost always) female partners, and a belief that once they had started a relationship, regardless of whether it had ended, their partners were their property and as such were not permitted to see other people, or otherwise exercise self-determination. They then appeared to justify this stalking to themselves, to victims, and to others by rationalizing it as responses of a 'concerned partner', 'jealous boyfriend', or 'wronged husband'. This is consistent with previous researchers that found that stalkers were unlikely to perceive their jealous and destructive stalking behavior as intrusive or even wrong (Sinclair & Frieze, 2005; Spitzberg & Veksler, 2007), and, accordingly, showcases their adherence to stalking schemas set out below.

Stalkers' adherence to stalking schemas

The concept of schemas (which are discussed more in depth and in relation to helpers' responses in Part 4) are useful here, as they assist the categorisation of stalkers' justifications for the stalking. Even relayed

secondhand, victims' stories are strongly suggestive of several consistent motivations for stalkers' behaviour. These correlate to internalised frameworks of understanding that, when stalkers adhere to them, allow them to rationalise the stalking to themselves and attempt to legitimise it when they are speaking to their victims or to others. This is particularly evident when the stalking was perpetrated against a current partner. We have set out the most prevalent of these below.

Table 1. Stalking schemas interpreted from respondents' accounts.

Schema	Description
"Because you're mine"	The irrational focus on whether victims are having sexual relationships with other people (especially post-separation) are illustrative of stalkers' intense focus on women as their possessions, who must only and eternally be sexually available just to them.
"Because you/women are untrustworthy"	Stalkers' emphasis on their need to 'check up on' their victims, even when the scope of activities available to those victims was already heavily restricted, highlighted their inherent belief that given the chance, victims would defy and betray them.
"Because you did something wrong"	Anger and increased monitoring of activities and communication, or tracking of location, often appeared to stem from stalkers' baseless belief that women (as their possessions) had somehow wronged them – by talking to the wrong person, by concealing their activities, or by not proactively keeping them informed of every life event.
"Because I love you"	A common justification for wanting to be updated about every activity and demanding full digital access to personal data and frequent physical oversight, was love, concern, and affection. Demands for constant company and updates were passed off as devotion, and digital tracking was passed off as wanting reassurance about victims' personal safety.

Each of these demonstrated stalkers' capacity to minimize the harm of the stalking and repackage this to themselves and others as necessary and understandable actions. Finally, as with previous research (Spitzverg & Cupach, 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), respondents indicated that the length of time that stalkers continued this behavior spanned months to years, and often only ceased when there had been decisive action taken (either by informal sources, or by police) or when they had formed new intimate partnerships and the new partner became the primary focus of the stalking. In the following section, we outline the breadth of impacts on victims in each domain of their lives.

Part 2: Impacts on Victims

1.1 Overview

It was a very unhealthy toxic relationship and when I eventually had the courage to walk away, or to escape really I suppose, what I had anticipated would happen did happen, and the threats towards my safety, [and] the safety of others definitely became a real issue. This person - he really, honestly wanted to control every single little part of me. He wanted control, he wanted to control my thoughts, and it felt that [whenever] I was thinking something he would just lose it. There was just any opportunity for him to just absolutely lose it, [to] become violent, and lots of threats, and countless times I had a knife up to my neck, you know, [he'd be] choking me and holding me against a wall with a knife against my neck, [or] sharpening a knife in front of me.

I mean, he was a very controlling individual, yeah, and to get away from him was not going to be easy, but I had to do it and I had to do it once [and for all] and I had to do it completely, and that is pretty much what I chose to do. But it certainly wasn't easy. It was a really long time to be continually living in fear and I got to the point where I felt like a paranoid deluded nutcase, you know, like 'what are you so paranoid about?'. It turned me into somebody that was extremely paranoid and anxious. A high state of anxiety, constantly double-checking locks and doors and constantly looking behind my back just to make sure he wasn't anywhere near me. Yeah, it was a long time of just being on high alert and being hypervigilant about what was going on. – Roimata, research participant.

Roimata, above, talks about the intensely emotionally taxing experience of living in continual fear. She, along with many other participants and respondents, suffered a variety of adverse impacts of living with stalking. While these are different for every person, they could include emotional impacts, such as hopelessness, distress, and a reduced sense of being safe in the world, and psychological impacts, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or isolated trauma symptoms, depression, and anxiety. However, the impacts expanded beyond emotional and psychological wellbeing, severely impacting their social and relational wellbeing and their economic stability (although this will be explained in more detail in Part Three). Many respondents found that they ended up having to sacrifice valuable wellbeing-promoting activities or relationships in order to access safety from the stalker, or in order to manage the debilitating impacts that the stalking had contributed to. It is important to note that it is impossible to distinguish the effects of the stalking from the impacts of the broader patterns of gender-based violence to which respondents were typically subjected, but that the impacts they list were, at a minimum, exacerbated by the prolonged stalking experiences.

Unsurprisingly, mental health impacts of stalking are well documented. While experiences are highly variable and, accordingly, the specific range of impacts vary for every victim, Diette et al. (2013) established that even in the absence of any other form of violence, stalking victims are 113 percent more likely than other members of the community to then experience a first episode of psychological unwellness. The effects are then cumulative; the risk of mental distress increases over time if the stalking continues (Purcell et al. 2004).

Digital forms of stalking have also been independently associated with distress, anxiety, and helplessness (Bocij, 2004; Wall, 2001), presumably as it is so difficult to address and mitigate social fallout from cyberattacks. Victims' changes in behaviour in response to stalking is often the defining factor that determines whether the course of unwanted contact is in fact stalking. For example, if there is regular contact by an ex-partner but this is not interpreted as distressing, it is probably not stalking; if another person feels fear or distress and has asked for the contact to stop with no effect, it probably is. The impacts of this can then manifest in fear or concern for safety (Finch, 2001) or in the disruption to emotional and social functioning (such as the ability to continue to see mutual friends), even in the absence of fear.

In sum, victims in this study spoke of having to remain constantly vigilant in order to continually circumnavigate stalkers' opportunities to contact them, harass them, or otherwise interfere with the normal functioning of their life, including their home safety, their relationships with others, and their professional standing. In listing common detrimental impacts to victims, Sheridan (2005) highlights the social impacts – victims are likely to lose employment and their financial stability, have fewer opportunities to comfortably participate in social activities, and be less confident to leave their homes and actively engage in supportive relationships. Most of the victims Sheridan surveyed had faced some financial disadvantage, and almost 20 percent had had the integrity of their homes violated by the stalker. In respondents' accounts of the impacts here, there is a central theme of the stalking pervaded every aspect of their lives and undermining their ability to feel safe and connected.

2.2. Emotional and psychological impacts

Respondents referred to the adverse and often debilitating emotional impacts they suffered as a result of stalking. As is evident in their quotes, this worsened over time, typically in conjunction with growing feelings of hopelessness. Contiguous emotional impacts included fear, numbness, loneliness, and worthlessness.

I felt nervous. I would avoid him, hang up the phone, lock the door, [and] persistently tell him to leave.

I tried many times to tell him it's over to leave me alone, [and that] I was going to get police involved, but I was so scared. This led to me feeling numb and isolated. I shut everyone else out of my life just so I could keep myself and children safe, and I thought the only way I could do that was to listen [to him] and do everything he asked. I wasn't sleeping or eating properly, [and] I became depressed. I felt like there was no hope, and I felt like it was all my fault... I felt worthless.

It is apparent that responses from both police and informal sources of support consider emotional disruption and/or distress as indicative of mental health symptomatology and disorder. Conversely, respondents consistently identified their own emotional distress, but these are clearly (and understandably) directly evoked in response to violence, abuse, and prolonged lack of safety.

[I] became more withdrawn, anxious, and terrified of his creeping around and sudden appearances and odd behaviour in general, [and] knew I had to quietly find a way to leave safely.

[I became] hypervigilant about safety.

Abusers were acutely aware of the potential for the victim to be made to look 'crazy' and took advantage of this to deter help-seeking.

He made it clear that I would be made out to be a crazy, unstable person. I did contact a free lawyer advice set up who recommended I apply for a protection order through the courts.

Some had diagnoses of PTSD; others described single or multiple (and intersecting) trauma symptoms such as hypervigilance, flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, emotional lability, a sense of profound disconnection from reality or from others, and sleeplessness. However, many of the behaviours that could be regarded as 'symptoms', such as being withdrawn, anxious, or hyperaware of people's presence or of noises were actually highly adaptive. Risk rarely subsided entirely and vigilance was considered to maximise victims' opportunities to react quickly to abuse, even when there are long periods between episodes of this abuse.

[I was] scared, panicked, worried, frightened, always looking over my shoulder, [and] not comfortable being on my own.

I tried to kill myself a number of times - and failed, and then ended up having to take 6 months off work to get back on track. When he was in the shops with me, I would freeze and lose time just standing there. I was never sure when he left, and I must have looked real dumb just standing there. Then I became super paranoid and kept looking for him everywhere.

The intensity of these mental health impacts affected respondents' abilities to work (at the standard they were accustomed to) and to carry out other everyday functions.

It set off my PTSD in a major way. I stopped sleeping so I could be awake for when (not if) they came to 'get me'. Because of the lack of sleep and hypervigilance I was unable to work, and the work I was doing was substandard. Knowing I was working [in a] substandard [way] and having my managers tell me that destroyed the teensy bit of self-confidence I had managed to find, and set me on a depressed/suicidal path.

Of particular noteworthiness is a pervasive sense of hypervigilance amongst respondents. This was precipitated by relentless and unpredictable behaviour, usually by someone who had already used physical violence and coercive control against them in the past and were thus perceived as having the potential to use violence again. This hypervigilance was variously termed as 'paranoia', 'nervousness',

and ‘being jumpy’, and oriented both respondents’ cautious approaches to safety and risk, and their self-professed illogical actions aimed at circumventing stalker’s access to them.

When he was in the shops with me, I would freeze and lose time just standing there. I was never sure when he left, and I must have looked real dumb just standing there. Then I became super paranoid and kept looking for him everywhere. He also took a job opposite where I worked, and the shopping centre was right there, and I couldn’t really choose other places to shop easily. I did change my shopping places – [like] going out of my way to other shops - and shopping at ‘weird’ times like 9pm [at] grocery shops.

I was also very anxious about being in public, especially alone for a long time, and hypervigilant [with regard] to his car or people who looked like him.

Feeling powerless, feeling traumatised, struggling with intimate relationships, and becoming ‘desensitised’ to violence are all amongst the impacts reported by respondents.

I felt utterly powerless. I couldn’t make him stop and to this day I still don’t know why he did [what he did].

I could have died if it wasn’t for my quick thinking at the time he was strangling me. Afterwards it leaves you scared and insecure.

I feel isolated [and feel] that others don’t take it seriously [as straightforward assault]. I am anxious about what I say to my kids as he gaslights. I wish education would reach the minds of the wealthy social group I am around, they just seem to ignore it as not their problem and that it only affects people in lower socioeconomic groups. I’ve had this emotional abuse and manipulation against me for years - it’s harder to deal with due to the ongoing nature. At least with a punch it’s all over.

It desensitised me to violence, the stalking and the violence I mean. There was no support or really any sympathy for my situation, so I didn’t get the support [that other abused] women get. I think in some ways I benefited because it has made me a lot stronger and more resilient. But [I am] still quite damaged; I don’t think I can ever be in another relationship and don’t really like being touched.

It really affected me deeply psychologically and still does, it went on for so many years and still does.

Some of them found the stalking to be more damaging than any of the other forms of abuse they experienced; as one stated: “being stalked is terrifying. I’d have rather taken the beatings than the mind games.” They also explained that the stalking did not have a clear ‘stop’ date; rather, it continued to be perpetrated over years, continually triggering fear and distress in victims. This, as well as the concurrent restriction of their activities, led to significant social exclusion.

2.3. Social safety and safety-oriented exclusion

Feeling unable to cope with the impacts of ongoing stalking was often a key precipitant to returning to an abuser. Staying in the relationship or returning to the relationship was often regarded as safer than leaving. In living with the abuser, victims could to some degree anticipate stalkers’ abuse and found comfort in the predictability. Conversely, staying out of the relationship with stalking ex-partners meant constant vigilance, vulnerability, and the feeling that danger could erupt at any moment. The fatigue of orienting their lives around the potential for danger then has the potential to override victims’ commitment to remaining separated; returning to the stalker is regarded as comparatively less stressful and less dangerous.

It was horrible, not being able to sleep at night [and] putting obstacles against front and back doors, panicking at every knock, [every] footstep, [or at] music starting at your neighbour’s [house]. Everything makes you into a “crazy” person. But that’s the reality of being harassed like this. If you don’t [become paranoid about safety] then you get attacked, and things get worse and worse until all you want is to go back, [because] you knew what to expect then.

I think there is an insidious nature and a very real panic that comes on while being stalked and it is if left unchecked the most likely reason I know for a women to return to an abusive relationship. You already feel beaten down and the inability to effectively prevent the ex from continuing his abuse after leaving means it's easier and safer to return them face the unknown.

It's scary. When I was in the violent relationship, I could read his moods. Now I've left with children I never know what [might happen] or where? I still live on eggshells, jumping at every noise, [and] looking at every car. It's so scary that sometimes I think it's better just to go back.

This sense of despair at the extent to which safety-oriented behaviour dictates everyday life was shared by many of the respondents.

It is a truly disturbing experience that erodes your sense of belonging and security. Even now, I still worry about posting things online, using my phone or being out and about for fear of being "found". His behaviour has turned me into a fearful introvert who hates going out and I can't believe the changes to my personality as a result.

It is horrible, destabilising and scary. The idea that he might find out where I live scares the crap out of me. It damaged every part of me and took something that I will never get back. It ruins lives. It sounds like more of a nuisance type crime, but it isn't.

As far as I'm aware, it has stopped, although the relationship property matters are still before the Court nearly four years later. I still get anxious if I see him around town and I try to avoid places I might bump into him.

This safety-oriented behaviour also results in social exclusion, particularly in online spaces.

I saw on the news about five years after he stalked me that he was wanted for kidnapping... my social media is private and I am very careful about what info I share publicly now.

I was lucky as I moved away but he still talks to my family and kids and occasionally I receive messages It has completely ruined my life and my kid's lives. I don't have the ability anymore to participate in much of anything and I stay home a lot. It's very scary. I'm angry that I had to completely change my life to get away from it.

Others highlight the role of stalking as controlling the victim's freedom so that they may not escape ongoing physical violence, and the constant fear and dread that accompanies victims living with this violence.

I wish stalking was actually taken seriously. For me it was the psychological damage that was the worst. Knowing that I would never be able to get away from him, [that] he could be anywhere, [and that] he had every right to do what he was doing. The constant goosebumps. The tears and feeling of suffocation when I would usher the kids from the door to the car because in public it was words and shame, [but] at home it was the threat of really hurting us.

Even years later, respondents spoke about still living in fear of being hurt or killed by the stalker.

It was the most traumatic thing I've ever been through. It still affects me today. It affected my life in every way and despite years of counselling and moving cities I still feel affected by it.

This has affected me so much that I tried to take my own life because I feel that is the only way to stop his harassment.... he doesn't care [about] being on bail, [and] I believe nothing will stop him... Do I fear my life with this unpredictable man? Yes, I do.

I always felt powerless. This behaviour went on for literally years and I felt like it was a power-play that he enjoyed. We only dated for a few months when I was 19 but it affected me for years afterward and if I saw him today (I'm now 29) I would still freak out.

The deep unease that permeates victims' lives once they live separately to the abuser but are still plagued by unpredictable and unwanted contact can be fatiguing and may ultimately precipitate a return to the known quantity of violence that is perpetrated by a partner upon reunification.

[As victims] you know where [the stalkers] are going to be [if you go back], because it is always going to be with you if you are in the relationship. When you break that relationship down, most of them say it is scarier because they don't know what their partner is up to. They might be getting threatening texts or abuse or whatever. They actually don't know what state they are in, because in the relationship they learn to pick up all those cues. So most people in violent relationships will say, you know, I knew when I was in trouble because of the look or the way he held himself in the room or just things like certain ways that he would hold himself. When they are not in the relationship seeing him and he is constantly doing things that are scaring them, they don't know at what stage he's at in that cycle of abuse. – Key informant 2

I have heard some women say they don't go out. They just can't be bothered; it is safer to stay at home or they go back to him because it's safer to be with him because they know where he is and what he's doing. – Key informant 4

It just kind of shows [victims] again that it is easier to be with [the abuser] because it continues [long beyond separation] and there is nothing we can do to stop that continued abuse outside of that relationship. So they go "look I was in a violent relationship, but 80% of the time he was tolerable, but now 100% of my life... is managing his stalking". - Key Informant 2

The impacts of stalking on its victims are immense. In the absence of protective strategies that actually prohibit the stalking and take seriously all instances where it is perpetrated, remaining in or returning to a relationship with the stalker can be comparatively less dangerous, and the predictability and familiarity of that violence can be comparatively less anxiety-provoking for the victim. This exhibits the long-term nature of stalking; that unlike other forms of violence, it does not necessarily ever end, even years after separation from the stalker. Clearly, victims found themselves having to make transactions of relative safeties – they could return to the stalker and submit to the unrealistic restrictions those stalkers would place on them, or they could choose to continue living apart but suffer the social isolation that the constant need to evade the stalker engendered. Equally, they could minimise both their physical and online social presence and reduce the likelihood that the stalker would be able to find an avenue to harass them while also becoming increasingly disconnected from vital forms of support, or they could choose to continue to access this connection and support with others and tolerate distressing and harassing encounters. They often could not, however, identify any way to access all of these forms of safety simultaneously, placing them in a lose-lose position.

The impacts to respondents' lives also extended beyond those that could be easily explained to others, and into domains of their lives that meant they suffered multiple losses. Logan and Walker (2015) deviate from the consideration of 'risk' from stalking as essentially physical in nature to include personal and social risk such as living with ongoing harassment and social and financial harm, which they usefully term 'life sabotage'. Physical safety is not the only domain of a victim's life that is irrevocably impaired by a course of stalking; it also pervades the ability to feel confident in public and private spaces, confidence to engage in important social relationships, employment and economic stability, the comfort of everyday routines, and the potential for future life planning (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Sheridan, Davies, & Boon, 2001). In addition, far from being incidental to the principal goal of the stalker, such life sabotage is often their focus and it correlates to greater fear and distress of the victim (Logan, Walker, et al., 2009; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012). These broader impacts are unlikely to be readily explained as stalking-related; accordingly, mapping the breadth of impacts should be part of support work with victims.

3.4. Comprehending impacts

Respondents rarely experienced an adverse impact in just one domain of their lives; more commonly, it disrupted other areas of their lives. Fear and distress are usually indicators of the severity of the stalking and also indicate the breadth of the stalking methods used. Exploring what the impacts are to an individual victim can help with establishing the various ways that the stalker is manifesting, especially if it is yet to be labelled as stalking. It is also, of course, important to understand the range of impacts on the individual victim so that they may be supported. The below questions (when they are adapted to be appropriate for and targeted at a particular client or used to inform general questioning can help to draw out the various impacts to the victim. This is unlikely to happen all at once, but rather over time as the victim develops their intimate partner violence-informed understanding of the significance of each episode and how these build on the cumulative harm from the episodes before it.

- What contact are you comfortable with, and what contact are you not comfortable with?
- How much of it is possible to avoid? What happens when you do?
- What are you having to give up or not do as a result of the stalking?
- Are there other activities or routines that you don't feel safe doing at the moment?
- What are you afraid might happen? How likely do you think that is to happen?
- What has had to change to get away from/avoid/not be vulnerable to the stalker or to avoid escalating their anger escalating?
- What role does the stalking play in your decision/ns about your future?
(e.g. going back/staying in the relationship, decisions about work, childcare, housing, location etc).
- What does safety look like in versus out of the relationship with the stalker?
- Do you find that you're constantly on edge? Are there times that this is worse or feels harder than usual?
- How many of the fearful/protective actions are still necessary? Are there any that are no longer serving you well, or ways that you would like to be able to feel or act instead?
- How have your relationships with others (colleagues/employers, friends, and family) changed as a result of the stalking? How did the stalker make that happen?
- How much has it cost you (both financially and practically) to set up safety from the stalking?
- How confident do you feel that the stalking can be stopped?
- How have other people's responses been when you've told them?
- Have other people understood why you're scared/upset/angry/uncomfortable about it when you've told them? Or have there been times where other people have seemed to align with or excuse the stalker?
- How has the stalking influenced how you trust or seek out other people/future relationships?

In addition to helping us comprehend the full range of impacts to victims' lives, these questions are likely to elicit further information about the stalking itself. As we see in the next section, one of the most useful actions that people supporting victims can take is to recognise the significance or meaning of stalkers' actions as intentional and life-restricting and to communicate these patterns and impacts to justice actors. Next, Part Three introduces victims' attempts to get help through formal pathways to stop the stalking and discusses the barriers to the disclosure of reporting of stalking experiences.

Part 3: Pathways to Safety and Justice

3.1. Overview

After [a violent threat] the police advised me to get a protection order... [But still] he would constantly call, constantly text all that sort of stuff... Like maybe 20 times a night, it would be overnight, it wouldn't be during the day when I'm working, calling, trying to come round that kind of stuff... Yeah just turning up, and I had to change the locks, and he would just bang on the door, and sometimes he would come in and smash windows, and come in and throw my daughter's toys around, just stuff so that I knew that he was there... Just a little symbol to say 'I'm still here'. Every time that [kind of] stuff happened, I would call the police.

He didn't pay any regard to the protection order, it was just nothing to him, he didn't care... [But when it was reported] they would say it was fairly minor what he was doing. [He left notes that] were innocuous, like 'hi how are you', 'have a good day', you know, that kind of stuff... Or he would leave something on there like a CD or he would leave a little gift. I felt like saying [to the police] 'what needs to happen next?' I got the protection order, and I was telling them 'he is not listening to it'... He tried to run me off the road one time. I called the police immediately and they did undertake quite an investigation, but basically there was no evidence. It was my word against his and his won out, so nothing happened with that.
– Ngahuia, research participant.

Victims enacted a wide range of strategies to try to stop the stalking and to manage the impacts of it. However, their attempts to seek help from their personal support networks as well as from first responders were often met with minimising or judgemental responses, which further clouded their own perceptions and attempts to understand what was happening to them. Similar responses have been consistently identified in the stalking literature (Brennan, 2008; Glass, 2006; Logan, Walker, Stewart, & Allen, 2006; Meinberg, 2003; Nicol, 2006). Respondents encountered various barriers to disclosing the violence at all, including a fear of escalation, the belief that it would not change anything, feeling responsible for adverse outcomes the stalker may face, and concern that telling people what was happening would not engender a supportive response. When they did decide to tell someone, this was often through informal channels. Many did attempt to get help from Police or from Netsafe but often found this ineffective. This section discusses victims' strategies, barriers to disclosure, and their experiences of the responses from law enforcement and associated agencies.

3.2. How Victims Respond to Stalking

Range of responses

Just as there is no universal experience of stalking, there is also no single, universal response to it. Victims usually try a variety of strategies, from acquiescence or trying to prove their innocence right through to moving towns, eliminating their online identities, and reporting it to police. There are, however, some very commonly reported responses, both to their immediate emotional responses as they began to realise (some of) the pattern of stalking, and then their practical responses as they began to attempt to circumvent it.

The first strategy used by victims to attempt to halt the stalking was almost always to talk directly to the stalker and ask them to stop.

I asked them to leave

[I] repeatedly asked him to stop texting, calling and emailing [and] reminded him why we're not together.

This was manifestly unsuccessful and rarely seemed to effect even a marginal reduction in the frequency and intensity of contact.

I was utterly terrified and kept expecting him to turn up on my doorstep to hurt me. I sent messages back telling him to stop contacting me. He ignored those requests and kept contacting me.

First [I] tried to remind him that I'm in a happy fulfilling relationship with a woman, texted

his mother who I previously had a good friendship with, [and] blocked every person who associates with the guy, to prevent further interaction.

As their suspicion of the methods the stalker had used to monitor them grew, so did their concerns about their everyday activities and the ways that these may now be unsafe.

[I] confronted him. [But I was] worried about using my phone.

Physically and digitally avoiding engaging in the unwanted contact, such as declining visitors through a third person, not answering the phone, using different routes, switching preferred social venues, or blocking numbers of social media profiles was also a principal strategy respondents used to manage the abuse and its impacts.

[I managed by] ignoring and avoiding the person [and] not taking calls or responding to emails.

I was really freaked out. I spoke to a close friend and also deleted my email and cell number and got new ones.

However, blocking numbers or barring other forms of contact also had the potential to elicit an escalation of the respondent's anger.

I blocked him as soon as the harassing messages started coming in even to the point where my mum threatened to call the police on him. This didn't help and it got to a point where, when he stopped me in town the first time, I had to lie and pretend that I was going to unblock him just to get him to leave me alone. He'd get really angry if I didn't agree with him, and I wanted to stay safe even if it meant lying to him.

This sometimes had the unfortunate impact of actually increasing victims' sense of isolation, as their attempts to avoid the stalker necessitated their withdrawal from social situations.

[I] tried to be direct at first to discourage it, [and when that didn't work] then isolated myself.

I ignore communication via text, phone, social media, email (yet he still tries to contact me over 2 years later). And at social/work events I would avoid him but he would sometimes try to corner me. I thankfully haven't seen him at a social or work event for nearly 18 months, but this is largely due to my work situation changing rather than him respecting my space.

This was felt even more acutely when third parties were engaged to participate in the stalking, prompting the removal of mutual friends and apprehension about continuing to socialise in the same way or with the same people and prior to the stalking.

A lot of it was online stalking. I didn't realise he had access to my bank accounts until he started abusing me about what he perceived I was spending my money on and where I was going and when. I changed my passwords. Ultimately I had to delete everyone we had in common on all forms of social media because even years down the track I couldn't figure out who he was getting information from. I became quite anxious when going out as I became aware his friends would follow me all night if they saw me. They wouldn't say anything just follow me from bar to bar and their girlfriends would go to the toilet whenever I did; still not saying anything but it made me nervous about going anywhere alone.

I was uncomfortable and decided not to attend several events because of it, [and] tried not to engage with him online.

Several felt compelled to move homes or workplaces, often resulting in financial disadvantage.

I moved house, changed all my passwords, switched up my routines, locked down my social media so we had no mutual friends.

I told him to leave me alone, blocked him on every social media, blocked his number, moved house and relocated work.

I moved towns.

[I was] confused at first, then angry, then scared, asked him to leave, when he decided he was going to come back I had to take my daughter out of school and go stay with family.

One respondent explained that her lack of response failed to negate the stalker's dedication to pursuing contact with her, and that it was not until she had a new partner that she felt sufficiently confident to not only demand that it stop, but also threaten to unleash social consequences for the stalker if he continued.

At first I told him to stop contacting me several times without success. Then [I] ignored him and blocked him for months, and he [still] did not stop. Finally, when I ended up getting a new partner, he gave me the bravery to respond, saying I was absolutely serious I never wanted to hear from him again and would tell his wife if he contacted me again.

I told him to go home, [and to] leave me alone or I would tell his wife.

They also noted, however, that finding out the extent of the stalking was usually a gradual process, and so their responses often shifted significantly over time.

[I was] continuously trying to prove my innocence of cheating. Allowing him to snoop through emails, or my phone as I had nothing to hide. But also outraged and angry at times when I would find out the next stalking behaviour he had done to me. I told him its extreme and not ok to follow someone and monitor them. But he justified it so sometimes I allowed [it to continue]. I was horrified when I found out he had a private investigator and a proper GPS tracker installed in my car. That was next-level frightening.

3.3. Barriers to Disclosure

I was with him for years. He wasn't too bad until I moved in with him at which point it became incredibly elevated like what I was wearing, who I was seeing, where I was going, how long I was going for became huge issues and he would sort of he would send constant streams of text... I was constantly sort of monitored. Like he would text my friends to ask if I was with them... Once I left him he went completely off the deep end and he threatened to harm himself, he sexually assaulted me a few times, and this was always because he was just so upset because I left him. He would say I've broken his heart and I was a cold heartless bitch. And the more I sort of cut him off, the more I sort of blocked him on social media, and cut off friends of ours that we had in common, and he started following me. Then I started getting calls from numbers that I didn't recognise. I started getting calls at like all times of the night, and if I picked up he would just be like sobbing or screaming or whatever. It was horrifying and I went a bit mental.

I had gone out to a Halloween party and he didn't want to come, and I was running a bit late, so he starts calling me on repeat and that kills my phone battery. At which point he starts calling all my friends and I get home at like 1 am or whatever and he explodes, he keeps me awake until about 5, and I'm meant to go to work in a couple of hours. Like, I give up and I'm so, so tired, and he is still calling me and texting me at work. It was just this barrage of like bullshit, and I got home and I felt like I was too tired to cope anymore and I sort of said 'I need to leave'. Like 'I need to get out of this house, and I want to end this'. I don't remember how I phrased it, I was so exhausted. At which point he did the whole crying, and lying down on the floor, screaming sort of routine and then it turned into like cajoling and like he just had sex on me. It was one of those 'try everything and see what happens' [sort of] sex, and the fact that we had sex apparently meant that we hadn't broken up. Like he just started telling me that was it, that we were fixed, and we would be together, and like my brain was so backward, [thinking] 'oh no I messed up breaking up with him. I'm going to have to breakup with him again.'

We broke up, because I thought that would be less dangerous, like it just escalated so fast. When I tried to say anything, like I definitely tried to break up with him about three times before I actually managed to get out, and [it didn't work]. [And then] I blocked him on social media pretty quick, so I don't really know what he might have said or done, because there was definitely like this weird underground communication railroad. Like I would run into him by

accident, and he would repeat back to me things that I'd said to somebody else like on the bus. I'm like 'did I tell him?' or 'did I fucking message him, is he fucking keeping tabs?' You know, I couldn't tell [how he knew]. It was absolutely crazy, so I just started cutting things out and cutting out people and cutting out modes of communication and going offline. One day, I went back [to get my things] and there was this weird trail of gifts with notes on them, which was terrifying. It was so unimaginably creepy.

[When we broke up], a lot of people sort of got in on that and tried to play mediator and tried to coerce me to going to see him. And then it was [them saying that] I'm super unreasonable, [or that] I've left him alone to deal with the flat issues. It sucked. It wasn't so bad with the people I gave up on pretty quickly. There were a few that I tried to retain because I liked them very much and a few people that I tried to tell, like 'look he abused me, like you can't [ignore that]' and that did not work out. They did not believe me, or not to the extent that I needed them to believe me to be able to protect my information and my location.

– Thalia, research participant.

Disclosure as a leap of faith

As illustrated by Thalia's experience of trying to make people understand what had been happening, disclosure is often a far from straightforward process and is contingent on listeners' willingness to take it seriously. There are many reasons why victims of stalking may feel unwilling or unable to disclose the stalking informally or to report it to the police. Concern about being disbelieved or blamed, fear of retaliation, and the stalking behaviour being normalised all precluded disclosure. Equally, a sense of futility about the likelihood of disclosure effecting positive change discouraged respondents from telling people. Finally, sexualised content could prevent respondents from feeling comfortable in sharing messages from their stalkers.

Barriers to meaningful disclosure

Many respondents feared being disbelieved, and justifiably – friends' and family members' perceptions of the stalker as a 'nice guy' and as unlikely to be perpetrating abuse meant that their disclosures were often met with disbelief or judgement, particularly if they did not have evidence of physical attacks.

[I] didn't ask for much support as I felt I wouldn't be believed

I told so many people. No one believed me. He was older, therefore "wiser" and could portray me as the problem.

[I would have liked] more support from family as he was thought of as a good guy, I spent 14 of the 16 years with him being verbally and mentally abused, [but] they didn't believe me.

I had mentioned it to friends during the time, but no one really took it seriously or believed me because he was "such a nice guy".

Not realising the seriousness of the behaviour also meant that some respondents did not think to explain the stalking patterns in their entirety.

I didn't really know at the time what options were available to me - I didn't at the time really realize that what was happening met the definition of "stalking".

[I] didn't think it was that crazy at the time. When I got out and look back on it I realise how bad it was.

Societal norms that permitted abusive behaviour under the guise of romantic or sexual partnership arguably contributed to this; without clear parameters of acceptable behaviour, insidiously abusive behaviours became difficult to identify and to describe.

I wish I had known how to spot the red flags, there just wasn't that information available at the time. I think when I mentioned it to friends it wasn't really seen as all that bad. I worked in a place where I was surrounded by predatory older men in a repulsive sexist culture where sexual harassment was de rigueur. It is almost unbelievable to me now. But all of that behaviour was so normalised, even encouraged, in the environment I was in that I think I just assumed that's how it was. It's when I really pushed back that I saw how ugly it really was.

Accounts of stalking were generally (although not always) pervaded by a deep-rooted sense of fear or intimidation. This fear limited the range of options that they regarded as viable, and, in some cases, served to immobilise them.

I don't know what I would have done without the option of going through work channels to stop him - the only option I know of would be the police but I doubt that I would have been taken seriously. I was scared that doing so (ineffectually) would make him angry and escalated the behaviour.

I sadly didn't seek support as I didn't know how to. I was scared to do [report it].

It was common for them to take some steps to initiate support, but then retreat when the prospect of taking further action seemed overwhelming or frightening.

I once rang women's refuge just to talk to someone and cried when I did. I wish I followed through with actually going in to follow through with help, but was too unsure about everything. My friends are very supportive and were there when I needed them to talk.

I was too scared to ask for help, and hoped that the situation would resolve itself

Many felt embarrassed to have been stalked.

I was too embarrassed to tell anyone, I knew I would have been blamed for it.

I didn't [tell anyone]. I was embarrassed and scared.

None. I was too embarrassed and felt that I was in the wrong for not giving this guy enough of a chance.

Some had received advice, either from their own support people or from professionals, but felt that this advice, while well-intentioned, would be unlikely to be successful at reducing risk and could actually increase the danger they were in. This was particularly relevant for respondents whose partners had already had convictions and had little to no regard for the law and for potential criminal sanctions.

One of my friends knew about it but I was too scared tell anyone else because of how he might react.

I spoke to the mental health team while I was in hospital with an injury from him and they suggested I leave my job or move away from him. I considered a restraining order but he didn't seem the type to consider consequences and I felt that his anger if he found out would do more harm than good. I mostly relied on friends for alternative places to stay and to go places with me so that I wouldn't be out alone for too long.

One of my friends knew about it but I was too scared tell anyone else because of how he might react.

As has been illustrated in this section, most respondents had developed many strategies for the day-to-day management of risk (such as not answering the door, moving house, changing phone numbers, upgrading social media privacy settings, using cameras and emergency alarm equipment, changing up their schedules or routes home, or even using reverse-stalking to gauge risk) and were worried that reporting the abuse would tip off the stalker, escalate their behaviour, and negate the effectiveness of their current safety strategies. Importantly, too, they often signalled the risk of 'ineffectual' judicial responses – principally, calling the police and having an investigation from, or being given a warning by, police that then did not proceed to guaranteed safety (i.e. by the stalker being taken into custody or otherwise compelled to stay away from the victim) in escalating stalkers' violence, indicating the paramountcy of effective first-time responses. Finally, fear of being killed could also prevent respondents from feeling able to tell people, and they spoke of both explicit threats such as "he said he'd kill me" as well as implicit threats (for example, sending text messages saying "I haven't forgotten what we talked about last week", referring to an in-person threat of stabbing and strangulation), and symbolic threats (such as the positioning of a knife in a victim's

home or leaving signs of forced entry to the victim's home or car). In addition, not all victims had reached the point where they were prepared to instigate serious consequences for the person stalking them, as signalled below.

Feeling conflicted about disclosing or reporting the stalking

For respondents that had initially had close relationships with the stalker and had known them to be kind, sensitive, and caring, there was often intense inner conflict about the appropriateness of involving police, and many defaulted to assuming they were overreacting or to guilt that to involve the authorities would have adverse effects on the stalker's future.

[I wanted] someone who was of authority to contact him so tell him to stop, [but] I didn't want to call the police because I didn't want to get him into trouble with them as it seemed like a really big jump between me telling him to stop and him getting a call from them or something like that.

I wish I'd been honest with our mutual friends. When I left, I tried to protect his reputation so didn't tell very many people about any of this - I still care for him, and Welly's a small town. It wasn't until much later that I realised my desire to protect him, had been to my own detriment.

The act of going to police was, for many, a gargantuan step that they were not comfortable taking.

[I would have liked to have] known there was a way to get him to stop without having to talk to my parents or something less intimidating than talking to police.

This nuanced understanding of victims' evolving relationships with stalkers, and the inherent tension between caring strongly for someone while also wanting harmful and dangerous behaviour to be stopped, has important ramifications for practitioners.

Degradation as both a punishment and help-seeking deterrent

Including degrading messages or images in unwanted communication functioned as a very effective means of preventing victims from seeking help or disclosing the abuse. In some instances, stalkers combined intimate material with the most explicitly threatening messages, presumably to deter disclosure of the threats.

[The] relationship was sexually and psychologically abusive so [I was] ashamed of it. Once I finally ended it, he would show up at my house with knives and would not stop contacted me via text and email. If I blocked him, he's get[ting] a new email or phone number.

Making me feel scared for my safety, but not in an obvious violent manner. He sent me threatening messages but made them personal enough that it would embarrass me to show others. He called me at work (so I didn't know it was him calling and had to pick up as an administrator) but would hang up when I picked up the phone after a few seconds of silence. He basically wanted me to feel scared of him but he was smart enough to not be obvious about it.

Threats to post explicit intimate or sexual material online were equally effective; victims commented that they felt they had no choice but to comply with the stalker or risk humiliation and serious consequences to their personal reputations.

I can't remember any of the text things because unfortunately when he would come over to Featherston I had screen shot and saved all these abusive emotional texts from him and Bluetoothed him to my tablet and unfortunately they came up in conversation, and he like made me [delete them], he sat me down and made me delete every single one of them and as soon as they were gone, the tears stopped, and then he went back. And then it just kept building from there and then all of a sudden a different number started texting me saying that they were a friend, I can't even remember the name they used in that they had my number and if they wanted to catch up and I was like 'no, sorry, I don't know who you are' and then later on like a few months later [it] turned out it was him trying to catch me out like cheating or having flirting texting with somebody else.

And then when we first got together, I had sent, like, not nude photos, but things like my legs or a little bit of thigh or something like that and [after we broke up] he tried to use that as

blackmail to make a Tinder profile of me to, I don't know, just to make a Tinder profile with those photos or he was going to post the photos on Facebook and I freaked out, but not that much because they weren't really anything explicit. – Sophie, research participant.

One stated her partner had indeed gone ahead and “posted sexually explicit material on my social media accounts”, and added “not that I would have pressed charges”, feeling that the exposure of further attention to the images would amplify the degradation and would be too emotionally challenging, particularly given the perceived high threshold for prosecution for such offences. Others simply felt there would be little point in reporting it, as this next section showcases.

The sense of futility

Several respondents spoke of the hopelessness they felt when they realised the futility of trying to successfully evade their stalkers. Stalking could continue for many years after separation, and many respondents had a sustained perception of risk throughout the duration of the stalking.

When I was well enough to leave hospital, we moved again. After two months [of living in the new house] the neighbours had a party and I said to my then new husband that I heard my ex's voice next door. Straight away panic mode set in, but my husband convinced me I was being paranoid. Later that night, [in the] early hours of the morning, a noise in the house woke me straight away. That [made] panic set in, I checked on my daughter and my two other children from a previous relationship. [The] kids were asleep, [so I] went back to my room downstairs, [and] then heard another noise - this time it was the bathroom window latch hitting the frame, then [I] heard a thump onto the wash-house roof. Straight away I called the police, [and] they bought the tracker dog and also finger printed and found out it was my ex who [had] got into the house.

Again I moved house - all was quiet until my daughter turned 13 and we went to netball. For whatever reason, he was there, I don't know, but he saw me and my daughter and proceeded to follow us. We ran - my ex terrifies me - I asked some guys at the netball court to please protect us and they did, they made a circle around us and the netball officials rang the police. My ex was yelling out that he would keep hunting me till he kills me.

Closely related was the sense of powerlessness – that there was no viable method of regaining the power that the stalkers appeared to exercise with impunity in many of their lives.

I always felt powerless. This behaviour went on for literally years and I felt like it was a power play that he enjoyed. We only dated for a few months when I was 19 but it affected me for years afterward and if I saw him today (I'm now 29) I would still freak.

I always felt like there was nothing I could do about being followed when I was out because nobody was actually “doing” anything.

What I went through I would never wish upon anyone. I may not have been physically abused but I was mentally abused, emotionally abused, [and] sexually abused where I felt I had to have sex with him to stay alive and be safe. Having him follow me and be in control of every move I made is scary, and draining, and it's not ok at all.

This was reinforced by the perceived inadequacy of protective orders and the classification of offences that reduced individual instances of stalking-related contact to standalone incidents rather than patterns of offending that was commonly perpetrated using methods that, taken separately, did not attract a strong judicial response. In an effort to try to prove the pattern of cumulative rather than standalone episodes, some victims collated evidence to attempt to meet the evidence sufficiency required by police. However, as we discuss below, this was often not a viable expectation.

3.4. Evidence issues

Advocates in particular emphasized that the onus placed on victims to collate their evidence, or the request for evidence that is unreasonable given the nature of crime, precluded safe responses by police and courts. Acknowledging and validating the distress that victims experienced as a result of the stalking was a routine

part of advocacy but could be undermined by the difficulties advocates faced in having the abuse inherent in these experiences also validated by the court.

They are fearful - they feel really fearful, they feel violated, they become very hypervigilant, you know, they want help. They want someone to look after them, and they want validation of their experience which is what we give them, but at the same time it is quite tricky because if there is no protection order or there is not enough evidential information to obtain a protection order [then] it is a real tricky situation. – Key informant 4

Police charges or access to protection orders are often precluded by the subtlety of abusers' threats; as they are current or ex-intimate partners, they can draw upon shared experience to allude to threats without articulating any risk that could be interpreted as objectively threatening by a third party. For example, they might refer back to prior, in-person conversations that had involved a threat to the life of the victim. Equally, they couched unwanted digital contact in vague terms so as not to definitively give away their identities.

He had sent her emails in a cryptic form, but she said "I think this is what it means", and it was things like, I can't remember exactly, but like... "I'm never going to let you go" or "I still want you back and we could go and get married" and things like that, when she had been absolutely clear [about ending the relationship]. – Key informant 1

They refer to things that are jointly known, or yeah, experiences they have both had, but they are not dumb enough to absolutely say who they are beyond doubt... that's why I say these men are clever, and I see it all the time, they just work the system again and again. They know what to do, they know how to push the boundaries, and when to kind of come back [without getting caught]. - Key informant 4

I have always felt like there is some sort of gap there because, you know, she can be really, really fearful but if he hasn't done anything [explicit] then there is nothing you can do, but it can be a huge predictor of what could happen. So what happens in the middle? – Key informant 1

It's so hard, especially when it is not a threat on her life or the kids' life...[it's not like] "I'm going to kill the kids today", it will be like "remember when we had that discussion about what I would do if you left me?". Like reading that like from afar, that could have been about anything, so it is really, really hard to get anything any traction anywhere. – Key informant 2

Attempting to gather proof about episodes of stalking that are fleeting and that do not pose immediate danger to the victim was a frustrating experience.

The main things I see is the drive bys and [then] they've gone. We say "next time you see him try and get a photo or video just so we've got proof" because there is no proof, you know, and this person could be doing it every single day, doing a drive by, and it could look quite innocent to a bystander, but for our client they know exactly what he is doing and they have got no recourse, they don't know what to do. Because by the time they call the police, [and] the police turn up, he's gone. – Key informant 4

Individual police officers were sympathetic to this tension between safety and the threshold for evidence.

The family violence sergeant that we deal with quite closely he is really good. He is very much aware of the context and is very good with if I went to him and said this [stalking] is going on he is really quick to try and help and give advice, or to say "okay, I'll go and talk to the person" or whatever. But as for the other police officers I don't know how seriously they would take it... there might [questions like] "where is the evidence" or "where is the proof" [evidencing] what the women have experienced... I still believe it is because they still adhere to stereotypes [about] the physical [violence] being the most important... despite the fact [that] we know stalking correlates to homicide risk. – Key informant 4

Advocates also gave examples of how do-it-yourself attempts to gather evidence could backfire; for instance, installing CCTV motion-activated cameras that were still too grainy to be considered convincing evidence, screenshots of messages from unknown mobile numbers exhibiting content that did not conclusively implicate the stalker, voice recordings that were inaudible, or reports of subtle tampering

that seemed implausible to people unfamiliar with gaslighting tactics and psychological abuse (such as moving clothes in the bedroom or children's toys in the living room).

3.5. Involving Netsafe

When respondents did decide to take action about stopping the stalker, they typically turned to either Netsafe or the police to report digitally-perpetrated abuse. Having a delegated agency to investigate and consider digital harassment, such as repeated direct messages, posting on social media, using social media platforms to spread lies and ruin reputations, or threats to post 'revenge porn', was regarded by respondents as having little value – both because they had a high threshold for what would be considered offensive, and because police rarely communicated the possibility of an investigation into digital harassment to victims.

Despite most being subjected to digital means of harassment, often encompassing both cell-phone-based contact (such as phone calls and text messages) and online contact (such as posts on social media or messages through multiple fake social media profiles), the splitting of patterns of violence into individual incidents that spanned physical stalking, telephone use, and online stalking meant that stalking behaviour never attracted a law enforcement response that considered it in its entirety and addressed both physical and digital safety mechanisms simultaneously. The inability of Netsafe in particular to uphold digital transgressions as criminal then deterred victims from considering this avenue when seeking pathways to safety.

My boyfriend, who is experienced in the legislation and policy of these matters, looked into what Netsafe could do but didn't feel that it would be any help to contact them.

[There should be] more open discussions in the public eye about specific examples of these actions being wrong; e.g. constant phone calling, checking your personal email accounts etc. People can easily use the justification [of] "I'm your husband so why can't I just check it?" This is not something really openly talked about.

[Digital stalking] is also such a grey area about when to prosecute. Not that I would have pressed charges. But these issues all need to be way better discussed and supported. Support is difficult when everything you do is being monitored.

Downgraded responses by Police or Netsafe focused on advising victims to "contact the site". This rarely resulted in immediate or effective action.

[I would like] updated laws that deal with cyberbullying and online stalking more effectively. Stop letting social media sites police it. They don't care, they suck. They're a business. They only care inasmuch as it damages their bottom line.

Accordingly, few of the respondents who had reported stalking without also reporting violence had had this report result in criminal charges. The requirements for threats to safety to be objectively explicit and to evoke (the subjective experiences of) significant emotional distress before they constituted criminal acts precluded almost all of the digital or phone-based stalking from being effectively addressed through law enforcement responses or through the criminal justice system. These thresholds are further discussed in Part Five. Some simply felt that there was not sufficient support for them, which is set out next.

3.6. Feeling overlooked

Many respondents looked beyond individual police or support people's actions to the meso-level of parties involved with their safety and felt like the system that was supposed to provide them with options failed to do so. This particularly focused on their fear, the escalation of physical violence and the system's apparent incapability to put safety strategies in place in advance. Secondly, they focused on the uselessness of protection orders and police safety orders when breaches are not upheld and the order is not enforced, which was referred to by one respondent as offering a "false sense of safety". Another common complaint was the expectation that instead of utilising police resources to actually stop the perpetrator from using multiple phones or social media accounts to perpetrate abuse, victims were expected to use their own time and resources managing the impacts of the abuse and trying to create sufficient roadblocks to stop its perpetuation. This was likened to a full-time job; it required victims to constantly engage with the abuser through a battle of technical access, which was intensely exhausting and arguably an unfair requirement for victims to feel free from harassment.

[We need] decent follow up, [and] a way of stopping the phone calls and texts - I also got every number he called from issued with a warning from Spark but he used different ones repeatedly... [we] also [need] a way of following up all the times he knocked on the door and left before there was time to call anyone.

It was very difficult and degrading. Even though the person was in a different town, they still managed to commentate on my life and make it a living hell for me to do anything. I had to delete all social media and change my number for it to stop. I think it's very common for stalking to be something that gets overlooked, especially when it is by someone you are in/have been in a relationship with like what I went through.

Their frustration at being helpless to actually stop the abuse and instead having to simply tolerate it and wait to be physically harmed was tangible.

[There] doesn't seem much you can do about it, which horrifies me.

[There should be] immediate intervention, [which includes] providing a support person to help ground the symptoms of trauma, [and police] transparency around their files and notes, [and the] choice for freedom from stalker.

[I want] the police to have followed up on the incident when he was trespassed, and [to have] charged him with [an offence under] the Harmful Digital Communications Act by police in the first place and sorted a protection order... if that had happened, I may not have been assaulted.

Many alluded to the systemic failure catalysed by the absence of appropriate legislation and responsive agencies that are empowered to respond proactively to stalking violence, which, as they point out, is not usually easy to evidence and prosecute.

I feel that we do not have appropriate support in NZ for families experiencing emotional manipulation or emotional abuse [such as stalking]. This is a grey area, where there are little to no resources and no governing body to protect vulnerable women and children (generally) from this type of sabotaging behaviour.

This man ruined my life. He tore my family apart, ruined my credibility and any future careers in [my] chosen fields... [but] it is very difficult to prove or be believed when being stalked. They [stalkers] are clever. [There is] not enough government [or] police training in this very individualised area, or legal support with an individual emphasis on stalking [as part of] domestic violence.

Several spoke of their belief that the stalking could ultimately lead to homicide and referred to instances where the stalking had escalated to serious physical violence.

[I wanted there to be] something for him to [be made to] stop, like forced counselling or [and] anti-stalking program like an aa meeting! If they can do it once, they'll do again. The next one might not end well. He was violent. He could of killed me. There was even several points I wanted to kill myself. Although the victim needs support, so does the offender.

It turned from stalking into attempted murder.

I would have liked the police to have helped me with a protection order before he had the chance to abuse me which they then took action [on]. It took for me to be physically beaten, with evidence of the attack, for them to do anything.

They also outlined the emotional weight that this inability to effectively respond placed on them, and the silencing that they experienced as a result of the widespread normalisation of stalking behaviour by ex-intimate partners and misattribution of blame.

It is frightening. It leaves me feeling like my freedom and delight in life has been taken from me and I will never be free. I feel trapped and afraid. I feel like if I mention it people will think and reply something like, "what are you on about". I don't feel like anyone will believe me. When you have a child with the stalker, and you have to just get on with co-parenting, you are left

feeling [like] you can't complain about the stalking or the system will say you are making a "fuss". It is heart-breaking and soul destroying.

Finally, several expressed the need for stalking to be interpreted as indicative of increasing potential for danger, such as by stating "Police need to take stalking far more seriously... seemingly low-level things like this escalate into much bigger, more frightening things." This was echoed throughout participants' stories, where seemingly low-level offending did not subside without a distinct catalyst, which, more often than not, only occurred after an escalation to physical or sexual violence.

3.7. Reporting to police

The decision to report

Reporting to police was the most commonly reported course of action, both for physically-perpetrated and digitally-perpetrated stalking. Research in other countries shows that not all stalking is reported to police, and that not all stalking behaviour reported to police is recorded as being stalking. Research into stalking by the Crime Service for England and Wales (CSEW, 2015) found that 1.1 million people had been stalked in a single year, and approximately one fifth of these resulted in a complaint of stalking to police. Given the volume of complaints, it is understandable that police may struggle to identify which of these are suggestive of risk and which are not, and to respond accordingly. This is further complicated by the fact that victims rarely have the necessary framework of understanding to name the pattern of behaviour as stalking and to proactively identify every act that is covered within this. Conversely, as is evident amongst respondents in our research, they tend to recognise that certain behaviours are intentionally disruptive and feel threatening without considering how multiple other tactics are also being perpetrated in this pattern. Finally, stalking is a common (and risk indicative) component of broader cycles of intimate partner violence (Churcher & Nesca, 2013; Miller, 2012; Norris, Huss, & Palarea, 2011; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), and it is often the discrete episodes of physical violence that are prioritised for prosecution.

Unsurprisingly, respondents' decisions to report to police were not always a guarantee that the stalking would stop, and there were a range of outcomes resulting from these reports. These spanned the continuum from feeling blamed and disinclined to report in future, to feeling supported and able to reliably access safety through the criminal and/or family court. Slightly more than half (54.36%) of respondents reported the stalking to police.

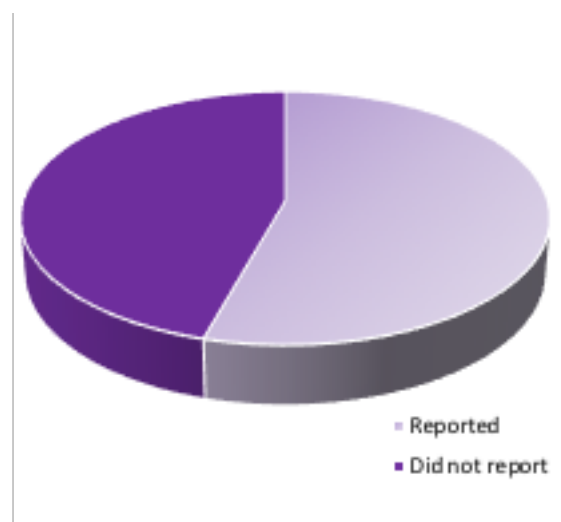


Figure 26: The proportion of respondents who did and did not report the stalking to police.

Differences in reporting between groups of respondents

We attempted to isolate differences in reporting to police by group. Only two transgender respondents had reported to police, which, although of interest, is not statistically significant. The number of transgender and non-binary respondents is too low to venture into possible explanations for the lack of reporting but feeling unable to report is likely to be consistent with their comparatively greater experiencing of social exclusion and discrimination. There was also no statistically significant difference between respondents identifying as heterosexual and those identifying with other sexual orientations. However, we did find that the younger respondents were, the less likely they were to report the stalking to police (youngest age bracket: 42.37%, oldest age bracket: 76.67%). Conversely, there were no significant differences by age group in the outcomes of reporting to police.

Differences and similarities in the stalking experience for respondents who did and did not report

Respondents who reported the stalking to the police had slightly different rates of victimisation through specific tactics than those who did not. In table 2, each of the markedly different rates of tactics used between the group that did report to police and the group that did not are detailed. We have only included the percentages if they are significantly different (some only differ post-separation), in order to illustrate the tactics that are particularly correlated to the likelihood that an individual victim will report the stalking to police. The tactics with the greatest difference in reported prevalence were calling often, damaging property, and breaking in and moving belongings, all of which were much more common amongst victims who did end up reporting the stalking to the police.

Table 2. Prevalence of reported tactics against groups of respondents that did and did not report the stalker to police.

Tactic	Respondents that reported to police		Respondents who did not report to police	
	% pre-separation	% post-separation	% pre-separation	% post-separation
Often called their employers/colleagues	16.13	28.04	12.50	16.53
Logged into social media accounts		31.98		21.25
Checked online banking transactions	21.18	13.71	9.05	4.53
Sat outside home, school or work		56.65		46.20
Questioned children		28.32		18.18
Physically followed		52.40		42.41
Interrogated family		50.64		40.61
Broke in and moved belongings		35.91		20.12
Damaged property		38.75		16.60
Posted threatening or degrading material online		39.30		26.95

Respondents' experiences with police

Many respondents contacted the police when they became aware of the stalking or when it escalated beyond the point that they could manage it themselves, assuming that this would provide them with some protection, or, at a minimum, deter the stalker from further engaging in that behaviour.

At first [I] tried to diffuse the situation myself, then blocked his contact. My phone still tells me when he attempts to text me and he did not stop so I went to the police.

However, this assumption proved erroneous, and they typically then found themselves on the receiving end of unwanted contact for which they could seek no recourse, at which time they had to find their own (often drastic and disruptive) solutions to evade further abuse.

[I] also went to the police who didn't find it to be unlawful as the comments had no context - no contextual threats.

I would have liked it if the police had more power and didn't require such strong evidence of stalking. He was smart and knew what he could get away with, so he never did anything that could easily be traced back to him.

I'm Māori, it felt like they gave no fucks. I had to make repeated calls and was then advised to serve a trespass order. I felt like they didn't take me seriously.

The prospect of expending yet more energy and time on managing the impacts of the abuse also made some victims unwilling to proceed through the police process, especially when the onus for giving evidence was repeatedly placed on the victim, despite the emotional cost that this necessarily entailed.

There was evidence and I had a statement taken about the digital underage revenge porn and blackmail and stalking. But they told me I had to go back in to give more evidence and I did not want any more of my time to be wasted on thinking about a piece of shit so nothing ever happened. The police didn't make it easy for him to be prosecuted. He came back five minutes

after a protection order was given despite me telling the police officers that I was sure he would do so.

I would have liked more support from police initially. Only the second time I went to then they were very helpful. I had several pages of evidence, and he [still] only got a letter of warning.

They issues a PSO [police safety order]. He came back the next day.

Overall, respondents expressed frustration with inadequate, minimising, or incomplete police responses.

I told him from day one to stay the fuck away from me, I rang the police heaps of times they were total arseholes, the police would say things like “you’re just jealous cos he’s got a new woman” or “It’s his farm, he has to come by your house”. Even after I got a protection order, the police kept on with this bullshit.

I told my father, and the police, but they couldn’t do much about it. I tried to take safety precautions, and had a safety plan.

The outcome was satisfactory, but I felt a lack of compassion from the male police I encountered. Much of what I reported was very intimate and embarrassing and I left feeling judged and dismissed.

At the very least I would have appreciated being taken seriously, “he hasn’t really done anything except send you flowers, wait for you outside your work, happen to be on the bus you catch every day to and from work and sending you lots of texts.”

Police defended this inaction by identifying the problem as being a lack of evidence, indicating that they did not have a mandate to act in the absence of irrevocable evidence of stalking. However, respondents referred to verbal responses from police that suggested they were locating the core problem as being with the mental state of the victim, rather than with the insidiously abusive actions of the stalker.

I feel unsafe. I talked to the police who said with no evidence, they can’t do anything. I told them I am frightened. They suggested I see my GP, presumably for medication. They thought I was nuts.

I was much too afraid to go to the police. I didn’t really trust that they would take me seriously or be able to do anything to protect me.

I would have liked for my stalker to have been a bit harsher spoken to by the Police - during his questioning, the policeman was joking and laughing with him about the incident in front of me and my family. It completely undermined the seriousness of the situation and I often questioned my reaction to the incident as a result.

These accounts of police believing it was the respondents’ mental health that was the problem, rather than the stalking behaviour itself, were common and highlighted police adherence to myths of ‘romantic pursuit’, which validated behaviour that would likely have been identified as criminal if perpetrated by a stranger. A respondent relayed her story of walking into a police station and reporting a host of symbolic threats including notes on the car and tampering with belongings, only to be asked if she had recently had a mental health assessment. Others were handed leaflets about counselling, with no accompanying investigation. They experienced this as an acute double-bind of the stalking: crazy-making stalking behaviour induced anxiety and fear, and then reports to police were met with assumptions of mental ill-health, potentially reinforced by the visibility of respondents’ anxiety and fear, with little recognition of the legitimate basis for paranoid thoughts.

[The stalking] seems to be crazy-making behaviour that puts us on edge, making us scared, and others don’t understand. They think we become paranoid and crazy. Too much victim blaming and shaming is still going on.

[I would have liked] for the police to not purport I am mentally ill, for starters, [and for there to have been] an investigation into [the stalker’s] behaviour.

Others recounted their interactions with police where the potential to lay charges was ignored completely, even after repeated and overt threats – especially when police considered the threat as a standalone communicate rather than within a wider pattern of abusive behaviour.

I went to the police, who didn't find it to be unlawful as the comments had no context.

I was 17. I told my mum who took me to the police but they just said they'd have a word to him and did nothing else.

The police refused to take any action and treated me and my issue as something of little consequence.

Relatedly, advising respondents to take responsibility for their own safety by accessing protective orders through the family court was common, and this was also usually not accompanied by police attempts to hold the stalker accountable through criminal charges.

I went to the police with my mum I was around 22 at the time. I didn't feel that they took it seriously, they suggested I could fill out a restraining [protection] order but I was worried it would make the situation worse and their response did not make me feel supported or safe.

I wish they would've checked in with me instead of just ushering me along. I wasn't asked if I was safe or if I was in danger. It was handled poorly and I wouldn't go to the police again if I came to be in the same situation.

A protection order was left for my ex but he 'never opened it'. I wish they'd have served it to him in person and read him the rules so he couldn't pretend not to know. The police I spoke to were kind to me, but I felt that the policeman I spoke to first blamed me because I had tried to remain friends with my ex after ending our relationship.

Further, even if a protection order was granted through the family court after victims acted on this advice (which was not always a viable option), this did not prevent further unwanted contact.

[I] tried to reason [with him and then] tried to end relationship. Ultimately [I] went to police [and then] got [a] protection order [which was a] (waste of time).

Others assumed that police would have been able to act protectively and immediately if they had only reached out at the time.

[I] would of liked support from the police and a restraining order but that would of been in place if I had of come forward. More information about what stalking is, a helpline, as I didn't see it as that until they stopped contacting me.

Not everybody felt able to call the police, and strongly believed that if they did, the stalker would follow through on their threats of violence or even murder.

I was petrified, he was an abusive partner, he went to jail for abusing me and got out, found out I had a new partner by the time he was out, and he wasn't happy about it. Every time I saw him the memories flooded back and he was very threatening, [such as threatening that] if I called the cops again I was dead. I didn't tell anybody about it, I quit my job and moved 2 hours north of my home, family and friends to get away from him.

I was really scared. He often threatened both me and my new boyfriend. I tried to avoid by leaving work at different times and walking to class by different routes. My boyfriend encouraged me to contact the police but I was too afraid.

I was much too afraid to go to the police. I didn't really trust that they would take me seriously or be able to do anything to protect me.

For these respondents, the perception of reporting the stalking as being an untenable prospect meant that they had to continue tactics of avoidance, seemingly in perpetuity. As is seen throughout these quotes, there was significant variation in respondents' accounts of their interactions with police. Many regarded the

police's role in responding to episodes of abuse as integral to their eventual safety and pivotal in preventing physical assault immediately after reporting the abuse.

[Police were] very helpful. [They] don't make me feel as if my going to them is unjustified. But getting any lasting and long-term result is the difficulty.

Police were awesome.

Others, however, recounted interactions saturated with outdated narratives of violence and (mis)attributions of accountability, many of which were either explicitly or subtly victim-blaming, minimising, and shaming.

I tried to contact the police before it got really bad [but] they didn't want to help. After I was hurt, Women's Refuge helped me with the court case and offered support. After that I dealt with it in my own, I was embarrassed and didn't want people to know what happened to me.

A social worker friend got involved and put me in touch with a domestic violence prevention social worker, who helped me to get the police involved... local police were helpful to a point, [but] then I was made to feel at blame. Then [the] police [were] unsupportive, or re-victimised or traumatised me more by believing his narcissist ways.

They should have monitored him to catch him or done something other than just speaking to him. It only made it worse and the cop was really rude, and implied it was my fault.

[I would have liked] him to be shown/told that his behaviour was not ok. At worst we both would be told "you guys have got to sort this out guys. You can't do this around the kids".

This occurred even in some instances where the victim had been physically assaulted by the stalker in the past but occurred particularly often for respondents whose partners or ex-partners had not (yet) physically abused them.

[I wanted] police to actually lay charges as they would had the event not been domestic.

[I wanted to] be able to report him to the police knowing someone would take it seriously. But when a detective started contacting me on his behalf [to convey messages], I knew it was pointless.

I would have liked the Police to be less dismissive the first time around and try and work with me as the issue continued for several months after that.

Similarly, one respondent described a situation where she had been followed and then assaulted. When she called the police, they spoke to the stalker first, and then tried to persuade her to "find time to talk to him" so that he could explain himself to her in person – a scenario that patently illustrates the acceptance of coercive and harassing behaviour provided it occurs within a narrative of romantic reconciliation.

I asked police what to do, they said I had no rights because I had allowed him certain privileges such as using my phone etc (which I didn't). They didn't take it seriously and told me to get counselling if I was struggling.

[I] only [got] help from family and friends. [I] tried to go to the police but was told [that] because he was my partner, it was normal for him to be checking on me.

Others were simply met with the response that the pattern of stalking was not something police could do anything about. One respondent summarised by saying "with subversive stalking behaviours, it's not like you can really go to the Police.... [trying to report it] was a total joke".

[I] went to police and they told me they can't do anything. They did warn him twice to no avail. He just said I am nuts and I am making things up, but he bragged at his work about what he was doing to me.

Being believed would of been a fine start... [and] Police assistance in warning him. But you are at the mercy of 'he said, she said'. If time was taken to understand then it would not been hard to see. I have children, he knew all about us so could create situations to scare us. I know for the police its difficult but letting him know they knew what he was doing would have helped immensely.

Initial reports of stalking behaviour that were not responded to frequently led to additional reports after the abuse had become physical in nature; usually involving either strangulation or rape. One respondent commented that she reported her ex-partner's physical following, drive-bys and text messages from multiple numbers, but was told there was nothing that could be done. She was then followed and strangled, and said she "felt relieved" because it was finally a tangible act of violence that police would take action on. Others, too, spoke about the initial non-response from police, followed by subsequent serious attacks:

The very last time I confronted him about it he got violent and attempted to strangle me several times.

My ex-partner broke into my home soon after stalking me in an attempt to kidnap and kill me. I was very lucky to escape with my life. Stalking type behaviours should be taken very seriously by police and the court, as men often escalate dramatically from this point.

Even after stalkers invaded victims' homes, respondents encountered the barrier of insufficient evidence and did not experience any resulting safety from reporting to police.

He attacked me and because we lived rural the police didn't arrived for 2 1/2 hours. By then I had gone. They never saw him until four weeks [later] and he never got charged.

The police did what they could due to the timeframe it took me to report. Unfortunately, they could not prove that he broke into my home both prior and at the time I woke up to him there, and it all became a case of my word against his.

I was also told that they could not get any physical evidence of him being there.

Equally concerning, respondents referred to the impact that this first experience with police had had on their outcome expectations of future reporting to police, stating that if they were in danger in the future – particularly from the same abuser – they would not report as reporting was perceived to be futile.

I tried to get support from the police but I had a terrible experience. I was NOT asked if I was safe. I was told to go find a lawyer and given a pamphlet on explaining what a restraining order actually is. I wouldn't go to them again if I was seeking help.

I wish they would've checked in with me instead of just ushering me along. I wasn't asked if I was safe or if I was in danger. It was handled poorly and I wouldn't go to the police again if I came to be in the same situation.

Mostly I did not report because I knew police would not act. When I did report, mostly no action was taken. However when the police DID take action it made a difference.

Contacting the police was not an easy step for victims to take, and for this courage to be gathered only for respondents to receive minimising or unhelpful responses was deeply harmful. As one respondent stated: "when a woman phones police, it takes courage to do so." Many left the police station after reporting with incomplete information and the impression that there was no point continuing to report the abuse against them.

I didn't realise the police would serve him with [the] trespass [order]... I got a friend to give it to him, it was horrible. The police just gave me [the] forms and didn't tell me to bring them back to them and [that] they would serve them... the whole process was scary and not very informative or supportive.

I felt less safe leaving the station than I had walking in. I would have loved for there to be free/cheaper options so that young woman can get the help that they need when they need

it before it is too late and they have to live in a constant state of anxiety.

Some respondents who felt that reporting abuse would not yield a safe or positive outcome believed this was due to inadequate legislation that limited police involvement to unrealistically explicit threats or evidenced physical or sexual assault.

I told friends and family. I didn't go to the police because I've had friends go to them in the past and the police couldn't do anything. They wanted to, but legally their hands are tied in many ways, so there's no point.

[I had] no cuts or bruises, so [it was] not taken seriously, or probably because [there was] no legislation they could work under.

As evidenced here, the transmission of beliefs amongst social groups regarding the efficacy of reporting abuse to police also influenced reporting decisions; in other words, the knowledge that police could not act protectively in similar circumstances engendered a shared sense of futility about police action in their peers. Frustratingly for respondents, their initial reports of stalking, regardless of whether these included physical and evidenced assaults, were often met with advice on how victims should take responsibility for keeping themselves safe by altering their locations and routines, which generally failed to instil any sense of actual safety in the victims themselves.

Police did nothing... I was referred after the third time to a police safety officer [and] she told me I should move houses.

Respondents who had experienced solely digital stalking where the stalker lived overseas faced additional barriers to effecting a law enforcement responses, yet paradoxically experienced police responses as coordinated and timely despite the added difficulty of inter-jurisdictional practices.

I ended up going to the police and they were great and took it seriously. They rung the guy at work and told him Australia (where he lived) has laws against stalking and they would call them to go through his hard drive if it continued.

Several mentioned that the stalker was either a police officer or friends with police officers, and that the threat of invoking police power to continue the stalking was a frightening deterrent to ever reporting (or, in one case, even disclosing informally) the stalking.

I couldn't call the police because he was a policeman! I was extra vigilant with my security and turned the phone off at night.

Some had had multiple experiences that spanned the continuum of support.

That cop was horrible! But [I] got good support from some lovely police after that when they eventually realised the situation was serious.

I felt judged and I was told I needed to change things – e.g., delete social media, change my phone number. I felt that because I was not physically abused, my fears weren't taken seriously and that I was a silly little girl who had a disagreement with an ex. Fortunately once the family violence team picked up my complaint, action was taken. But the male, station sergeants were dismissive and made me feel foolish and unsupported.

Respondents who did not feel that their situation fit the 'typical' scenario of male-to-female violence also experienced marginalising responses when they attempted to report the stalking.

I'd like police to be better trained in handling complaints from LGBTI+ couples, the officer probably thought he was doing his job but it made me so angry the way we were treated.

Even when parenting or protection orders had been granted, these were not useful unless consistently enforced, and many respondents found that unless there was explicit threat or violence, or the stalker was showing up and staying long enough for the police to arrive, reporting these breaches to police rarely resulted in the stalkers being arrested for breaching the order. One commented that she "continued going

to police when he violated [the] protection order” but that there was no arrest so she stopped bothering.

I would've liked the police to tell him to stay away from my house and stop using excuses of farming to be there, what part of 'protection order' don't the police understand. He should have been charged with attempted murder when he knocked me over with the truck, but they didn't even take a statement from him.

They [should] follow up on breaches and don't tell you to breach if it's not gunna [sic] go through. And don't tell us to report it so there's a record... Make it so we actually are heard and feel it will help rather than going through all that shit for nothing.

One respondent estimated that over 100 separate incidents had been reported to police, with varying results. For the initial complaints, police dismissed her concerns and she later found they had kept no record of her coming in to report his continuous drive-bys and instances of showing up and repetitive digital contact. It was not until her father contacted the police that they took the complaints seriously, and she states: “[after] getting someone else involved, the police responded much better and he was cautioned.” Others similarly recounted that they were told they could not get a protection order and were told that they could only warnings to stalkers rather than criminal charges.

[Police said] that there needed to be a physical altercation with the stalker before anything could be done.

I believe the police contacted him to advise him to stop or criminal charges would follow.

They warned him with criminal harassment charge if he continued.

Despite some stalkers being warned by police that if they continued there would be criminal charges laid, this rarely happened when stalkers continued to harass and intimidate victims. In addition, as with accessing the protection orders in the first instance, attempting to get police to acknowledge that there had been a breach and take action such as arresting the stalker required the victim to compile their own evidence. This expectation was unrealistic for many victims as they did not know how to, could not, or did not want to spend time recording, collating, and eventually presenting their ‘evidence’ to systems that they largely perceived as blaming or unresponsive.

[It was] upsetting [and] felt like a set-back for me... [I] notified the police for [the] breach of [the] protection order, but [he] was free [from charges] because he claimed he didn't know he wasn't allowed at my workplace - but it [was] clearly stated on my protection order. [I was] disappointed.

[I] went to police who took statements, [I] said he was breaching [the] protection order but then [they] would only go talk to him - he would admit, and they would let him away with it.

[I would like] to of been taken seriously by the police and for him to be charged with every single breach... what's the point of having an order if they don't follow through.

Finally, if the first report of violence was immediately after a physical assault (particularly one that left visible marks on the skin), respondents sometimes found police to be helpful, sensitive, and capable, and were usually referred to specialist family violence support services. However, they also observed that if they reported the stalking at the same time as this assault, only the assault resulted in charges, and the stalking behaviour was disregarded. One stated that the police “did f*ck all about [the stalking behaviour]” but that they were good at responding to assault.

Advocates' experiences with police

As with victims' accounts of their experiences, advocates' perceptions of police capability and reliability in responding to stalking was varied. Key informants relayed that physical forms of stalking, especially those accompanied by physical violence such as strangulation or violent rape, attracted a competent and immediate police response, and that police usually responded sensitively and respectfully to these victims. They also remarked on the progress that this signified, as several had witnessed this change over a long period of time and had been working on the frontline at a time when police responses minimised the significance and severity of violence against women. Key informant 1 described the police's attitude

to call-outs as “refreshing, not minimising at all”, and others also expressed their approval of and gratitude regarding police’s response to victims.

Police are getting better at this stuff. They are doing a lot more education around what it looks like... [and] just simply understanding who has got control has gone a long way in their ability to see a situation for what it is. Back in the day, [an abuser] would have ultimate control over her how many months, weeks, years, days, and the police [would] have been called, and the police get there and the women lose their shit, because they are like “finally, there is somebody here to actually protect me, and keep him away from me” or they know he is not going to react in front of the police. So they start screaming and yelling and throwing punches, because they now have the power and safety to do so while they are angry. So police will look at that situation and go “God yeah if she was my partner I would probably whack her too”. That is the kind of stigma that stuff had, and now we are moving out of that space, [and] actually they do look at the whole picture... So they are getting better but obviously there needs to be something specific around this and how to evidence it. – Key informant 2

Conversely, stalking that either followed unreported physical violence or which was manifestly insidious in nature and did not feature specific and explicit threats – particularly if solely perpetrated from a distance – did not usually attract a protective or proactive police response. Further, advocates felt that victims’ own senses of fear and perception of danger continued to be minimised or dismissed by police, mainly because the immediacy of stalking threats is by nature unclear and the line between lawful and criminal behaviour in stalking episodes is so often blurred, thereby obfuscating the apparent mandate to address risk. These concerns were particularly prominent when key informants were discussing police responses to stalking-related breaches of protection orders, particularly when perpetrated by distance.

[One] perpetrator was texting the ex about taking his kids off her, and he had like never changed a nappy, spent any time with the child... [but] was texting her all these direct threats, like “I’m going to take the kids”... and she was responding saying “fuck off, because no you are not, and I am the mother, and how dare you” and this cop said “well you are kind of egging him on...” It wasn’t until I stepped in and said “hang on a minute, that is not okay, he is directly telling her that he is going to take those kids. She has got a protection order, [and] you need to do something” [that it was taken seriously]. – Key informant 2

It is like you think you have got away but you haven’t, you know, you think you have got a protection order out... well actually it means jack all. – Key informant 4

Like if I went and said that [there was incessant messaging] to a police officer, and he got in his car and went to talk to the guy, I would be shocked. – Key informant 2

Key informants believed that instead of regarding victims’ accounts as incredulous until victims themselves manage to collate sufficient evidence themselves to be convincing, police should begin with the assumption that women’s accounts of violence – and, relatedly, their level of fear – are credible and should be responded to seriously.

I think we just need to actually take women’s word [when there is a stalking] a complaint, [and acknowledge] that this is happening, and I guess police [need to] have a more proactive approach if that is happening. – Key informant 2

These responses were also undermined by the stalker’s intentional gaslighting of the victims and the advance discrediting of their stories. Telling police or support people that the victim is ‘crazy’ or that she lacks veracity by virtue of alcohol abuse or bad character acted to incite disbelieving responses. If, for example, abusers had called police before the victim, expressing their apparent concern for her mental wellbeing and indicating that she frequently felt persecuted with little reason, or had been suicidal, or had invented malicious rumours, this set the scene for police to then respond to her story with doubt or distrust when she eventually does call the police, not yet knowing that the abuser had been carefully crafting the landscape of this disclosure before she ever makes contact.

[There is] lots of [reputation damage] like emailing people about stories, [like] that she has like hurt the children, [or] that she is psychotic... It is all this absolute chaos and it credits his gaslighting of her, that she isn’t a good person, and that she is a horrible mum because the kids come home and say “you are an asshole” or “you are a bitch for keeping us from dad”...

[Or they say to police] I'm worried about her because she tried to kill herself last week, she has hurt the kids before, she is not as innocent [as you think], you know, she's on drugs.
– Key informant 2

Advocates' frustration with what they perceived as inconsistent police responses was exacerbated by what they perceived as a blaming systems response, which positioned the distress that stalking induced in victims as tantamount to a hysterical and disproportionate gendered response.

I think the woman's voice in our clinical system needs to be heard a lot louder. People don't make up this stuff for fun... but women having a voice and being upset is always seen as just being a vindictive manipulative woman rather than just being [like] "fair enough, you are upset, you have just lived through hell for six years, you are trying to leave and he is making that impossible"... So it is just this constant revolving cycle of women being victimised by our systems. – Key informant 2

Phenomena such as 'revenge porn' can also complicate the reporting process and play a role in this discrediting of victims; in two instances outlined by key informants, stalkers had placed nude photos in places as an implicit threat that if they reported the abuse to police, the police and/or their employers would be sent the explicit images. The humiliation that this understandably induced in victims deterred them from making contact with police; for one of them, she distrusted police not to make the reputation damage worse based on her previous experience with them regarding a similar issue.

Breaches of protection orders were also frequently highlighted by advocates, who expressed frustration with the seemingly high threshold for police to regard these breaches as criminal acts meriting a criminal justice response.

We see breaches all the time of not just POs [protection orders] but also of bail conditions [such as] non-association and curfews [that] they [stalkers] breach [where] they turn up, or they drive by, you know, I have one client who has got a protection order out against her ex-husband and they have a child together, and part of the protection order is not to associate with the child. So it is all supervised access, and he turned up twice to the preschool, and even though she wasn't there, the teachers know [about the order] and [so] the teachers rung her and said "look he has turned up and is watching the child", and then he would take off. So the police would go around and talk to him and give him a bit of a slap on the wrist, and that was it. He wasn't actually been done for a breach, because he said "I had just come to see if he was all right, he had a cold" [because] the little boy had a cold. They [abusers] always have good excuses. – Key informant 4

I have got an older client, so she [has been] a client for probably about three years and they have been separated for two now, and he is still driving past. There is a protection order in place, but it is like, he has been confronted before by police, and he said "well I have got a mate at the end of the road", you know. – Key informant 1

They felt strongly that the reliability with which police upheld breaches was dependent on the individual police officer and the quality of the knowledge held by the local police team.

The feeling I'm getting at the moment, particularly with our family safety team, is if they think that a breach has happened, even if they don't think it is likely to go through to him being convicted, they might still take it forward to give him a clear message which that wasn't happening before. And that has been impressive because, you know, he doesn't know any different... I think it depends on how passionate the police are as to whether they will take it forward or not... Ones who don't care so much don't, but the ones that we are working with at the moment certainly try and give that very clear message, which is really good.
– Key informant 1

Stalkers giving weak excuses to police for why they are in the vicinity of the victim despite the protection order was a primary point of frustration for advocates, who alluded to a lack of true commitment to upholding protection orders and, accordingly, the undermining of their purpose and power.

[He] drives past every day at the same time on his way home from work, which isn't on his way home from work, but that is what he keeps telling the police. – Key informant 3

Finally, advocates often found that abusers circumnavigated the restrictions posed by the protection order by opportunistically questioning acquaintances.

[In one client's case] a friend was dropping her little boy off to the father and he was asking... what is she doing, and why is she with that guy, [had] she got a new boyfriend, and who is it? ... The police said "well look it's not really a breach, your friend didn't have to go and say anything to the client".... and why is he getting away with it [even though] we have got a protection order? – Key informant 4

Importance of a positive experience with police

Although some respondents had found their interactions with police to be positive overall, most of them had felt like police could not effectively assist them to be safe from the stalking, and did not take it seriously (especially in the absence of physical or sexual violence, or explicit threats of violence). As has been repeatedly found elsewhere, accurate defining of stalking by the wider community is integral to developing an effective response (McKeon et al., 2014; Scott, Rajakarunu, Sheridan, & Sleath, 2014). There is plentiful evidence (spanning multiple nations) concluding that police officers are much more likely to categorise it as stalking if the perpetrator is a stranger, and to dismiss or condone stalking by an intimate partner (Quirk, Rosenfield, & O'Connor, 2004; Scott, Lloyd, & Gavin, 2010; Scott et al., 2014; Weller, Hope, & Sheridan, 2013; Pierce & Easta, 1999). As Weller et al. (2013) found, this is even true of police who have specialist training in IPV. Concerningly, intimate stalkers, despite having their stalking commonly regarded as benign, are much more likely to perpetrate violence against their victims than stranger stalkers (McEwan, Mullen, & MacKenzie, 2009; McEwan, Mullen, McKenzie, & Ogloff, 2009), reinforcing the potential for minimising police responses to be harmful to victims. Similarly, respondents felt that their concerns were disregarded because they had been a partner to the stalker, and rarely encountered police who were able to place the individual behaviours into a conceptual understanding of stalking on their behalf.

The reasons for non-reporting of stalking is relatively under-researched. However, Sheridan (2005) surveyed several thousand victims of stalking across 47 different countries, finding that victims usually do not report, principally because they do not feel safe to, they feel it may escalate the stalking or the risk of violence, or because they feel it is pointless to do so. This is entirely consistent with the findings set out here – respondents frequently explained that they did not believe the stalker could be stopped, did not believe the police would be sympathetic to the distress they were feeling as a result of the stalking, and did not anticipate a consequential response that would actually lead to the stalker being held accountable for the stalking. Several outlined how they had come to that conclusion, and this was usually generated through repeated negative encounters, or by hearing about the negative encounters of others. This belief in futility is somewhat justified – victims are more likely to be satisfied with the result of their informal help-seeking, such as from friends and family or confronting the stalker, than they are with the outcomes of reporting to police (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009). Even across different nations and the (sometimes radically) different approaches of police between these, the rate of dissatisfaction with the outcomes of reporting stalking to police remains at about 50 percent (Brewster, 2001; Dunn, 2001; 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Although we did not measure victim satisfaction, this seems consistent with the findings of our study, where just over half of respondents did report to police.

The factors that influence how successfully police address stalking is not well known, and the concealed and subjective nature of stalking and the invisible risk it represents can make it difficult to discern what the police mandate might be in any individual case. (Sheridan & Roberts, 2013). However, a sticking point amongst many respondents was the direction they received to collate their own evidence – a request we would likely not make to victims of categories of crime such as stranger violence, fraud, or theft. Low prosecution rates for complaints of stalking (regardless of whether the victims can define this as such) are not unique to New Zealand – in fact, Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) and Woodruff (2010) examined police cases in the United States and found that most were never even classified as stalking by police, and almost none were ever prosecuted for stalking-related offences. Even more importantly, cases that aren't specifically coded as being stalking generally did not receive any follow up unless there had also been physical violence (Woodruff, 2010), placing victims in considerable risk and forcing them to tolerate disruptive offending without access to any form of recourse. Possible reasons for police reluctance to recognise the centrality of intimate partner stalking as a (very high-risk) form of power and control include the disjuncture between the usual police approach to attending an incident (where immediate safety is paramount and the main priority) (Voerman & Grandt, 2016), and stalking incident reports where danger is difficult to gauge, not usually immediate, and can only be understood within the full context of the relationship.

It is not new or even surprising to find that stalking situations are usually not regarded as serious or high-risk by justice actors (see, for example, Botuck et al., 2009; Brewster, 2001; Jordan et al., 2003; Logan & Cole, 2007; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Logan, Nigoff, Jordan, & Walker, 2002; Logan, Walker, et al., 2009; Miller, 2001a, 2001b; National Center for Victims of Crime, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Weller, Hope, & Sheridan, 2013). This is, presumably, at least in part due to a lack of evident physical harm (Finch, 2001; Spitzberg, 2002b), and to the subjectivity required to interpret stalking from a course of behaviour consisting of individual acts that are not in of themselves illegal. Logan and Walker (2009) comment on the cumulative nature of harm caused by stalking, saying “each incident potentially elicits an effect, making the history and trajectory of incidents greater than the sum of its parts”. Accordingly, research supports the assertion that chronic exposure to abuse has greater inimical impacts than one-off events (Aneshensel, 1992; Classen et al., 2002; Green et al., 2000; Logan, Walker, et al., 2006; Pearlin, 1999a, 1999b). This is particularly relevant to stalking, where each act in the pattern builds on the one before it, and it is this pattern of cumulative harm that appears under-recognised by police officers hearing respondents’ complaints.

In other countries, police have utilised tools to assist their decision-making in stalking offences. Use of these tools has been shown to improve their responses, and to improve police consistency between responses (Baldrige et al., 2012; McEwan et al., 2017; Messing & Thaller, 2013). However, no such instrument appears to be used in New Zealand, and most victims indicated that their fear and distress did not attract a strong police response to the stalking. Plainly, there are opportunities for improvements to police practice, beginning with recognition of the environment-specific nature of stalking, patterns of cumulative harm, and the impacts of stalking on victims. In addition, police (like the rest of the wider community) are susceptible to myths about stalking or about victims of violence more broadly, and these myths are only deconstructed and disestablished with purposeful training. Without addressing these myths specifically, it is easy to default to discussing stalking complaints in ways that minimise, deny, rationalise, or ignore their significance. Language, and the way that we legitimise or delegitimise victims’ voices through our use of it, is therefore the focus of the following section.

Part 4: How We Talk About Stalking

4.1. Lack of understanding about intimate partner stalking

Below, Roimata describes involving the police to try and stop the stalker's constant and intrusive contact attempts.

He threatened to kill me [after separation] but couldn't get a knife to my throat [this time] because I was surrounded by people. For years afterwards he was stalking me and phoning me and driving by and following me to university and following me home and wandering around the university campus which he had nothing to do with. And basically I rang the cops, and the cops turned up and they pulled us apart, had a chat to us, and, you know, in the end the police often came up to me and said to me 'look just give him a phone call, he is going to go but he wants you to give him a phone call', you know, 'just call him and just say hi, that is all he wants'. And I was sitting there going 'you do not fucking get it, it is not what he wants. He wants me under his thumb and you are allowing this to happen'... [Another time] I remember being in the police station absolutely like on edge, losing it, [like] 'I don't know what to do, this guy is frigging nuts, and this is what is going on' and they just said '[get] a trespass order'. They did not say a protection order. I never even knew a protection order existed. – Roimata, research participant.

Police responded to Roimata's call for help from the person who had once held a knife to her throat by implying she was overreacting to a very reasonable request from the stalker that she phone him. This was far from an isolated experience; respondents were immensely frustrated by the apparent acceptance and normalisation of the stalking by the people they disclosed it to. They spoke about the stalking being 'brushed off', or 'swept under the rug', and also of their own internalised depictions of what constituted stalking and who constituted a stalker. Accordingly, they conveyed a desire to see these myths challenged, both amongst the people tasked with responding but also generally within communities.

I feel now as if I was never advised of this being an issue... I was only 16 when this happened and it was to an extremely high level of violent stalking... I feel as though I wasn't educated on this area of toxicity in relationships.

It's not good enough that we 'accept' it. A lot of those who I told kind of brushed it off.

What I went through I would never wish upon anyone... I was mentally abused, emotionally abused, sexually abused where I felt I had to have sex with him to stay alive and be safe. Having him follow me and be in control of every move I made is scary and draining and it's not okay at all.

I think it's very important to get the message out that these situations can happen to anyone. Prior to the relationship, I was an extremely confident and outgoing person with a wide social circle. He was a charming, successful guy from a privileged background. I had a mental stereotype of a stalker as a creepy, weird, social reject - the opposite to him.

Stalking was only one part of his controlling/abusive behaviour. From talking to others after the fact, I believe young women are socialised to believe that this is normal or if not, it's not that bad or it's their fault.

Several touched upon the conflation of stalking with scripts of 'romance'.

I would like it to be taken more seriously by society, it's not just a result of someone who has a broken heart or "romantic" as it's always portrayed in movies. It seems as soon as the word 'stalking' is mentioned people take your grievances less seriously... some even think it's flattering, or that the victim is being hyperbolic because who hasn't had a bad break up. I'd like to see harsher penalties for those who do [stalk].

I never really identified it as stalking for quite a while- you just assume it's kind of normal when you're fresh out of a relationship.

It is sometimes difficult to identify stalking behaviour--sometimes it can be interpreted

as romantic pursuing. Especially as it is usually coupled with some form of psychological abuse.

Families and friends had legitimated the behaviour as (gendered) normative responses to the end of a romantic or sexual relationship, which had the dual effect of implicitly justifying the stalking and thus letting the stalker evade accountability, and preventing respondents from feeling supported to address it.

There needs to be support available for people experiencing this at the lower end of the scale, because without intervention it just escalates. [We need] more [understanding] in the public as to what stalking is, and just how threatening it is. So many people, including friends, brushed off his behaviour or excused it as love, or him being “upset” with no expectation that he should be responsible for his actions. A number of people supported him, and blamed me for ending the relationship (which was also emotionally abusive).

Even more frustratingly, the assumptions that stalking represented ‘romance’ or was normal within romantic partnership clearly shaped responders’ views and, consequently, the preclusion of help.

The policeman I reported the first incident to told me that I had led my ex on - he would collect me from work when we were together, and continued to do this after we broke up. I never asked for this, but accepted when it happened (until this all came to a head). I thought for a long time that it WAS my fault for ‘leading him on’ and not being clear that our relationship was over.

The emotional impacts of the having their realities of stalking dismissed or minimised were also difficult for respondents to manage.

I often felt like my experiences weren’t ‘enough’ - weren’t serious enough to go to the police, weren’t alarming enough for mutual friends to stop being friends with him, weren’t even enough to even be categorised as stalking. It can be hard not to feel invalidated or dismissed when people don’t take it seriously or didn’t think what I was experiencing was a problem.

They advocated for greater education on what constituted stalking or abusive relationship.

Kid, male and female, need educating from a young age about what is normal/healthy in a relationship and what isn’t. I didn’t know.

Young people should be wary of their surroundings and not be afraid to do something about an uncomfortable situation. [As with] the case of my spouse, people need to know when something stops being caring and starts becoming stalker behaviour or abuse.

I didn’t really understand at the time that it was stalking. I think teenagers need more information about what to do and what isn’t appropriate in a relationship.

I think the more information women have about abusive relationships, including stalking, the better placed they are to deal with it. It took me too long to recognise how abusive his behaviour was, because he was often so adoring and apologetic about the abuse. I didn’t know how to recognise the signs.

I think that until there is a social shift in the way stalking behaviour is viewed, not much will change.

In fact, some had not recognised examples of stalking in their own lives until answering the survey.

The specific behaviours outlined in this survey made me realise that my ex-partner (mentioned in this survey) also displayed stalking behaviour. This was evident when the abuse grew stronger and toward the end of our relationship. I wouldn’t have considered these behaviours as stalking until now.

I did not know it was stalking when it was happening. I thought that it was just him wanting to get me back or being a “friend” - that’s just what guys who were persistent did. Looking back it escalated over a period of time and I didn’t recognise being younger how dangerous the whole relationship and situation was.

They believed that widespread lack of understanding, including amongst the systems charged with protecting their safety, contributed to the perpetuation of risk and the responsibility that they were forced to carry as they attempted to educate helpers and law enforcement agencies about the nature of the abuse and its ramifications on their lives.

It is really a very sad state of affairs that as victims my daughter and I carry all the consequences and cannot live as we want, whereas the perpetrator has no consequences.

It feels like a hidden crime. [Stalking] is hard to get evidence for... especially when my social media and email accounts were hacked so he could see even things I had deleted years before, [and] I felt like there was nothing I could do to stop it. The worst things were the constant threats to ruin my life - my work, my kids, my friends. It made me stressed, depressed and suicidal. It was almost a relief when he tried to strangle me as then I felt I was able to finally do something about it.

As is illustrated above, the far-reaching impacts of this lack of understanding had crippling consequences – victims were unable to sufficiently evidence the abuse in order for decisive action to protect their safety to be taken, and managing the impacts on every arena of their lives – such as their employment, their social and family relationships, and their finances – became overwhelming, at times to the point of suicide.

He bombarded me with texts and Facebook messages. I blocked him on these, so he would leave long handwritten letters and gifts in my locker at work. He used work connections to access my roster. He harassed friends for information on me, and used other people's Facebook accounts to check my profile. He came to my house uninvited, and hung out in the carpark at my work to intercept me. His demeanour was mostly "affectionate" - in a threatening and controlling way. He claimed (to me and others) that he couldn't control his behaviour because he was "in love".

The narrative of supposed love and the apparent desire for romantic partnership also insulated many stalkers from facing social judgement for their actions; instead, their behaviour was excused as 'lovesick' and mutual friends were often recruited to assist in their continued campaign for reunification despite victims making their discomfort with the aggressive affection apparent.

4.2. Minimising

Having the stalking minimised by others left respondents wondering whether perhaps they were overreacting, had misread the danger, or should simply tolerate the stalking and continue with their lives without it being addressed.

I got a few counselling sessions which were helpful, but was unable to find free help at the time which prevented me from getting the help I needed as I didn't want to spend money on the problem. I had a few family members that knew, and they were helpful, but I don't think they understood the significance which was difficult.

I asked police what to do, they said I had no rights because I had allowed him certain privileges such as using my phone etc (which I didn't). They didn't take it seriously and told me to get counselling if I was struggling.

Police, friends, family. Friends were almost non-existent and said they were too busy to help. Family were in a different city and didn't really believe me (I guess because our problems had been so well hidden). Police did help to a point, but he didn't care and kept stalking and harassing me anyway. I didn't know any other services to access. And I felt too ashamed to ask, or like my problems weren't severe enough to get help.

I mostly kept it to myself. People don't want to be bothered with what to them look like over reacting.

Respondents who were stalked by women felt their experiences would be downplayed as they were perceived as less dangerous or less likely to be part of a cycle of violence.

None. I feel I would have had support or access to resources had it been a male-female/heterosexual stalking situation, rather than female-female/same sex stalking.

Downplaying of stalking experiences, or implicit suggestions that the blame for stalking should be mutually assigned, reinforced victims' own uncertainty about the stalking behaviour being a criminal act and one that is worthy of help and support. It also prevents further help-seeking – respondents who had contacted police or other services in an attempt to get them to take their perception of danger seriously commented that they “never would again” and “next time I wouldn’t bother to call”. In some cases, the stalking became progressively more intrusive and culminated in sexual or physical assault, after which the police became involved. However, because the victims' initial complaints had been dismissed, they had not thought to log unwanted contact prior to the assault, and so criminal charges focused only on the episode that was attended by police rather than on the previous, and serious, pattern of stalking violence.

4.3. Making the stalker stop stalking

A general lack of awareness about stalking, an understanding of its dynamics, and a tendency to minimise the experiences of victims of partner stalking ultimately result in systemic inertia, where effective help is unavailable and the sole weight of the burden of safety falls on the victim. The help-seeking processes discussed in Parts 3, 5, and 6 highlight the extent to which the onus for halting the stalkers' abuse fell unequivocally with the victims of the stalking. However, the expectation that victims would be able to identify future and further risk and do all of the planning and execution of safety strategies was unrealistic and restricted victims from actually accessing the help they needed. Respondents were not usually aware of how “the system” worked to keep them safe and what agencies, services, and legal avenues they could access until well after an episode of violence. Accordingly, they named this expectation that they would be able to identify and communicate their needs at the time of reporting to police, or even be able to fully articulate all of the relevant aspects of the stalking situation, as prohibitive to being connected with the services or strategies that would actually support their safety and their wellbeing.

I was too afraid to ask anyone for help. I needed the help to be connected to me, not the other way around.

[I wanted] more follow up from the police (as during the relationship, there was physical abuse and the police were called). The police did not do anything for me and did not investigate further when I was clearly in a [vulnerable] position [and] seeking help.

[I would have liked] advice from the police regarding what I could do as I was in shock when I had to press charges against him.

Respondents felt that they would have felt safer and coped better if the onus for making the stalker stop rested with police or other agencies rather than with them, and talked about the additional mental load of having to do their own investigation and monitoring to keep themselves safe.

[I would have liked] some help with preventing the stalking that didn't involve changing all of my contact details and behaviours.

[I wish there had been] support more focused on getting him away from me, rather than me having to abandon aspects of my own life to get away from him.

[I would have liked] reassurance that there is a process to follow to have this stalking monitored. I don't think there are any such processes in place, but I feel that they would have helped my piece of mind. I would like someone else to monitor his online activity so that I don't have to be reporting stuff.

Even when police processes were positively instrumentalised, meaningful progress toward the stalker stopping was almost always the result of protection orders (usually preceded by victims taking lengthy and often onerous records of the stalking first), or by police officers giving stalkers a ‘talking to’. Obviously, there were many respondents for whom informal police strategies did not prevent further violence, or who did not feel confident in asking for them to be used or did not know that this was a possibility. Conversely,

some requested this from police and felt that unlike when they contacted the stalker directly, requests from the police that the stalker stop their behaviour were likely to be taken seriously.

I sought support from the police, my Women's Refuge case worker, friends and family. I wrote an e-mail and got a policeman to read it out to him face to face, making it very clear that I no longer wanted to hear from him.

This same respondent, however, still received unwanted contact (though to a lesser degree) after the police's delivery of her request to cease contact. She ended up having to limit her own digital presence to reduce his window of opportunity to contact her, without any real alternative option that could force him to stop.

He still sent me e-mails. He set up new Facebook accounts... to follow/stalk me as well. We used to communicate via Snapchat when we were still together, but I deleted the App.

Others had similarly engaged their family members or friends to act as this third-party messenger, knowing that the stalker would not take victims' requests seriously but may listen to others.

I'd had an appalling response from the police to a previous domestic violence incident, so I didn't bother contacting them. I knew the stalker's brother and when the stalking got really bad I would sometimes ask him if he could have a word with his brother. That worked for a while, but then it would start up again. Eventually the stalker started denying to his brother that it was him doing it to me, and his brother just believed him. I think he was just sick of it to be honest, as I was.

I sought support from my whanau, they gave me support and guidance. One of my cousins rung him and had a very frank and stern korero [conversation] with him. My cousin let him know that he needed to stop and [that] if he didn't we would go to the police.

As these respondents' comments illustrate, relying on other people to communicate a message about the behaviour being criminal and unacceptable was not always a reliable, and was contingent upon a shared and clear understanding of what constituted stalking behaviour. When these third-party messengers wholly or partially subscribed to myths about the nature of stalking (such as that victims lie) it becomes even more ineffective. This was reinforced by a lack of clarity of the definition of stalking – being unable to label it as stalking made it much more difficult to explain it to others in a way that would be understood as important, unacceptable, and illegal.

I confided in one flatmate, but I didn't really know at the time what options were available to me - I didn't at the time really realize that what was happening met the definition of "stalking".

I didn't identify it as stalking but just felt intimidated and scared. I told family and friends.

Without this shared clear definition, people who were considered safe to disclose to but who lacked an understanding of the significance of this pattern of behaviour were often still not equipped to advise victims or to facilitate their access to helping services, to police, or to legal forms of protection. Finally, they emphasised how unfair it was that they were perpetually positioned as being responsible for taking steps to stop the stalking – despite being the victims of the crime, and often lacking the social capital that would be required to navigate the systems who held the power to force the stalker to stop stalking.

I think it shouldn't be up to the person being stalked to put a stop to this behaviour, I think the stalker should be required to get help.

This unrealistic expectation of victims is reflective of a general, society-wide lack of understanding of intimate partner violence, and consequent lack of will to proactively address it. Using accurate and appropriate language, situated within IPV-informed frameworks of understanding, is therefore key to creating a better response to victims.

4.4. Stalking myths

As we can see throughout all of these accounts by respondents, language is inherently powerful – it can validate or deny victims' experiences. Responses that do not treat complaints of stalking behaviours (although these are rarely named as stalking from the outset) deny their realities and invalidate their distress. If the wider community lacks a robust understanding of what stalking is, who it happens to, and how it is perpetrated, it is unlikely that any victims will have a straightforward and cohesive pathway to the support and intervention that they need (Scott, Rajakarunu, Sheridan, & Sleath, 2014). As we can identify in their accounts of trying to communicate the pervasive impacts of stalking to police or to their social networks, victims' fear is often passed off as a disproportionate response – one that is either illegitimate in a setting where they have not (yet) actually been subjected to physical violent or overt threat, or one that is an overreaction to previous violence and ongoing (presumably subdued) contact from the person who used violence against them. However, given the oft-stated association between stalking and increased risk of homicide, severe violence, and other crimes such as sexual violence and property damage (Logan & Walker, 2010; Logan, Walker, & Hoyt, 2012; Logan, Walker, et al., 2006), victims' fear is far from baseless.

There have been numerous research projects into how people (and particularly police) arrive at judgements about whether stalking is illegal and harmful, which have universally identified tendencies to minimise ex-intimate stalking and to rationalise stalking behaviour by partners as somehow more permissible and harmless (Quirk, Rosenfield, & O'Connor, 2004; Scott, Lloyd, & Gavin, 2010; Scott et al., 2014; Weller, Hope, & Sheridan, 2013). This discrepant perception contrasts sharply with the equally robust body of evidence concluding that current or ex-partner stalkers are more likely to use severe physical violence against their victims than stranger stalkers (McEwan, Mullen, & MacKenzie, 2009; McEwan, Mullen, McKenzie, & Ogloff, 2009).

One explanation for the tendency to deny, minimise, rationalise, or exclude stalking behaviour that is perpetrated by current or ex-partners is the social sanctioning of stalking-related schemas. Schemas, or mental representations, are shaped by inaccurate beliefs about acceptable relationship behaviour, normative gendered behaviour, and expectations of victimhood (Copson & Marshall, 2002; Yanowitz, 2006). These beliefs then form the basis for assumptions and stereotypes that do not marry up with the realities of stalking; such as that it is misplaced affection, that victims invite it, that it must mean victims have not made their wishes clear, that victims lie about or exaggerate stalking, or that showing distress must mean they are paranoid or overly dramatic. These beliefs also provided a ready rationale for respondents' stalkers to use to justify their stalking to themselves, and for people who knew the stalkers to pass it off as simply "being in love". Additionally, these beliefs can be internalised by victims themselves, as their comments about "romantic pursuing" and about not knowing it was stalking demonstrate. Using similar scenarios, Kamphius et al. (2005) and DeFazio and Galeazzi (2004) tested the idea of stalking schemas, and found that people generally hold multiple and intersection schemas about victims' experiences, and that these were particularly manifest where stalking was subtle, subjective, and insidious rather than overt. For example, Yanowitz and Yanowitz (2012) discovered that when they asked their participants to script stalking patterns, they typically relegated behaviour such as frequent contact, following, and leaving tokens as 'romantic' and only scripted obviously malicious actions as stalking.

Men are more likely to subscribe to stalking myths (McKeon et al., 2015), and strong adherence to stalking myths predicts the judgement of stalkers as 'not guilty'. These are perpetuated through popular media, which portrays stalking as rare, relatively overt, and perpetrated by mentally unwell strangers (Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002). These schemas are influential in shaping people's propensity to attribute blame and evaluate severity (Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld, & O'Connor, 2004; Scott, Lloyd, & Gavin, 2010; Scott & Sheridan, 2011). Although drawing from respondents' accounts of the responses they received, rather than from the responders' directly, we have identified a number of stalking myths (derived from problematic schemas) that appear to have influenced the ways that people have responded to respondents' disclosures or reports of stalking.

"He just contacts you out of love."

One of the most prevalent myths pervading supporters' and first responders' responses to victims is the belief that when stalkers (usually men) stalk victims (usually women) during a relationship or after breakup, it is out of love. Some respondents reflected that they too thought this, at least in the beginning. Tracking whereabouts was passed off as caring concern, and jealousy was initially perceived as commitment and evidence of emotional investment. Usually, this was stalking that involved using apps or access to victims' personal accounts to monitor their activities, see where they were, and check who they had been

communicating with. As their understanding of stalkers' desire to control and restrict their lives evolved, these evolving analyses were usually not reflected in the responses from the people they told about the stalking, creating a tension of beliefs where the full reality of their experiences jarred with the perceptions of others. Post-separation, this began to manifest more through intrusive contact (such as countless text messages and phone calls), symbolic threat (such as frequent drive-bys, leaving personalised tokens, and access to the victim's property or belongings), which continued to be interpreted by many respondents' supporters or by police as indicative of the stalker's intense romantic feelings for the victim. Compliments and affectionate messages were especially difficult to explain the significance of, despite being implicitly threatening against a backdrop of violence. This myth centres on beliefs about 'romantic pursuit' somehow nullifying the power and coercion that characterises intimate partner stalking.

"His anger is just romantic jealousy."

Even if intrusive contact and forced access to parts of the victim's life could be explained away as 'romantic pursuit', outbursts of rage or resentment catalysed by discrete trigger events, such as the victim communicating with people the stalker disapproves of, the victim leaving, the victim disclosing or reporting the stalking, or the victim re-partnering, are highly reflective of their sense of ownership and possession over victims. Demonstrating intense anger at these perceived transgressions by the victim and responding in ways that are fuelled by revenge or the need to punish the victim for disobeying/deserting the (believed superior) partner is often constructed as a response to being 'lovesick' or 'heartbroken'. The people victims disclosed to sometimes regarded it as serious or as a potentially high-risk situation, but troublingly often, they responded in ways that consigned this possessiveness or aggression as illustrative of the stalker's 'romantic' and lifelong commitment to the victim. This was particularly acute for victims whose social support network regarded the stalker as a 'good guy'. Escalating aggression was then passed off as 'romantic jealousy', where the stalker was simply driven to extreme lengths by love and heartbreak and would cease the behaviour if the victim would just agree to 'try again'.

"It'll go away if you don't feed the fire."

The myth of 'feeding the fire' by responding to contact or maintaining a social media presence was ubiquitous throughout victims' accounts of the help they received and the advice they attracted from support people. Unlike petty crime, stalking is not a course of action where victims are interchangeable or easily deterred (as is made patently evident in Part 1.4). Removing 'provocation' by not responding to contact attempts, removing social media visibility, and withdrawing from social settings where information may be passed on to stalkers does not effectively deter them from the stalking cycle, but may encourage them to resort to increasingly unpredictable (and sometimes more serious) means of contact or monitoring. This myth of victim responsibility in removing perceived provocation can be harmful. Telling victims not to engage, or to change their usual level of social immersion, has little positive impact on disrupting the stalking pattern, but can have significant impacts on their sense of connectedness and their precarity to new stalking methods.

"The hysterical/paranoid woman."

Some respondents described being perceived as mental unwell when they tried to communicate the extent of the stalking to their support people or to police. In the most extreme examples, they were asked by police whether they had recently had their mental health assessed or whether they would think about seeing a doctor. Stalkers capitalised on this and reminded victims that they could invalidate their stories by insinuating that they were 'crazy'. Even those who had had frequent contact with police or specialist family violence services were questioned about the potential for them to be misinterpreting benign actions after becoming 'paranoid' as a result of past harm. Historically, the suggestion that women disclosing abuse must be crazy, paranoid, or hysterical has served to deny and suppress their experiences of abuse (particularly that which has occurred in the private sphere); stalking myths adhered to by first responders and support people appears no different.

"If it was that bad, victims would call Police."

Technically victims can call the police, but often don't, for a variety of valid reasons. It is expected that this will be straightforward, comfortable, and imminently lead to safer outcomes. In reality, victims who have experienced prolonged or subtle stalking have usually encountered dismissive or minimising responses, which discourages them from further help-seeking and makes them believe that to report the stalking would be futile (especially in the absence of concrete and compelling evidence). The majority of those that did report did not experience a positive outcome, and many found that reporting made things worse.

Deconstructing stalking myths

There are considerable parallels to be drawn between these ‘stalking myths’ (e.g. socially sanctioned beliefs that ‘real’ stalking is perpetrated by strangers and that ex-partner stalking is a romantic attempt at reconciliation) to the much-discussed and vehemently debunked ‘rape myths’ that have been the subject of feminist-led law reform and law enforcement development. Historically, prosecution of rape and other sexual assaults has been made difficult by the tendency of people (and particularly police) to more readily accept stories of stranger rape than partner rape, and to situate blame for sexual violence that is perpetrated by a partner against the victim instead for somehow inviting it (Jordan, 2001). Rape myth acceptance has been identified as arising in part from a ‘just world’ belief, or the belief that the world is fair and that bad things such as rape and violence happen because of bad behaviour or bad judgement, rather than being randomly perpetrated (Lerner & Miller, 1978). To accept that violence and other traumatic or distressing events can be randomly perpetrated or distributed is threatening to this belief, so people rationalise it as being somehow caused by the victim, thus reassuring themselves that they are safe from similar experiences (Lerner & Miller, 1978). This, however, has the tendency to attenuate blame toward the perpetrator and mistakenly direct it at the victim instead, for somehow inviting the event.

This “just world” hypothesis may account for much of the differential belief accorded to victims of stranger stalking in comparison to victims of ex-partner stalking. Scott and Sheridan (2011) suggest that there is a shared perception of ex-partners being entitled to stalk their victims, or that it may be considered justified by the fact that there was previously a relationship – evidence of the fundamental attribution error that causes blame to be redirected to the victim. This differential consideration of entitlement to stalk is identifiable amongst studies where the relationship in experiments is manipulated. Weller, Hope, and Sheridan (2013) presented a sample of both police officers and members of the community with the same scenario, but with some denoting an ex-partner stalker and some describing a stranger stalker. As anticipated, both police and the community participants were more likely to classify the scenario with a stranger stalker as meeting the criminal threshold for stalking, while being much less likely to similarly recognise the criminality of the ex-partner stalker scenario. Interestingly, this was true even of police officers who had previously encountered multiple instances of stalking by ex-partners, indicating that the strength of these beliefs supersedes even contradictory real-life experience (Weller et al., 2013). However, equally importantly, they also found that manipulating the nature of the relationship demonstrated no change in the assessment of risk, which is significantly divergent to previous research, and suggests that the capacity to professionally assess risk may be developed through repeated exposure and confrontation of stereotypes (Weller et al., 2013). Without an intentional approach to stalking in New Zealand, it is inconceivable that the opportunity to deconstruct beliefs (within police, but also within the wider community) would have been afforded here. It is therefore paramount that training specifically addresses conceptualisation of stalking scenarios. This needs to challenge assumptions about who it happens to, who perpetrates it, how it is perpetrated, and what risks, impacts, and outcomes arise from it. Once developed, this should be embedded for all first responders. At the same time, we must challenge societally-held stereotypes and media representation of intimate partner stalking.

Part 5. Legislative Context and Judicial Responses

I had to go [to police] and because it is deemed a protection order breach go into the police [station] and that. I have been through this time and time again, but [the issue] is the police can't do anything. It is just like me having to find a line in the sand as what is too much for me, to proceed with pressing charges and the context that we are now in. Things like LinkedIn - there is no legal precedent, or they don't really know what is deemed a breach of a protection order. Social media is a whole grey line and I'm kind of like the guinea pig in that. It is obviously hugely distressing. It will affect me, it brings back everything. I'll end up having nightmares. It affects my work, it affects my relationships, and then the response [from Police is that] you spend a couple of hours in the police station and they can't do anything... So they contacted him, and his justification was [that] it is a social networking site. So proceeding [with charges] with regards to getting some form of motive [established], I don't know, and again for me having gone through that whole process I don't think that legal process took a toll on him, but it certainly did on me... [And now] my discussions with the police are literally just 'wait until it happens again, screen shot it, and once we've got a case we'll try it', but that again is [unrealistic].

And there are pros and cons of going through that system. So obviously the cons are the mental distress that causes you the re-triggering and re-traumatisation. The practical demands of having to like take care of that administration stuff [like] that going into the police station, taking time out to do that, and what is the upside? The hope that eventually there will be a penalty in place to him and that will force him not to contact you anymore? Thankfully I [had] recorded him threatening to kill me as I mentioned before. If I hadn't had done that, I don't think I wouldn't have got through everything. You hear in the media about people's experiences of going through court, and then actually having gone through it myself, I just couldn't believe how dehumanising the whole process was for a victim.

I remember the lawyer challenging me on stupid things, like dates, and I got to the point where I was so frustrated, it was like 'I don't remember the date from that day. I remember trying to survive.' Like those kind of factors are irrelevant to me in the scheme of things. I got to the actual day of the trial, and as I mentioned, I had been through multiple hurdles before that with regards to getting a protection order through, because he contested that. He made me go to court [for it by contesting it] but didn't turn up, so [contesting it was] just to waste my time and my money. He didn't even turn up. So it is just [him] making the process as difficult as possible, and as expensive as possible for me. So [we ended up] in court for male assaults and threatening to kill, and he got off with community service. – Clare, research participant.

5.1. Introduction to New Zealand's legislative framework

Unlike many other jurisdictions, New Zealand legislation does not contain a standalone offence of 'stalking'. Further, stalking has no explicit mention in the Family Violence Act 2018 (previously the Domestic Violence Act 1995) unlike some jurisdictions such as New South Wales, where stalking is an offence under the family violence legislation. In contrast, both the United States and United Kingdom have introduced legislation to curb stalking violence, with the U.K using a multi-tiered law, with tiers used depending on whether stalking induced a fear of violence or resulted in serious distress (U.K. Crown Prosecution Service, 2018).

Stalking offences are sometimes prosecuted in New Zealand using the Harassment Act 1997 (New Zealand Legislation, 2017), which defines harassment as being the perpetration of at least two harassing acts (such as following, accosting, or interfering with property) that would cause a reasonable person distress within a twelve-month period. In other words, the individual behaviours that collectively amount to stalking are not criminal acts in and of themselves, but technically constitute harassment when they are repetitive, distressing, and represent attempts to control, surveil, or intimidate the victim. However, despite being drafted to satisfy the perceived gap in anti-stalking legislation (Mountfort, 2001), it is rarely employed for domestic violence-related stalking activities. Perpetrators may also be prosecuted under related offences that are included in their stalking behaviour, including theft; identity theft; property damage; illegal entry to a house or car; physical assaults including hitting, slapping, or strangling; misuse of a weapon; and sexual assault.

New Zealand was slower than most jurisdictions to enact any legislation regarding stalking and introduced the Harassment Act in 1997. Similar to both Canada's (1993) and the UK's (1997) harassment legislation, it prohibits harassment intended to cause an individual to fear for their own or family members' safety (or that

would cause a ‘reasonable person’ to have this fear). While not explicitly referencing stalking, it reflects similar anti-stalking laws elsewhere. Moreover, the ‘pattern of behaviour’ requirement, and the expansion of the definition to include harassment of family members, suggest that it is rooted in domestic violence-motivated origins (Mullen et al., 2006). Below are two sections of the Harassment Act 1997: s3 (‘Meaning of harassment’) and s8 (‘Criminal harassment’).

3 Meaning of harassment

- (1) For the purposes of this Act, a person harasses another person if he or she engages in a pattern of behaviour that is directed against that other person, being a pattern of behaviour that includes doing any specified act to the other person on at least 2 separate occasions within a period of 12 months.
- (2) To avoid any doubt,—
 - (a) the specified acts required for the purposes of subsection (1) may be the same type of specified act on each separate occasion, or different types of specified acts;
 - (b) the specified acts need not be done to the same person on each separate occasion, as long as the pattern of behaviour is directed against the same person.
- (3) For the purposes of this Act, a person also harasses another person if—
 - (a) he or she engages in a pattern of behaviour that is directed against that other person; and
 - (b) that pattern of behaviour includes doing any specified act to the other person that is one continuing act carried out over any period.
- (4) For the purposes of subsection (3), **continuing act** includes a specified act done on any one occasion that continues to have effect over a protracted period (for example, where offensive material about a person is placed in any electronic media and remains there for a protracted period).

Section 3(3): inserted, on 3 July 2015, by [section 32](#) of the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 (2015 No 63).

Section 3(4): inserted, on 3 July 2015, by [section 32](#) of the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 (2015 No 63).

8 Criminal harassment

- (1) Every person commits an offence who harasses another person in any case where—
 - (a) the first-mentioned person intends that harassment to cause that other person to fear for—
 - (i) that other person’s safety; or
 - (ii) the safety of any person with whom that other person is in a family relationship; or
 - (b) the first-mentioned person knows that the harassment is likely to cause the other person, given his or her particular circumstances, to reasonably fear for—
 - (i) that other person’s safety; or
 - (ii) the safety of any person with whom that other person is in a family relationship.
- (2) Every person who commits an offence against this section is liable, on conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years.

Section 8(2): amended, on 1 July 2013, by [section 413](#) of the Criminal Procedure Act 2011 (2011 No 81).

As encapsulated in these sections, the sequence of acts rather than individual acts is emphasised in the meaning, and there is a clear requirement for the victim to fear for their safety before stalking becomes a criminal act. In addition, some digitally-perpetrated stalking offences are prosecuted under the Harmful Digital Communications Act (HDCA) 2015, which was created in part to bridge the legislative gap of digitally-perpetrated abuse. However, as set out in the table below, there are few offences each year that result in court action. This would suggest that the HDCA shows little efficacy in the absence of broader policy traction regarding stalking.

Table 3. Number of Proceedings under the Harmful Digital Communication Act for ‘causing harm by posting digital communication’ offences where an intimate relationship existed.

		Aug- Dec 2015	2016	2017	2018	Jan-May 2019
Partner	Court Action	0	4	3	2	5
	Warning (Formal and Informal)	0	1	0	1	2
Boy/Girlfriend	Court Action	1	1	13	7	1
	Warning (Formal and Informal)	0	3	1	3	0
	Subtotal	1	9	17	13	8
Ex-Partner	Court Action	1	3	1	3	2
	Warning (Formal and Informal)	0	0	1	1	0
Ex-Boy/Girlfriend	Court Action	6	34	34	33	19
	Other Methods of Proceeding	0	1	6	1	4
	Warning (Formal and Informal)	1	10	14	29	3
	Subtotal	8	48	56	67	28
Total		9	57	73	80	36

5.2. Addressing stalking through criminal or family court

When we split up and all the rest of it, I ended up [leaving], Women's Refuge helped me to work out how I could do this, and I stayed in the same house, but he would drive pass all night every night. He broke into the house at one stage and I called the police and they came and they found him. But everything that he did he went to the line and not over the line. So that made it hard. But we couldn't go anywhere [without him knowing] and he would know and he would text constantly. I blocked the number, he would Facebook stuff, you know, I blocked all that, but there was always a way that he found round it, because he had another alias person that he would contact on.

And from my daughter's point of view, I mean if she went to school, well she did go to school [but] she couldn't stand outside the school or hang round anywhere, because he would find her and yell and scream at her going past in the vehicle and all sorts of stuff, calling her names. [He] contacted how many of her friends, and spread all sorts of rumours, and this was all after we broke up. And yeah it just got worse and worse and worse, until this day. At the end I tried to get a protection order and went through with Women's Refuge to do that, but it was hard to get one and in the end I didn't get one. – Taylor, research participant.

Respondents' experiences

As set out above in relation to police responses to reports of stalking, protection orders offered a mechanism to promote safety for respondents. However, while these are targeted specifically at victims of intimate partner violence and are intended to cover a broad range of tactics used by abusers, respondents' experiences of considering, applying for, and reporting breaches of protection orders suggest that this is not always a reliable of safety, and that the subjectivity with which they are considered and subsequent variation in how they are upheld limit their effectiveness. Similarly, it was common for victims to be reassured by bail conditions that prohibited contact, only to find that these conditions meant little in reality and that stalkers on bail were able to contact them while rarely facing sanctions for this in criminal court.

It was the Court system that let me down, [such as through] bail conditions [that] were unenforceable, e.g [saying] "no access to [the] internet." He would be given a slap on the wrist, e.g "if you continue to do this you'll be in serious trouble"... which of course never happened the next time [either].

I obtained a parenting order through the family court. It was really difficult to get. Then I called the police every time he breached it. He was occasionally charged. He often didn't leave enough evidence. Every few years he received a conviction, but always got given a suspended sentence, then just enough time would lapse between convictions for him to never receive any actual jail time.

[I wanted] a more severe stance taken by the courts early on. The amount of chances given [to perpetrators] is incredibly disheartening and deflating.

My mother was my support. Although she didn't want me taking legal action as [she] was worried [about] any repercussions, I went to the family court and got a supportive lawyer after the stalking turned violent and got an emergency protection order that afternoon.

It was common for respondents to describe incidents where even if they had a protection order against the stalker, this was not either not followed up by police or not upheld by the court.

The offender was not remanded in custody until there had been a large number of serious protection order breaches. This was devastating to me.

I had a protection order, [but] police [just] warned him and [then] dropped the charges.

After about 6-9 months of harassment I felt like I either needed medication or a protection order (which my family lawyer had mentioned was something to consider). I chose the protection order. But even with it police didn't seem inclined or empowered to take action. It really knocked my faith in the police (and made me cynical about posters recommending people seek help from the police).

[A] protection order was already in place due to strangulation and [him] threatening to kill [me]. Police will call and give a warning as [he is] breaching [the] protection order, but that is all.

In these circumstances, respondents often considered police and the family court to be inter-related and mutually problematic. Additionally, respondents' reports of comments made by judges and other justice system actors illustrate the continued and pervasive adherence to outdated myths about women's disclosures of violence.

I attempted to raise the issue while going through family court. I was totally dismissed and made the perpetrator of issues because I "was overreacting, fabricating and unstable".

[I would like to see] quicker action on the repeated breaches of the protection order... [and] being believed - there were so many serious breaches, and [they dismissed it as me being] a silly hysterical woman.

Each time I [reported to police] I was made out to be a catty person who was trying to keep the kids away from him and then I would be told to grow up.

With subversive stalking behaviours, it's not like you can really go to the Police. I have been to them in the past to seek out a protection order and the entire process was a total joke; namely that a protection order can't be granted 'easily' unless 'there is physical contact' - i.e. go ahead and get murdered first and then we will give you a protection order. Having been through the family courts for the protection order (and ultimately ending up with only an Undertaking), I had next to no faith in the Police being able to do anything of meaning so I never considered it an option.

I got a protection order and a trespass notice but despite him breaching both and the police being called numerous times, the police did nothing to stop him.

Police talked to him, but didn't charge [him] with [a] protection order breach.

[He] was charged for breach of protection order... But only after many breaches.

The substantial cost involved with pursuing the application for a protection order when it is defended and goes to a hearing was also prohibitive, especially when the person against whom the order was applied for had greater access to economic means than the victim. This represented a significant double bind for victims – if the police refused to take any protective or law enforcement action unless there was a protection order,

but the access to the machinery of family court (including protection orders and parenting orders) is too cost prohibitive to be realistically sustained, victims who are high-risk but cannot afford ongoing legal costs have no access to safety, regardless of the severity of abuse and the continued threat against them.

[I] went to the police, but was told until I went to family court they couldn't help. In the end I did. I was given a protection then order. But then he contested it. He's a lawyer. Trying to keep it cost me over \$50k in fees and it didn't even get to a hearing. He blackmailed me with my daughter. I gave up and accepted undertakings. I have no protection from him now.

He was clever about using words and phrases that I would find threatening but didn't necessarily read like threats to an outsider, [so] evidence was difficult. [I] was advised that I could apply for a protection order, but it would be expensive.

[I would like] a lot more active help from the family court... they were useless and [it] cost a lot of money for a protection order, which wasn't awarded as he was there and so able to lie, and I didn't want to be anywhere near him as didn't feel safe.

[I want] it to be easier to get and keep a protection order, he kept contesting it [and] I didn't have enough money to keep going through court.

Protection orders were often perceived as requiring the abuse to meet an unrealistically high threshold, meaning that violence that was subtle, happened in private, or where the level of threat was apparent only to the victim, respondents found them to be unattainable.

A lower threshold for what is considered harmful behaviour [is needed]. [At the moment it] seems it's more about me tolerating a lot, successive, and frequent forms of stalking to build a case before anything further can be done.

I contacted Taupo Police where I lived at the time, who were supportive. I sought a protection order from the court, which the court denied.

The process of application was also daunting; it required navigation of numerous bureaucratic barriers and the tedious compilation of 'evidence', which was difficult for victims whose principal concern was surviving daily life in the aftermath (or in the present) of abuse or trauma, and which necessarily involved continuous emotional engagement with memories of the abuse.

When I went to court, we both had to wait outside the courtroom together. I'd like to see more protection in that instance. I found the process of a protection order quite hard. I really felt like giving up. It's also blimmin expensive! I'd like to see it free no matter the amount someone earns. [And then] when he broke the trespass order nothing happened, he carried on stalking me.

I was told to do it myself and I just wasn't in the head space to do it... [It's a] bit hard for the victim to be the authority in this situation.

Several also believed that the illusion of the stalker as a charismatic, articulate, and well-intentioned person permeated the decision-makers who decided whether protection was merited, and that the stalker was able to use this falsely projected image to deter court orders from being made and enforced.

I got a protection order which lasted three months and after that, he decided to fight it in court. So, I had to appear in court, where he told the judge he felt like a father to my daughter (bullshit), and that he had only wanted to give her and me a present. The judge believed him.

I felt that the police were trying to support me, but it didn't take long before I knew there was just no way anything was really going to happen to my abuser: a polite, educated, white, mild-looking, affluent, master manipulator of a dude. I wish that protection orders were more easily attainable - that police could do more with less evidence.

The negotiation of parenting arrangements, especially when day-to-day care and access is dictated by parenting or other orders, was a source of vulnerability – access to the victim under the guide of ‘talking about the children’ was common, as were their reports of stalkers using pick-up and drop-off of children as opportunities to further perpetrate stalking violence (such as by leaving notes, putting listening devices in the car, or pressing the children to give details about the primary victim’s whereabouts).

[There needs to be] stronger enforcement of protection orders, particularly around parenting orders and who can contact [the victim] and when.

People’s kneejerk reaction is to tell you to cut off all contact with the person but that’s impossible when you are co-parenting and need to know that your child is going to be safe with them.

Respondents also spoke of protection orders as being ‘toothless’, and generally viewed the equation of them with safety as illusory – a form of ‘safety’ that was much touted by police, social workers, and court actors as necessary and effective, but which rarely worked as intended and which rely on a uniform and rapid response across and between agencies enforcing them.

While he was not violent, I was very vulnerable at the time, especially with a young daughter and when I think of the years of fear he caused me (I would shake if I ever saw him in public). I hope there is more robust support [for others]... than a toothless protection order.

Appropriate consequences for repeat offenders are necessary... [which means having] legislation that supports harsher penalties for stalking, harassment, psychological abuse and harm and more recognition of the harmful effects of those [types of abuse].

A common source of frustration was the implicit messages that were given to perpetrators through the failure to act on minor breaches or persistent stalking when a protection order had been granted, or the messages they felt the stalker would interpret from declined protection orders.

It’s so frightening and for me it’s ongoing as the police don’t address every bail breach, so it makes him feel he’s invincible because he is still getting away with his reign of terror.

Protection orders are only effective if every police officer and judge has regard for why they were needed and so therefore acts in a way to do everything possible to support keeping the victim safe. Others referred to the protection orders that had been granted as a ‘waste of time’, and gave examples of times the stalker had breached the protection order (often in multiple ways within short time-frames) but the police had dismissed the breaches as inconsequential unless they were overtly threatening or aggressive.

I went to police and applied [for] and got a protection order. [I] continued going to police when he violated protection order [with no arrest].

I had a protection order but never enough evidence to prove what he was doing was breaching it as [it was] my word against his, [and there were] never any witnesses.

They went and spoke to him and advised him to stop. It went no further even though he was breaching a protection order. I knew it was him, but [I] couldn’t prove it.

I would have liked him to be charged with a breach of protection, as the behaviour only escalated after the stalking.

The following passage underlines the fallacy that victims who follow the police’s directive to apply for a protection order will consequently be able to quickly and consistently access safety.

I obtained a parenting order through the family court. It was really difficult to get. Then I called the police every time he breached it. He was occasionally charged. He often didn’t leave enough evidence. Every few years he received a conviction, but always got given a suspended

sentence, then just enough time would lapse between convictions for him to never receive any actual jail time. Over the years the frequency of incidents have decreased.

Many also identified the disjunction between the intended use of protection and parenting orders and the flaws in the ways that these are considered by the family court, particularly in relation to care of children within the context of violence from one parent to another. Many women were made to feel as though they should accept all contact from the children's father, and that if they attempted to limit unwanted contact they were somehow impeding the father's right to parent. This led to these respondents feeling uncertain about whether their complaints would be taken seriously (by police and by the family court) and whether attempting to secure safety mechanisms through the court will ultimately detract from their safety rather than supporting it.

I would like to know what my rights are, as it is confusing and you feel powerless [and] unsure if you can contact police or what rights you have to peace and privacy, especially where you have children that your stalker is the father of. He has texted at midnight and at 5am in the morning when he knows I am alone. it is on-going, and I wish it would stop.

Not sure now which type of Order it was that they suggested I go for. But I didn't feel safe with it and felt it would make things worse and was worried about that he was going to go after the elderly members in my family. I would have liked more support and options.

Implicit in these stories was the court's assumption that abuse toward a mother was an entirely separate issue to the ability to parent safely; accordingly, information about a father's violence toward a mother – other than actual convictions – was disregarded by the court or considered irrelevant to a father's ability to safely parent and his right to regular access to the child/ren.

Going through divorce, [I was] required to attend a number of psychological/relationship counselling sessions. It was irritating to receive 'requests for more child access visits ' when the child did not want to spend more time with father at that point. It seemed to be very manipulative behaviour, and he was trying to use the counsellor to his own way of thinking.

I would have liked lawyer for child [to] have seen the massive amount of evidence to support a PO [protection order]. Also I wasn't helped by anyone at refuge until the order was granted.

As seen above, respondents also make the point that they had felt that assistance was contingent on the order having been granted, regardless of the risk that they were currently living with.

Advocates' experiences

Protection orders for stalking were considered hard to come by, and key informants believe this relates to the continued subordination of psychological violence in the courts, particularly in comparison to episodes of violence that clearly constitute a physical risk, such as strangulation. One relayed advice she had heard a police officer give a client, which had centred on access; i.e. blocking numbers or taking photos of unwanted contact, and stated that the client had been advised that it would not be sufficient grounds for a protection order as the abuse (stalking) was primarily psychological in nature.

It still seems to be [that with] psychological violence, which we see [and which] happens all the time, it is still quite difficult to [get an order granted] or the lawyers might say we don't feel there is enough evidence to apply for this. – Key informant 4

If there is physical abuse I'm nearly always sure that they will get [a protection order]. If there hasn't been physical abuse but there has been subtle threats, [I would see it as] unlikely but definitely worth a try. – Key informant 2

This disregard for the role of psychological abuse such as stalking in establishing and maintaining power and control, such as through fear, intimidation, and isolation, was identified as deeply problematic.

I think there is not enough consideration of how the behaviour affects a woman, you know, she is scared. She's fearful, she's worried, she is stressed, so surely that should be enough for

judges and police and lawyers to take note. It's like emotions don't seem to count.

– Key informant 1

Like if I [was a client and] just went in and said my ex-partner is stalking me, I don't think I would get a protection order even though I am fearful... I know what he is capable of, I might not have ever mentioned to police, I might never have called them, and [maybe] he has never assaulted me, but I know he has threatened to kill me for the last six years, [and] that fear is very real in me - that he is going to come and kill me. – Key informant 2

My experience of that is [that] if they have the big three they get a protection order instantly: physical violence, gang related, meth addiction. Those three and you can guarantee you will get a protection order... [But] I have never ever been able to support a client who has just been stalked by her ex to get a protection order, which is horrifying, because there are literally nothing else you can do. – Key informant 2

Protection order pitfalls

Family court mechanisms that are accessed by victims in a bid for safety do not necessarily lead to the stalker being held accountable for their continuous abuse against the victim. Debate continues regarding whether the issuing of protection orders (often called restraining orders in other jurisdictions) actually discourages further violence; however, much of the research attempting to establish this is dated and may not account for later trends in police or family court policy. Harrell and Smith (1996) found that of victims who accessed a protection order, half still received unwanted phone calls and one fifth were stalked or visited in person by the person against whom the order was issued. Meloy et al. (1997) discovered that there were significantly fewer episodes of violence where protection orders were issued against both primary victim and primary perpetrator, and, importantly, that violence and aggression following the issuing of protection orders was most commonly perpetrated by those whose victims voluntarily made contact with them. This suggests that the most influential mediator of an aggressor's behaviour following the issuing of a protection order is in fact the victim's behaviour, giving rise to queries about whether reciprocal non-contact orders should be served to both parties to discourage this contact (Hakkanen, 2003). This must be regarded with caution, as victims (as evidenced throughout this research) do not usually hold the balance of power in decisions about contact from stalkers.

On the other hand, stalkers' willingness to breach protection orders without fear of consequences may also be associated with how reliably and consistently police and the courts uphold and censure these breaches; if police disregard 'minor' breaches, stalkers can essentially continue to act with impunity, knowing there will be no debilitating consequence. In addition, if they do not clearly set out the parameters for contact (and enforce these) where there are children involved, or have conflicting orders relating to an abusive person's contact with a victim and their contact with a child, it becomes even more difficult to ensure that these are able to be upheld. This advocate also illustrated the tensions between various court orders, and the myths that implicitly support the continuation of the stalking behaviour:

Basically they turn up at the house, or they turn up at work, or they turn up at school and even [people just think that] "he's got a right to see his kids, and, you know, poor man has been taken away and his kids have been taken away from him". [And] he drives past every day on his way home from work, but he lives on the other side of town... that is an actual example but [the victim] couldn't do anything [about it]. So she started putting like a camera on her front door, facing out to the road, [but] even with the evidence that he was driving past her house, [she] couldn't do anything. [If they send lots of texts you can] tell him not to text you, like tell him not to text you while you have got a protection order, [but at the same time] in the parenting order it says [he] can text [the victim] about the kids. – Key informant 2

In the next two sections, we look at themes in anti-stalking legislation generally, and then at the overarching issues of both our anti-stalking legislation and the civil provisions that are accessible to victims.

An onus on victims to provide 'evidence'

The responsibility for exhibiting episodes of stalking and their place in the broader pattern was believed to sit firmly with victims, albeit with assistance from advocates wherever possible. This ranged from taking steps to block unwanted telephone contact such as liaising with cell phone providers or getting a new phone

or phone number, to strengthening home security such as through lights, locks, and closed-circuit cameras. While advocates' volume of experiences differed, there was a distinct point of consensus – that of feeling that there was insufficient law enforcement motivation and legislation infrastructure to act protectively before the stalking escalated to physical or sexual violence. Instead, victims are expected to do their own investigation and implement their own safety strategies.

Usually it is like bombarding with messages, you know, sometimes they can get 50 or 100 messages. They can use other phones, so she will get something from an unknown number... [victims] can block numbers and things, but not if they are multiple... and then proving it is him as well [is the issue]. I mean police often say “block your phone or get a different phone”, but it is often easier said than done. – Key informant 1

It is always the victim who ends up having to make changes, and I think that is kind of the crux of the stalking from what we see our end. It's... the victim [who] has to go and get the security cameras, it's the victim that has to go and get security lights, it's the victim that has to block the person [by going to] court. – Key informant 4

Advocates felt it was monumentally unfair to place the lion's share of the burden of investigation on those who were the primary victims of the crime, but found there was little alternative.

Eventually we got some cameras in there and I think they found him so that was good. They could see it was him coming around, but it was really hard for her because by the time she got up [from bed] he was nervous, you know, he was hiding or he had run off. – Key informant 4

Police don't do police work anymore. Police act like they need the evidence on their desk for them to act. So even if the woman went into make a statement, they would just say [they] would make a mark on his file, but that doesn't go through court processes. So if he did get arrested, say he ran her off the road, the fact that she reported that he had been following her for the last three months after work would not have made it... through the court process because it is not like an investigation. – Key informant 2

Part of our safety planning is “if you see him and you are fearful, you dial 111, [or] if you can, take a photo or video”, like let's get some form of proof or do a recording, you know, if he said “I saw you go for coffee”, you try and get a recording.- Key informant 4

This responsibility for safety-seeking, aside from being costly, time-consuming, and with variable effectiveness, took a considerable emotional toll. Carving out the mental space necessary to delve into the stalker's abuse methods and design ways to circumnavigate them was simply not possible for some, as all of this mental energy was expended simply through day to day survival.

They have got kids as well... their lives are chaotic. They don't want to sit down after a day of coping, because that is what they are [doing], or just surviving, and write down all the shitty things their ex did to them today, and literally that is the only tool I can offer someone who is being stalked to at least have some evidence or some picture of how bad this is. – Key informant 2

Finally, although advocates assisted victims to evidence the stalking and to obtain a protection order, they also spoke of the dissonance these helping actions could create – the sense of security the granting of a protection order may engender in victims may not marry up with the reality of attempting to have it enforced, and the emotional cost of rapid disclosure and navigation of the application process cannot be understated. This is subsequently exacerbated as victims are tasked with keeping meticulous records of breaches, often without any confidence that these will be reliably upheld or that the legitimacy of her distress in breach situations will even be acknowledged.

So screenshots are our best friend in Refuge, especially now that they are so easy to take. Printouts of like emails where he has constantly bombarded her, and [where] she is saying “stop” might [mean the police] give him a warning. I doubt that would be [classified as] a breach if she had a protection order, but the thing I... talk clients through [is that] “you leave

this relationship, you put your hands in the lives of complete strangers in Refuge, and they go 'yeah this has all happened before and this is how we are going to fix it. We are going to get you a protection order, we are going to get you into this lawyer you have never met before, you are going to tell your full story about your life and all the hurt that you experienced and then we are going to spit you out in six hours and you'll have a protection order and you will be sweet'".

But that protection order is a piece of paper that is actually not upheld to what you expect it to be. Its onus is on the victim to call the police, which she might not have even done yet [throughout] her relationship with this guy.. so calling the police is fearful enough, but supporting her through gathering that evidence is something that she has never even thought of. She knows that [the stalking] is wrong, we got her the protection order that says it is wrong, but now she has got to go through and evidence it all on her own. I say to clients... "if he texts you, text him back once and say stop, I don't want any communication with you... and as soon as he starts texting you again screenshot it. Don't reply, no replying, because if you are replying you are engaging".

I have [also] told women who have been largely emotionally and psychologically abused [and] sexually assaulted in the relationship... to have a notebook of everything that happens with him that she is not happy with, because her voice can't be heard in any other space. Like she can tell us that he's doing these things, [but] we can't then make the police do anything, because the police go there is no evidence. – Key informant 2

5.3. Themes in anti-stalking legislation

Stalking is notoriously difficult to prosecute - only a minority of stalking charges result in a conviction (Jordan et al., 2003; Baum et al., 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), and when convictions do occur, it is usually after the charges have been amended to lesser offences. There is an inherent tension between the right of the victim to have transgressions against their safety prosecuted and the right of the stalker to maintain their freedom, meaning it is essential that stalking is correctly defined and that provisions balancing these two rights evolve alongside understanding of the stalkers' motivation and the dangers posed by their behaviour. Other jurisdictions have variously enacted stalking laws in response to emerging recognition of the detrimental impacts of stalking and their association with other crimes. Prior to 2010, when stalking crimes in Scotland were generally prosecuted under common law crimes (e.g. breach of the peace) because stalking was not differentiated as a discrete category of crime, there were fewer than ten offences prosecuted per year, which increased nearly 500% in the five years following the introduction of specific stalking legislation (Middlemiss, 2014). Despite the relatively low conviction rates (only one third of charges resulted in conviction), Middlemiss (2014) argues that the uptake of law and increased sentencing will have deterred some stalkers. In Australia, a swift legislation response to stalking emerged in the aftermath of intimate partner homicides that were preceded by stalking, and by 1995 every Australian state had enacted anti-stalking laws (although the penalties varied significantly, with Victoria imposing a ten-year maximum sentence in comparison to Western Australia's twelve-month maximum sentence and \$4,000 fine). An analysis across jurisdictions, however, showed general consistency in the awarding of minimal or suspended sentences and low fines (Freckelton, 2001).

Many anti-stalking laws require one or more of the following: conduct requirements, intention, and consequences to the victim. They tend to refer to 'conduct' or 'series of acts' without specifying exactly what these acts constitute (for example, the United Kingdom Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the New South Wales Crimes (Threats and Stalking) Amendment Act 1994, and the Western Australia Criminal Law Amendment Act 1994). Conversely, in New Zealand (and most Australian states) examples of behaviours that are prohibited when repetitive and may cause the victim distress are listed, such as loitering outside the victim's residence or workplace, following, phoning or otherwise contacting, and interfering with personal property (McEwan, Mullen, & MacKenzie, 2007). Significantly, these specified lists require regular attention and amendment as technology continually enables new methods of contact and forms of surveillance, contact, and harassment, and gaps in this legislation in terms of named behaviours lead to difficulties in even laying correct charges. Importantly, New Zealand (like other jurisdictions) has maintained its original threshold; i.e. that stalking comprises of distinct instances that would 'cause a reasonable person distress', despite growing recognition amongst scholars that the social harm associated

with stalking is the result of continuous and insidious stalking behaviours, as opposed to several objectively offensive actions.

There are several issues with our legislative framework as it pertains to stalking offences, and we discuss each of these below.

Problems with our anti-stalking law and civil provisions

While court orders may restrict stalkers' behaviour or provide more opportunities to criminalise their behaviour subsequent to the order being served, past stalking predicts future stalking even with these orders in place (Logan & Walker, 2010). However, sending a clear and unambiguous message that the stalking is unwanted and illegal has been shown to be a vital and often influential step in seeking safety for the victim (Carr et al., 2014; Mullen et al., 2006; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2008; 2014). This requires safety and justice mechanisms to be both available to and suitable for victims, which, as exhibited above, was frequently not the case.

There are three obvious issues with the way that the law provides for stalking activities to be prosecuted and for victims of stalking to be protected. The first is the reliance on fear as a mandatory feature of criminal harassment, which poses a prohibitively high threshold and fails to account for insidious social impacts other than fear. The second is the discrepancy between the threshold required to obtain a restraining order and the threshold required to obtain a protection order, leaving victims of partner violence unable to access safety mechanisms for harassment falling short of this threshold. The third addresses the inadequacy of the Harassment Act 1997 as it currently stands to effectively criminalise all forms of stalking, particularly those that are perpetrated by an intimate partner.

The first issue with the legislative framework is the reliance on 'fear'. Despite the range of behaviours that may constitute stalking being broadly defined in the literature, New Zealand's legislation creates a narrow window for what can be prosecuted as a stalking crime, as the labelling of behaviour as stalking is contingent on victims' qualifiable fear and on the stalking fitting with proscribed actions (McEwan, Mullen, & MacKenzie, 2007). This, of course, is problematic – very few other categories of crime are legislated in such a way that successful prosecution is reliant on the measurement of suffering caused by their perpetration. In addition, while the qualifying factor of victims' fear or distress is a common feature of anti-stalking legislation internationally, the nature of intimate partner stalking appears predicated on persistence and disruption, rather than psychopathological obsession or conflict. Taken alone, single episodes are usually innocuous – a single episode will often appear to represent little other than a nuisance or annoyance. However, the same seemingly harmless act, such as driving past, showing up, leaving notes, intercepting messages, or posting on social media, will seem much more threatening if A.) it is persistently repeated at all times of the day and night or is unpredictably repeated, B.) it alludes to environment-specific content and thus becomes threatening (such as messages saying 'you look nice today' when the victim is hiding from the abuser, or 'I'm still thinking about our last conversation' when that conversation was about a threat to the victim's life).

The threshold of 'fear' (and particularly the requirement that it would cause a 'reasonable person' to feel fear) is the inherent lack of consideration for how cumulative harm impedes a victim's ability to live with autonomy and dignity. Loss of autonomy and dignity represent social impacts of stalking that extend beyond simply personal distress. The Harassment Act 1997 requires two or more episodes within a 12 month period for those acts to be considered harassment, and states as an objective of the Act: "recognising that behaviour that may appear innocent or trivial when viewed in isolation may amount to harassment when viewed in context". However, despite this stated commitment to recognising cumulative impacts of individually minor actions, the threshold for criminal harassment requires perpetrators to have intended to cause the victim to fear for his or her safety. These two thresholds are not entirely incompatible, but are disjunctive – low-level persistent contact is unlikely to be viewed as likely to 'cause a reasonable person' to fear for their safety, but could satisfy a different threshold, such as being likely to 'cause disruption, distress, or impediment to usual participation in activities'. Put simply, at present stalkers can act with relative impunity to sabotage the lives of their victims if they are not acting in a threatening enough way to make them afraid.

The second issue is with the differential threshold for harm required to be granted a restraining order or protection order. Somewhat paradoxically given the legislation's domestic violence origins, it is emphasised to victims by legal providers and the Ministry of Justice that the Harassment Act 'does not apply' to harassment that is perpetrated by someone with whom the victim has been in a close family relationship, such as a partner or ex-partner. While they are presumably only referring to the civil aspect

of the Harassment Act, they do not specify to victims that the criminal aspect of the Act still applies regardless of the nature of the relationship with the perpetrator (Community Law, 2019). Instead, as intimate partner stalking relates to family violence, victims are directed to the Family Violence Act 2018, which both sets out the right to access a protection order and gives reference to stalking as an example of the 'psychological abuse' category of family violence – which, it should be noted, is not criminalised beyond being a specified act of family violence for the purposes of obtaining protective orders. In sum, although stalking is considered to be covered by the Harassment Act, this is implicitly aimed (through both civil and criminal provisions) at curbing and responding to victims of stranger or acquaintance harassment – not intimate partner stalking.

Provision of information to victims of stalking depicts significant differences in the supposed threshold that the stalking needs to meet, based solely on whether the perpetrator is someone who has been in a family relationship with the victim. This is particularly apparent in the difference in protective orders. Restraining orders focus specifically on harassment, and definitions of harassment are expansive enough to cover seemingly innocuous behaviour such as loitering, following, or persistent contact. Conversely, protection orders, which are designed to constrain domestic abusers' access to their victims, can only be obtained if there has been abuse. While psychological abuse such as stalking does technically qualify as family violence under the Family Violence Act, it must meet a sufficient threshold to be considered by the Judge to be abusive rather than simply annoying or disruptive. This is markedly different from the threshold implied by information given to victims of stranger/acquaintance stalking about their rights to access restraining orders under the Harassment Act. In other words, victims of intimate partner stalking face more restrictive criteria to protective orders than other stalking victims, and their experiences do not appear to be the focus of the Harassment Act despite this being New Zealand's primary anti-stalking legislation. To address this inequity, the granting of protection orders could be strengthened by legislative direction to consider the role of stalking in all applications, or, more simply, to remove the exclusion criteria for victims of intimate partner violence so that they too may apply for restraining orders to address low-level but persistent stalking.

The third issue with the legislation is the scope of what is considered harassment, which does not always align with the scope of behaviours that can be considered stalking. There are several stalking behaviours that are not explicitly covered by the Harassment Act (although these may arguably be provided for within s.4(1)(f) as 'acting in any other way'). These include using some forms of spyware, instrumentalising tracking or monitoring applications for surveillance of the victim, placing a GPS tracker on the victim's car, interrogating others in the victim's life for the whereabouts of the victim, and intentional reputation damage to undermine the autonomy and dignity of the victim (such as to colleagues, employers, police, and Oranga Tamariki), as well as many other examples. These do not necessarily constitute harassment, as they do not involve specified acts such as accosting, pursuit, the sharing of distressing content, or threatening behaviour, but collectively they constitute life sabotage tactics that undermine the autonomy and social safety of the victim. Intimate partner violence involves a very particular set of dynamics that should be explicitly catered for and integrated within other IPV legislation. There may then be potential for intimate partner stalking to be addressed by way of a separate criminal offence, which recognises the unique manifestations of patterns of stalking as they occur within a context of partner abuse. The threshold for such an offence could then be broadened to effectively criminalise intrusive courses of behaviour that are not overtly violent, by recognising how persistent acts of unwanted contact, monitoring, surveillance, or interference may restrict or undermine a person's sense of autonomy and security to engage in regular everyday professional, social, and personal activities.

Finally, aside from the legislative framework for stalking specifically, this research has also identified serious issues with the financial barriers to participation in the Family Court. Respondents and participants spoke of losing thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars simply to respond to ongoing litigation, much of which is safety-oriented in its origin but subsequently delayed and prolonged by the stalker's design. That access to the machinery of justice is contingent on victims being willing to sacrifice their principal means of economic security, such as their homes, negates their legal right to be safe from abuse. We therefore recommend reviewing access to Family Court processes and removing financially prohibitive barriers to victims' applications for protective orders.

Part 6: Making Help Available

I remember sitting down to have a meeting with my manager, who was a male and totally ill-equipped to deal with something like this. And then another [man], the health and safety rep who was a male, and we sat down like we are now. I said to him... out of shame, like having to justify the conversation, “it is not really work related”, you know, you are kind of justifying having this conversation and the response was “if it is not work related then why are we having this conversation?” I just left work crying. It makes you realise how unprepared we are in society for [violence]. Like I mention this years later, and I’m still dealing with this. The current work that I’m with is really understanding, but it is still the fact you have to have those conversations - like this is the burden that carries on years later. Then you have to go into work and carry on as if nothing is happening. You feel like you can’t really function at work, but how many times can you have time off work for situations like this? – Clare, research participant.

6.1. Respondents’ experiences of seeking support from services

Complexities in seeking support

Respondents had managed to seek support from a range of sources, but these did not always prevent further harm. Although many had successfully engaged with support services or with informal sources of support, others had identified barriers to support or dissatisfactory interactions with services, including a lack of disability-inclusive services, services that accepted and embraced clients in same-sex relationships, and those who had been victimized by women.

I wish they had been prosecuted the first time I was assaulted, I think if that had happened they wouldn’t have felt they had free reign to continue on for years and years knowing they would never really face any consequences. Some people, laughed it off (because they think women abusing men is funny, or not serious, I don’t know) a lady in court when I went to ask for their help laughed when I told her the story.

Refuge was not deaf/disability accessible in my region at the time.

Accessible help from everyone I tried, [and] to be taken seriously. To have people not make jokes... [just] because my stalker was a woman. Mostly the accessibility thing though.

Finally, several had touched upon the complexities of what constituted ‘support’ for them, and what vulnerabilities created constraints about what sort of ‘choice’ was open to them. For example, one respondent who had been a transgender youth spoke about the multiplicities of sites of risk, and the negotiation of safeties where choices were between continued but predictable abuse, and homelessness and the consequent loss of practical social support.

I also want to note that I was a homeless trans youth, and like many others, I made very conscious compromises on what I would put up with in order to access stability. In saying that, young people are often not in the best position to make great choices for themselves, because they have limited access to resources such as income and housing, for example. So, I didn’t seek support to make him stop, because I mostly wanted to remain in the relationship, even though I knew it was abusive. Once I was leaving him for the last time, I told my friends about him stalking me etc. I also told my family, who lived in a different town.

Importantly, this highlights the transaction of safeties as being relative to social power and avenues for adequate and individually tailored forms of support – such as access to housing, income support, and inclusive and affirming support.

Counselling

Experiences of counselling during or after the relationship with the stalker were variable – for some, it played a vital role in their growing recognition of the harmfulness of stalkers’ behaviour and/or helped them to manage the emotional and relational impacts of the stalking; for others, it was difficult to access or

was felt to be unlikely to help. Of those that spoke about counselling or therapy, most referred to actively engaging in the therapy for more than a year, and often had been engaging in therapy for several years. Those who did access counsellors did so for a number of reasons, usually centring on the total pattern of abuse from a partner rather than just one aspect.

[I had] counselling for a range of his actions, not just stalking.

One respondent recounted how going to therapy for “couples’ counselling” precipitated the identification of abuse dynamics, but that this realisation of abuse did not immediately compel her to leave; rather, it provided a useful framework for considering his subsequent behaviour.

We went to a couple of therapy sessions as our relationship was so volatile. The therapist asked to see me privately and showed me a chart with the various signs of an abusive relationship, and I was shocked to realise I was in one that ticked the majority of the boxes.

Although she stopped attending this therapy and remained in the marriage at the time, eventually she used this knowledge to challenge her own internalised beliefs about the relationship and initiated a separation.

In addition to emotional support and the opportunity to process distressing experiences, counsellors were sometimes instrumental in alerting victims to the options available to them.

I was seeing a counsellor during the relationship, who thankfully identified it as problematic and encouraged me to end the relationship and helped me build up evidence of his behaviour against me by keeping screenshots of messages and call logs etc. but I never followed through with legal action. I continued counselling after the relationship ended, which helped rebuild myself after it had ended.

I found a therapist [and was] considering applying for a protection order.

Not all respondents who accessed counselling or therapy found this to be useful in identifying potential options, and commented that they seemed unaware of options they later found out about from other sources, such as protection orders.

I went to a counselling session provided through the university, mainly to talk about school-work, but I did mention the stalking. I didn't find this helpful as the counsellor recommended I try to ignore it.

In addition, cost, suitability of the service for children, and perceived (lack of) expertise in dealing with the technological facilitation of stalking behaviour all deterred respondents from engaging in, or continuing to engage in, counselling or psychotherapy.

I got a few counselling sessions, which were helpful, but was unable to find free help at the time which prevented me from getting the help I needed as I didn't want to spend money on the problem. I had a few family members that knew and they were helpful but I don't think they understood the significance which was difficult.

Support from friends and family, I did contact the Women's Refuge but couldn't commit to counselling. I did use another service but I stopped as my son was spoken too without me in the room he was only 7ish at the time.

I didn't actually talk to my therapist or uni counselling or anything about this because it was so intensely online and some parts so technical that I knew they wouldn't understand. These are people who didn't understand how online communities worked at all so I knew it wouldn't work.

The combination of fear of retribution and shame for having been victimised together discouraged help-seeking from both formal and informal sources. Victims referred to the tensions between wanting support and also wanting to preserve the relationship with the abuser or feeling unable to accept interpretations of stalkers' behaviour as abusive.

I talked to a counsellor and my best friend and her mum, that's it.

I shared some concerns with a couple of friends but when they became concerned, downplayed what I'd said. I wasn't willing to give up the relationship.

Several respondents expressed that a peer support model might be more beneficial as it could de-mystify the experience of stalking and help to counter their tendencies toward self-blame.

It would have been nice to talk to 'future me' or someone who had been through similar and could outline the path to recovery.

Maybe a support group of some type. I blamed myself for it happening, so it would've been nice to talk to other people in the same situation.

Some had not sought therapeutic support at the time, but reflected that they believed it would have been beneficial if they had.

To be honest after the police told us they couldn't do anything we (my partner and I) just stopped talking about it and kept it to ourselves. This is the most I've ever talked about it and it's only after 13 years that I feel able to write this down without crying. I wish we had sought therapy at the time. It probably would have done us a lot of good.

Others felt that counselling or therapy would have little value while there was still violence or crisis, or if the therapist was not appropriately trained in stalking dynamics.

I was too distraught to have gone to counselling - NOT that it could have helped in a crisis situation.

I went to a therapist through EAP program provided by my employer, but they were unprofessional and didn't help me with any strategies for coping or anything useful.

Arguably, this illustrates the pivotal role in crisis support that can be provided by social workers or counsellors and which has a focus on immediate, practical safety while also therapeutically attending to the emotional needs of clients who have been impacted by violence or trauma. Many also commented that they may not have felt comfortable finding a counsellor themselves and did not know at the time how to get support, but would have liked a digital platform that they could use to find out how to access help, what stalking was, and what steps they could take to stop it.

I would of liked more information on my options regarding support choices as it took months for me to consider therapy and I was so new and in shock that I didn't know what to do. I needed advice on what to do and how to get support when I needed it.

[I would have liked] possibly advice around stalking or around talking to a trauma specialist just so I could feel safer.

Maybe a place/website to record my concerns and offer advice [would help].

A website with behaviours to look for, [and] a number to talk to someone to figure out earlier how to get rid of the person [would help].

Non-threatening sources of support, advice, and knowledge seemed particularly important given respondents' negative experiences of reporting the stalking to police.

Support for mental or physical health

The role of mental health intervention was often mentioned, either in relation to the respondent's own emotional state and need for support, or in relation to the stalker's behaviour and the role that his mental health may have played. Personal mental health support appeared particularly integral where other support networks were absent, fragmented, or insufficient, or when the impacts of trauma caused intense distress,

intrusive symptoms, shame and self-blame, or difficulty in processing the trauma.

For the PTSD – [there needs to be] more specialists that know how to deal with dissociation, underlying shame, [and] self-blame, [and for] them to have [an] understanding of how avoidance maintains PTSD and [how to work safely] when dealing with multiple traumas... [like] working incrementally with one aspect until its processed and desensitized before moving on.

The police provided no intervention. I felt alone and vulnerable. I had the support of a psychologist to manage the anxiety and depression.

In some instances, mental health support was not available, and the impacts of the stalking on the victim's low mood escalated.

I called suicide helpline but they said they were too busy and could not help me so I attempted [suicide].

During this time, the DHB had rejected my requests for free counselling from my GP several times and I was deemed not suicidal enough for intensive mental healthcare.

Disclosures to medical professionals were identified by some respondents as necessary and as precipitating helpful strategies; for instance, post-rape medical oversight and referrals to counselling. On the other hand, they also recognised the limits of what doctors could offer, and, importantly, that 'help' could be offered to them to support their own mental state but that this did not practically stop the perpetuation of the harm that underpinned their distress.

I talked to the Police, [but] they were useless [so I] talked to my GP after [the stalker] raped me.

Eventually I managed to secretly see the doctor who passed me to a counsellor for a couple of sessions before he found out. And was prescribed with antidepressants to try help me cope and sleep. Unfortunately it did not help with the stalking behaviours.

Attempting to understand what had been going on for the stalker was frequently one of the initial steps taken by victims who wanted the behaviour to stop but also wanted the stalker to be okay.

[I phoned the police a couple of times, [and] spoke for a whole day with psychotherapist friend to understand [the stalker's] underlying borderline personality disorder.

Others got in touch with the stalker's mental health clinician to seek advice about how to keep themselves safe from them. These conversations were rarely helpful; the priority of the clinician tended to be the wellbeing of their client rather than the risk they may pose to their former partners.

I spoke to the mental health team while I was in hospital with an injury from him and they suggested I leave my job or move away from him.

Others commented that if they had been proactively offered support to manage the impacts of the stalking they would have taken up the offer and believed this would have been beneficial at stemming the insidious fear, shame, or self-blame further down the track, but would not have thought to seek this out at the time. One commented that "I would never have thought to ask for it at that stage in my life", and that waiting until it was no longer a problem led to deeply entrenched "fear and blame" cycles that were at times debilitating.

Women's Refuge and other specialist domestic violence services

As with police, respondents' experiences of accessing Women's Refuges and other specialist domestic violence agencies varied greatly. Many found them instrumental in assisting their journeys of recognition of the abuse and developing resources to limit the practical and emotional impacts; others found that they did not offer sufficient practical support.

[I accessed] [the local] women's refuge who were my main support and who were wonderful –[I] cannot thank them enough.

[Going to a specialist service] just took up my time and energy and then they gave me bad advice [like] “get a protection order” that didn't achieve anything.

I had help from the women's refuge too, but this went on for longer than I was in contact with them.

Continued contact was sometimes precluded by the chaotic nature of surviving unpredictable abuse.

[I] talked to women's refuge who were supportive, and it gave me the courage to make plans with family and friends to let them know what had been going on. I only met the lady once and can't remember why I didn't meet her again, that time of my life was confusing.

Others felt that their experiences of stalking abuse were not severe enough to merit the help they were offered.

I was referred to women's refuge but I felt a bit ashamed about coming. Like what I went through wasn't violent enough to need it. I didn't want to waste [someone's] time.

I spoke to women's refuge but gave little detail and was uncertain myself, but they were incredible support, even with [the] small details I had given.

The length of the stalking abuse, however, usually far exceeded the length of engagement with Women's Refuge or other services.

Over the years, the frequency of incidents have decreased. It's been many years though, coming up [to] nine [years] I think. I also had support from women's refuge, and received counselling for sexual assaults during the relationship.

I had the support of the women's refuge by meeting with my case worker in my home a few times. She would check in with me daily via text and call me as well which I really appreciated even though it was so hard to talk about anything without getting extremely upset back then. It's almost two years since the incident now and I still think about it every day, trauma is horrible.

It is important to note that as many did not initially recognize the behavior as stalking, or felt ashamed or as though they were to blame, they also did not know that support was available. Similarly, those who did acknowledge the criminality of the patterns of behavior and for whom the police had suggested seeking specialist help appeared to know how to access help from specialist services to address it, again highlighting the importance of a common understanding.

A desire for more support

When respondents discussed what they would have found helpful in managing the impacts of the stalking, their wishes for help can be broadly classified into the following categories: belief and validation, social work support, practical safety help, better investigation and monitoring, and counselling/psychotherapy. The first of these categories reflects respondents' need for their realities to be validated by the people they disclose to, irrespective of the seeming incredibility of their disclosures. As earlier discussed, stalking represents a sum of individual small, insidious behaviours, much of which seems to mean little on its own but which collectively becomes disturbing, distressing, and potentially dangerous. Having this acknowledged and believed at face value was seen as vital to managing the emotional impacts.

[I wanted] reassurance that I wasn't crazy, [and] that his behaviour was unacceptable no matter what his reasons or upbringing... [And] the promise that I could survive without him, that I was worthy of healthy love, [and] that I could rebuild my life and dreams.

I would have liked to have the courage to seek police help or rape crisis but as my friends didn't believe me, I thought [they] wouldn't [either].

[I wanted] support how to deal with it at the time, and now. [And] to be heard and believed.

[I would have liked] them [police] to have taken my concerns seriously and believed me.

Secondly, having social work support, where they could access advice that was supportive and compassionate, was desired by several respondents. This was usually framed as someone to 'walk alongside' the victim, who could help to make a plan and access the necessary resources to adhere to it, who could situate the stalking in a robust framework of understanding about abuse, and who victims could feel comfortable talking to, and, if necessary, act as a conduit to police and to the justice system.

I would like to know what my rights are as it is confusing and you feel powerless, unsure if you can contact police, or what rights you have to peace and privacy, especially where you have children that your stalker is the father of.

I would have liked to know what my options were at the time. Even now I don't know what I would do if it happened again. I would have liked to have somewhere I could go where I wouldn't be told I was imagining it or making it up. Somewhere I could have felt safe to be.

Someone easier to call than the police. Like someone I could call and say "Hey I've got a stalker leaving me roses from his garden around my property while I'm out or sleeping. What should I do to try and stop it? Maybe someone who had experience of what stalkers are like? I felt like I had no one I could talk to.

Someone to help me address it and identify the pattern, then give me strategies to stop it and trust myself.

Thirdly, practical assistance that meant that the victim could live independently from the stalker, disentangle joint financial commitments, and instigate safety mechanisms through safe housing was regarded as essential to becoming free of the stalker. For those still living with the stalker, this entanglement precluded escape.

[I would have liked] financial support as my partner was earning our only income, [and] housing support as my daughter and I had nowhere to go.

I would have liked it if there was a devoted advice/help service for stalking victims, I couldn't find one. The police said I may be able to get victim support but when I looked more into this I found I wasn't able to get help. A service dealing with online stalking would have been useful

[I would have liked] a highly trained [advocate] who was fully a part of what was happening and guided me with options and sat with me through legal meetings, victim support at criminal court, someone to link all the individual processes and agencies that operate independently from other.

I would have liked to have walked out of the police station feeling safer than I did. I told the police woman that I felt unsafe and asked what my options were and she basically said that there was nothing that could be done as I never came forward during the relationship when there were issues.

[I would have liked] assistance with obtaining a security camera or alarm.

Fourthly, respondents said they would have liked to know that there would be a proper investigation and/or monitoring so that they alone did not hold the responsibility for ensuring that the stalker did not escalate their behaviour. This was emphasised particularly by respondents for whom the stalking was

principally technology-facilitated, who (almost unanimously) conveyed that police had told them they could not help and/or that they lacked the resources to investigate technology-facilitated stalking. Accordingly, these respondents expressed a desire for “a Police IT investigation”, or “to look at the technology side”.

[I would have liked] a proper investigation. This man has been doing the same thing to previous partners and will do it to the next and the next. He will not stop.

Finally, counselling was desired as a mechanism to work through the distressing and often traumatic experience with someone capable and trusted.

[I would] probably [like] some counselling. Someone to validate my experience and help with moving forward with life.

Being referred to a counsellor would have been helpful, looking back on it. I would have accepted [it] even though I would have not wanted the help, and it could have helped me a lot in the long term.

Counselling and someone to tell me it wasn't love it, [and] wasn't normal.

Counselling and/or therapy. I often float the idea of having a 'sponsor' like the AA or NA sponsors. Someone to call who talks you through situations or does wellbeing checks.

I would have liked a lot of support, but the main thing I needed and never got was validation. I ended up just having to believe that I deserved this treatment.

6.2. Limitations in the knowledge-base of support services

Advocates who participated in interviews also felt strongly that there was insufficient training available on stalking, and that as a result they were ill-equipped to pre-emptively manage technology-facilitated stalking issues. They felt that accessible, standardised training would build their capability to respond to victims safely.

I think there needs to be more knowledge around and more training around the whole cyber-abuse [issue]... [including] what can we do, and how can we make these people, the victims, feel validated when they are expressing that they feel they have been stalked this way. – Key informant 4

[We don't know] what to do about it, and we kind of just fumble around it... you know, from what I found out, it can be something really simple that you can do on your own phone, and that would be probably good to tell every client that we meet with. – Key informant 1

I think that needs development. I don't think any of us would be very confident doing that, you know, we are not trained, no one has told us [how]. I feel that is the same with the police as well - that there is just not enough knowledge or learning around that, and I think as advocates it will be really good to have some type of training for that and I think the police need it as well. – Key informant 4

As highlighted here, they also advocated for dual-developed training for themselves and police, and indicated that they would like to see internal police training on how they can investigate technology-facilitated stalking and develop a comprehensive understanding of the seemingly minor manifestations of this stalking when victims do report it.

6.3. Creating responsive services

Earlier in Part Six, victims outlined aspects of accessing services that were helpful, and those that they experienced as problematic. The services that respondents found useful, or thought they would find useful, were:

- Inclusive of all genders, sexual orientations, abilities, and ethnicities. While it may not be possible for any single service to effectively cater for everyone, workers should at a minimum have sufficient knowledge not to cause harm or to dismiss any person's experiences, and to refer as needed.
- Flexible and tailored. Respondents' experiences of abuse were often enmeshed within greater contexts of social precarity and working proactively with social factors such as housing and income support, as well as emotional factors such as changeable and interdependent relationships with abusers, is essential.
- Focused on safety. Victims often felt overwhelmed having to predict and manage risk themselves and wanted somebody to be alongside them in this process.
- Able to work in partnership with other providers. Respondents who had only accessed a social work-type service felt they could have benefited from long-term therapy, and respondents who had only accessed counselling or therapy often indicated that their social needs were left unmet. Services should normalize, promote, and set up connection with other services that target different aspects of the stalking experience and its impacts, and ideally the opportunity for emotional processing should occur in tandem with advocacy and practical support for safety (such as safety planning and accessing legal orders).
- Well-informed about stalking and other forms of gender-based violence. Stalking rarely occurs in isolation, and a frequent pitfall of respondents' experiences of seeking help was the lack of knowledge held by the practitioner.
- Able to refer to other low-cost or free providers. Victims are frequently precluded from accessing options such as long-term therapy and are often unaware of how they might qualify for free or low-cost options.
- Confident in challenging fear and shame.
- Able to offer different models of support. Some respondents indicated a preference for peer support-type models, while others endorsed individual support or therapy. One respondent suggested that online platforms might be easier and less intimidating to access.
- Equipped to anticipate, explain, and manage the risks of digitally-perpetrated forms of violence. Some victims stated that they did not receive the technical expertise they needed and were unaware of what the risk of digital coercive control or surveillance might be or how to address these risks.
- Educated about the police process. Respondents frequently expressed a need for informed advocacy with police and the courts.
- Trauma-informed. Most victims described their mental health as being impacted by trauma and wanted support with this.
- Focused on reaching out to victims, rather than requiring victims, to reach out to them.
- Not time limited. Stalking can continue for years. While the nature of clients' needs may shift over that time, stalking alone should be regarded as sufficient reason for re-engagement.

6.4. Advocates' strategies for supporting victims' safety

Advocates emphasised that stalking was never a standalone experience; it was a central aspect of a much larger and systematic pattern of one person exercising power and control over their intimate partner. However, while other episodes of this abuse attracted an immediate and relatively homogenous criminal justice response, stalking was perpetrated disparately, often subtly, and without clear recourse. Accordingly, advocates explained the strategies they currently use, such as incorporating technology-facilitated safety tools into safety planning – but also acknowledged the substantive limitations of reactive technological safety strategies.

Normally the stalking is part of the whole package, not just isolated incidents. So we do is we basically say, you know, I can talk to police, we can look at getting security cameras, [and] getting a safety alarm put in. So we do a safety plan [that includes saying to the victim] “if you do see him, or he comes round, call police.” We talk about trespass orders... [but] I just feel there is not a lot more we can do apart from doing a safety plan, because it is so unpredictable, and like I say to all the women, we cannot control his behaviour... you just don't know what is going to happen, or when it is going to happen.... I have also known women who have bought their own cameras. They have resourced it themselves, or they got money from Work and Income. So we do that. We try to say “use technology to your advantage, if he is using it to his....” [and] “yes block him on all these avenues, but try and take photos do recordings.” But it is very hard, it is really hard when it is cyber-abuse, because what can you really do? – Key informant 4

We've really just been muddling through. In one case [the client] had a friend who might be able to have a look at her phone. I think there was another time when [the client] was going to go along to Vodafone and get them to check out [her phone], and I'm not tech-savvy, but apparently there is something on your phone that can indicate if [spyware is likely to be there] or not... So we kind of muddle our way through at the moment. – Key informant 1

Advocates indicated that although confidence in navigating potential technology-facilitated stalking varied, most felt ill-equipped to respond to fast-evolving software and the ways that this stalking might manifest for individual victims.

[We start with] removing all apps, [and] changing all passwords as a start. [We advise women to] remove everything you could possibly think of and even reset your phone if that is possible, just so that it disconnects. Changing your number is not enough, because it is actually the phone, like your login to Gmail is actually linked to other things – like iCloud accounts and stuff like that. – Key informant 2

Some acknowledged that blocking stalkers' numbers and closing off digital forms of access to stalkers could precipitate further violence or increase the risk of the stalker using alternative and less traceable methods such as social media to contact them, and advised victims to keep at least one channel of communication open so that they could receive and interpret stalkers' messages, and evidence their attempts to contact them.

I err on the side of caution of blocking, because it is more of an indicator of what he is up to. So some women will block his number and feel confident in that, because they are not hearing from him anymore, but some women need to know what he is doing. So it is just talking to them about “if you feel comfortable blocking him do that, if you don't then leave it open, just know that these messages are going to come through.” So I kind of talk to women about always having a channel of communication to know what he's at – preferably an identifiable one. – Key informant 2

This advocate provided an example of how safety plans sometimes require one channel of communication to remain open.

Like if he is trying to message you five times on Facebook and realises that you have blocked him, and then he texts you [like] “you fucking bitch I’m coming to get you”, at least you know and that is [when you activate] your safety plan and get out go somewhere where he is not going to find you. – Key informant 2

They also outlined strategies that included third party involvement, such as involving providers or considering the role of mutual friends or social settings.

[We might say] perhaps try and go to your internet provider or mobile phone provider and see if they can help. – Key informant 4

Other things that we do for stalking, if they can afford it and they want that security, [is] getting security cameras on their house. Home upgrades are good because it gives them time [to call for help], [and] we’re always explicit in that it is not going to save you, [but] it’s going to keep give us enough time to try and save you. I don’t frame it like that but that’s essentially what it is. [We also say to] try and minimise your contact with mutual friends, which is a real hard one, because I feel they get more heartbroken when they get betrayed by a really close friend who were close to the couple and she has relied on them and then that person has fed back to him. I [also] often get them to stipulate in their [temporary] protection order or parenting order that they only want communication through an email which is set up specifically [for that contact]. So [the email address might be] the two kids’ names @gmail.com, and that is the only way he can communicate with them. Then anything outside of that is a breach. [And then we talk to victims about] evidencing that – [in a] little notebook, write it down, keep it on your phone, [or] keep a folder, because when it comes to the hearing for keeping your protection order you can then evidence that stuff as much as possible. – Key informant 2

Clearly, advocates identify the same tension that victims do – victims’ actions oriented toward creating safety by precluding stalkers’ access to their lives are directly in response to stalkers’ actions as they happen. That means these strategies necessarily involve the minimisation of victims’ participation in the social realm. Further, they require vigilant, continuous, and thoughtful strategies, which fall to victims to enforce, and which remain targeted at closing off avenues for access and evidencing the instances where this proves insufficient. Once this fails, such as if/when stalkers’ command of digital means of communication or surveillance, advocates describe feeling “stuck” or “helpless” to institute new means of protection that is able to encompass all of the possible digital methods of stalking at stalkers’ disposal.

In sum, the advocates interviewed assist stalking victims to take the following immediate steps for safety:

1. Listen to victims’ concerns about being monitored or tracked and take them seriously. Part of the pattern of abusers is undermining victims’ sense of the legitimacy of their experiences and emotional reactions, and they may anticipate similarly minimising responses from support services.
2. Brainstorm about coincidences. There are typically numerous examples of the stalker showing up somewhere unexpected, getting an invite to family or social events without the reason for them being involved being immediately apparent, or the stalker possessing unfathomable knowledge about the victim’s life. Working backwards about where information was stored (such as about events or appointments) can often pinpoint what level of access they have that might not previously have been considered.
3. Check and turn off all location settings. These might be on social media platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat, but also on seemingly benign cell phone applications such as Find My iPhone/Find My Friends, and Google accounts.
4. Identify which ‘shared lives’ planning might be facilitating access to information. Many couples and families have family calendars on various digital (and sometimes hardcopy) platforms. GooglePlay, Gmail, Hotmail, Outlook, iCloud, and Android calendars can all be shared, either intentionally or by the stalker using the victim’s phone to enable this access.

5. Make a list of shared accounts and personal accounts that have security questions or passwords that may be guessed by the stalker. Shared accounts, such as computer, mobile, parental control, online banking, or email accounts are often a deep source of information – confirmation of events, signifiers of future life planning, and communication with others can all be mined through these. If there has been a long intimate partnership, and especially if there has been cohabitation, many of the security questions to circumnavigate passwords involve details that are likely to be known to the partner. If passwords are used for multiple platforms and the stalker knows some of these, they may also gain access to platforms that the victim does not anticipate. Changing passwords and resetting security questions to all of these can provide some measure of security, as can using a new email address that does not feature a specific name.
6. Reset operating systems to factory settings. This should ideally happen at the same time as a full password reset to accounts, particularly accounts such as iCloud, which provide a means to access integrated sources of information.
7. Consider whether surveillance tactics might be in use. Spyware is increasingly common and difficult to detect, but some giveaway signs are rapid battery draining, significant shifts to memory storage, or increased data consumption. Other home surveillance tools may be instrumentalised by the stalker to monitor the victim, such as baby cameras, Smart TVs, fitness trackers, tablets, clouds, car dashcams, cameras such as GoPros, Playstations or Xboxes, and home security cameras. If a victim connects to a family cloud to keep track of children's activities, for instance, their device is often trackable to other members of that cloud.
8. Communicate with key support people to alert them to the potential for information-mining. Friends, family members, colleagues, and employers are often approached by the stalker. This does not usually sound alarming if they appear warm and harmless to the person approached, but this circle of support people may not be aware of the harmful potential for the stalker to mine them for information about the victim's activities, whereabouts, or personal life.
9. Consider social media use. Social media platforms can be a vital means of connection. There are several ways to improve the safety of this use, such as editing privacy settings so that friends or friends cannot see posts, tailoring post privacy so that nominated people are excluded from seeing posts but remain online friends, and preventing non-approved tagging and automatic location tagging.
10. Consider which channels of communication may be limited or endorsed. The default advice that victims receive is often to block the stalker on social media and by phone. That can, in some instances, elevate the risk and make it difficult to hold them accountable. For example, when telecommunications companies receive a complaint about unwanted phone or text contact, they automatically send a message to the number the calls or texts are coming from, notifying them that there has been a complaint. This can trigger an escalation of the aggression. In addition, prior research into stalking tactics suggest it is unlikely to act as a deterrent, but rather motivates the stalker to resort to new (sometimes more intrusive) tactics. If they then pursue contact using different (often multiple) numbers, or by creating new or fake social media accounts, those contacts are much more difficult to prove as originating from the stalker. However, if the constant or unpredictable contact is taking an emotional toll, some victims may feel it is worth the risk to at least restrict the number of ways someone can contact them.
11. Keep a single channel of communication open, to provide documentable proof of the contact and to maintain that source of data about the stalker's state of mind in relation to the victim, can usually offer the dual advantages of an evidence trail and the opportunity to gauge risk.
12. Create a detailed log of episodes and store in a way that preserves the integrity of data. Although the weight of responsibility on victims to prove that they are being harmed is an unjust one, they are more likely to have their reports of stalking taken seriously if they have documentation evidencing the pattern of the stalking. While recording every episode is not always a practically or emotionally viable prospect, there are many times that capturing brief descriptions is a straightforward task.

Specific times, dates, descriptions of what happened, and a brief note of context can begin to build that body of evidence. Screenshots and audio-recordings are powerful and relatively indisputable forms of evidence. If possible, the feed into a log of contacts should be time-tracked; for example, by keeping a separate email address and emailing descriptions of each episode to that address as soon as possible after it occurs. Ideally, capture screenshots that include dates, times, and names. It is also possible to use the voice record function to record phone calls or voicemail messages that are abusive, provided these can be securely stored. However, safe storage of this evidence should also be assessed – if there is a possibility that somebody else has access to the victim’s phone storage system, for example, screenshots and digital notes may be vulnerable to stalkers’ discovery of them, and consequently of the victim’s intention to report the stalking.

13. Get help from the experts. Many advocates do not feel that they are equipped to maximise clients’ digital safety by attending to all of the ways this could be compromised by stalkers’ access to clients’ mobile phones, social media, and other technology devices or online platforms. Calling Netsafe about digital safety concerns can provide an easily accessible mechanism to work through considerations such as location sharing, data access, and communication safety. In some instances, accessing the client’s telecommunications provider such as Vodafone or 2 degrees in person and asking them to check for spyware can also be a valuable option.

6.5. Identifying risk and safety

Much of the literature on risk assessment for stalking has focused on the stalker’s history and predilection for violence, coercion, and control. Churcher and Nesca (2013) carried out a meta-analysis of risk factors for physical and sexual violence in stalking cases, drawing on 25 separate datasets. While differences in classifications makes distinction between tactics difficult, they found that overt violent threats were a predictor of actual violence (Churcher & Nesca, 2013). The role of stalkers’ criminal history is unclear; it has been found by some researchers to predict stalking violence (Churcher & Nesca, 2013) and others to have no association (Rosenfeld, 2004; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002). It is theorised that this difference may be in the severity of violence, as perpetrators with a violent history might be more likely to continue to use less serious violence, while those who commit serious violence only against the person they were intimately involved with may have no criminal history (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019). The evidence on the role of stalkers’ mental health on their propensity to commit severe violence is equivocal (Roberts, 2005; Rosenfield, 2004; Churcher & Nesca, 2013; Farnham et al., 2000), while separation is a well-documented risk factor (Dutton, 2005; Kienlen, 1998; Mechanic, Weaver & Resick, 2000; Melton, 2007). Interestingly, victims’ fear is strongly associated with stalkers’ use of severe violence (Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012), but this is under-explored in the literature, despite being acknowledged as being highly predictive of IPV more generally (Campbell, 2004).

The other relatively under-explored factor in determining risk level is stalkers’ jealousy.

As we discussed in Part 1.4, jealousy – usually informed by a sense of entitlement and ownership – is identified as a catalyst for stalking escalation within many respondents’ accounts of the stalking pattern. Jealousy has been identified as a strong predictor of IPV (Dutton, 2005) and of stalking violence specifically (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019; Roberts, 2005), and jealousy as a motivator for stalking has been well established (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000; Roberts, 2002; Silva et al., 2000), yet most research projects exploring risk indicators have not included it explicitly. Bendlin and Sheridan (2019) in particular identified a significant association between jealousy and physical violence and found that the extent of stalkers’ jealousy predicted the level of severity of the violence. The same authors also showed that victims’ belief that the stalkers would seriously harm them, and the stalkers’ past violence against them, were both significantly associated with higher severity physical violence throughout the stalking. In sum, several of the prominent features of stalking have lacked empirical testing of their predictive validity or stalking violence, but emerging focus areas, such as jealousy, fear, and strangulation, show important associations. However, it is evident that characteristics demonstrated by stalkers, such as jealousy, possession, imagined betrayal, and a need to coerce or control victims, are integral to understanding the risk they may pose to their victims. Their behaviour toward the victim in all settings, rather than just in the pattern of stalking specifically, should be carefully considered when evaluating risk and planning for safety.

Patterns of stalking behaviour can stop, start, shift, escalate, or de-escalate over periods of time (Cattaneo, Cho, & Botuck, 2011; Kropp et al., 2002; Miller, 2001b). Looking at duration, intensity, and frequency can all aid in understanding the pattern (Logan & Walker, 2015). This is complicated, of course, by the unknown quantities – if stalking is ongoing, the duration cannot yet be determined, and both intensity and frequency

may not be entirely apparent from the outset as many tactics may remain concealed (Logan & Walker, 2015). However, when looking at the overall pattern, noting when there has been an escalation of threatening, monitoring, or harassing behaviour is integral to evaluating dynamic risk. This escalation could be qualitative or quantitative: it may be an increase in frequency, an increase in the number of methods employed against the victim, or a greater volume of contacts per episode, or it may be an intensification of messages, a heightening of threatening, graphic, or insulting contacts or of symbolic violence, or increased personalisation of and breadth of the stalking indicators (Logan & Walker, 2015; McEwan et al., 2012; Meloy et al., 2012; Rugala & Fitzgerald, 2003). These indicators of stalking escalation are predictors of violence escalation (Kropp, 2008; Kropp et al., 2002), and are associated with intensified emotional distress of victims (Botuck et al., 2009; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, Weaver, & Resick, 2000). To fully comprehend the stalking pattern, is it therefore vital to examine multiple dimensions – the stalker’s course of conduct, the context of the threat (as it is felt by the victim, rather than objectively), and the scope of the consequences the victim has suffered (Logan & Walker, 2015).

Understanding the level of risk also requires an informed understanding of victims’ fear. This, of course, is often intertwined with the statutory requirement for harassment-type offences to cause a ‘reasonable person’ to feel fear for it to constitute criminal harassment but is equally important in working with victims’ safety. The ‘reasonableness’ of fear relates to what the (overt or implied) threats are, what context they occurred in (for example, the backdrop of IPV or coercion) and victims’ concern for their own safety (Logan & Walker, 2015). The experience of fear is cumulative; the impact of each stalking episode builds upon the fear from the previous episode. More often than not (Baum, Catalano, Rand, and Rose, 2009), threats are implicit – they are symbolised within stalkers’ perpetration of monitoring and contact behaviours such as incessant messaging, driving past, and turning up. These function as continuous reminders that the stalker has access to the victim, is not intending to leave the victim alone, and will be able to identify and capitalise on periods of vulnerability. These behaviours induce fear but are difficult to quantify to others (Kamphuis et al., 2003; Mullen et al., 2006). In addition, the level of implicit threat (and therefore the level of cumulative harm) may be escalated by more personalised symbolic violence, such as interfering with victims’ belongings, moving their possessions around in their homes, or damaging their property. In some instances, the threat may become much more explicit (Logan et al., 2006), such as leaving broken locks at the victim’s home, or referring explicitly to previous conversations about violence – both of which were reported by respondents as significantly fear-inducing events. Sending ‘tokens’ such as dolls, jewellery, or dead animals were amongst the most explicit forms of this. Such messages were often accompanied with declarations of permanence – insinuations that the stalker and victim would never be parted. However, episodes of implicit or symbolic threat are commonly misinterpreted by others as possibly unusual but not indicative of violent propensity (Logan et al., 2006; Kropp et al., 2002; Miller, 2001). Explicit threats, on the other hand, occur within 30-60 percent of all stalking cases (Baum et al., 2009; Blaauw et al., 2002; Mullen et al., 2006; Pathe´ & Mullen, 1997; Purcell et al., 2002). These are associated with both frequency and severity of stalking violence (Groenen & Vervaeke, 2009; McEwan et al., 2012; Sheridan & Roberts, 2011), and, unsurprisingly, with victims’ fear (Bjerregard, 2000). Finally, explicit threats are strongly associated with the likelihood of attempted homicide (McFarlane et al., 2002).

The context of the stalking, and comprehension of the threats interpreted from the stalking, is influential in determining how people respond. Respondents’ accounts indicate that they were often not taken seriously, and that the stalking was frequently minimised. However, supporters of victims, and helping services in particular, need to be equipped to recognise how seemingly benign acts may collectively cause harm, and that the risk of this harm can shift over time. Logan and Walker (2015) suggest that the more that other people perceive a victim to be vulnerable to a stalker’s threat, the more proactive they will be in the support they offer to that victim. The greater the volume of coercive or violent tactics used against victims in their relationship with the stalker, the greater the likelihood of stalking being prolonged and likely to escalate (Eke et al., 2011; Ferreira & Matos, 2013; Mohandie et al., 2006; Sheridan & Roberts, 2011). To comprehend (and communicate) the full context of the stalking, factors to consider include:

- Whether and how the stalker has coerced or manipulated their current victim in the past (Ferreira & Matos, 2013);
- Whether they have stalked or been violent toward previous partners, and over what duration and to what degree (Echeburua et al., 2009; Kropp, 2008);
- Whether there have been cycles of behaviour that have included an escalation of violence toward the victim (Conner-Smith, Henning, Moore, & Holdford, 2011);

- Whether their criminal history is suggestive of violent propensity (although this is not a conclusive predictor, and homicide attempts may be carried out regardless of criminal history);
- Whether they are enraged at or revenge-motivated toward the victim (Echeburua et al., 2009; Kropp, 2008; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002);
- Whether they currently have substance abuse issues (Brewster, 2000; Willson et al., 2000); and
- Whether they have exhibited or disclosed intense negative emotions or suicidality (Mohandie et al., 2006; McEwan et al., 2010).

Stalkers' mindset in stalking their victims is the final integral piece to better understanding risk. There are several components to this – their motivation to stalk, their justification of their behaviour, and their ability to carry out stalking methods. Motivation to stalk often stems from a trigger event (or multiple trigger events); most commonly, separation or the threat of impending separation, and less commonly the discovery of perceived betrayal, the victim's report to police of other violence, or a personal crisis (Conner-Smith, Henning, Moore, & Holdford, 2011). Additional triggers may occur throughout the stalking and precipitate an immediate escalation of the stalking (Logan, Walker, Shannon, & Cole, 2008; Mechanic, Weaver, et al., 2000), for example the victim re-partnering, police becoming involved, a court order being served, or the victim attempting to sever ties. Some trigger events are accompanied by a perceived loss of status, such as proximal support people discovering the stalker's violent history, or a failure to reconcile being made public knowledge. Loss of status can then act as a catalyst for sudden severe violence to the victim (Borum et al., 1999). Justification is then closely connected to motivation but concentrates on how the stalker explains the behaviour to themselves or others. Their justification usually centres on the role of the victim in the stalker's life, and that they perceive themselves as having the 'right' to reclaim what is theirs and exact revenge for the victim's attempts to abandon this partnership or imagined future (Echeburua et al., 2009). Finally, if they have the capacity to undertake sophisticated methods of stalking, or to easily perpetrate severe violence, this must be considered as high-risk factors. If threats are graphic and detailed and seem feasible, there is a greater likelihood that they will then be perpetrated (Meloy et al., 2012). Similarly, if they imply to the victim that they are able to track every facet of their lives, and they are known to have the technological sophistication to carry that out, that threat should be taken seriously. Finally, if they are carrying out a threat to track, monitor, or harass the victim, and are censured for these activities but proceed with the stalking anyway, this should be interpreted as a signal of a high-risk pattern that is likely to continue to escalate (Miller, 2001).

Both the findings from this research and the literature on stalking risk factors have been incorporated into the risk matrix in Figure 27. Pale peach indicates some risk, orange indicates very concerning (and often changeable) risk, and red indicates very high risk (including risk of potential homicide). However, despite being useful to inform decision-making and understanding of stalking risk, it is no substitute for experience, training, paying attention to victims' experiences and feelings, and professional instinct.

The stalker

Static risk factors

Addiction history
Mental health history
Past disregard for partners' wishes/
control over their decision

Criminal history including violence
Technical expertise

Multiple violent convictions
Having proceeded to contact a victim
despite having a court order in place

Dynamic risk factors

Increased use of substances
Distress or relapse
Commitment to contacting the victim against

Demonstrating a desire to limit the victim's contact with
others
Blaming the victim for their own behaviour
Justifying their behaviour
Physical access to the victim

Access to means of harming the victim
Rape and revenge talk
Jealousy and possession, and themes of ownership
and entitlement to the victim and to the victim's
cooperation
Threats of suicide or intense negative emotion
(e.g. about hopelessness or pointlessness)
Imagined or perceived betrayal

The stalking pattern & relationship context

Past monitoring of this victim's
behaviour
Past attempts to isolate the victim

Insulting or negative contact content
Prolonged for weeks/months

Implied threat
Symbolic threat or confrontation
Perceived loss of face (such as an employer
or friend finding out)
Lower-level physical violence
Property invasion
Tampering with belongings
Escalation of volume or number of different tactics used
Anticipation of impending separation, or suspecting the
victim wants to separate

The victim

Past violence by the stalker toward the same victim	Attempts to destroy the victim's reputation or work prospects
	Separation from the victim
	Increasing personalisation of tactics (i.e. tokens, or symbolism of permanence or intimacy)
	Escalation of threatening or degrading content, or escalation of reach
	Severe physical violence or sexual violence
	Following or threatening children
Family/social group that minimised stalking and IPV more generally	Discomfort with the stalking and/or impacts of the stalking
Isolated from key support people	Becoming nervous and hypervigilant about safety
Home easily intruded upon	Feeling the need to withdraw from usual activities or change routines
	Reports and disclosures of stalking met with minimising, blaming, or invalidating responses
	Feeling afraid and believing the stalker will cause them harm
	Feeling too anxious or fearful to leave the house
	The development of a new intimate relationship, or the stalker's discovery of this relationship

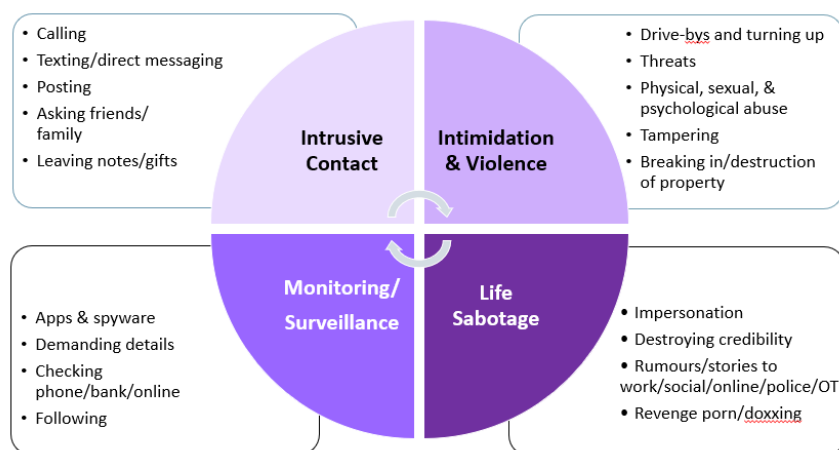
Figure 27: Stalking risk matrix.

CONCLUSIONS AND COMMENTS

Intimate partner stalking can happen before, during, or after a relationship, and it is the two latter temporal periods that are the focus of this research. To constitute stalking, it must be unwanted, repetitive, and intrusive. To meet the threshold for criminal harassment, it must induce fear, but can be perpetrated in ways that cause disruption and distress without necessarily making victims feel fearful. The significance of any discrete episode is heavily context-dependent: the impacts of each episode build upon the impacts of each prior episode, and tactics capitalise on the relationship history to obscure the meanings implicit in their content. It can be perpetrated physically or digitally and is most commonly both. Individual stalking actions usually do not appear overtly threatening or harmful to outsiders, which makes it difficult to recognise and respond to for people who do not have an informed analysis of how stalking patterns manifest, cause cumulative, or lead to elevated risks of violence. International prevalence studies indicate that up to one tenth of women may be subjected to stalking throughout their lifetimes, but this has not been studied in New Zealand.

Using the data from over 700 respondents and 18 interviews with people who have been victims of intimate partner stalking, and supplemented by the data of four key informants, we explored the stalking experience of victims, gaps in help provision, the various understandings of stalking, and the implications for safety-seeking in the future.

The tactics used by stalkers centered on their belief that their partners or ex-partners were, on some level, their possessions. Accordingly, they intruded upon, limited, and sabotaged victims' lives, and justified this as legitimate responses to the perceived transgressions of victims. While there are myriad tactics, and minimal homogeneity across victims' experiences, there are stark consistencies in superordinate patterns of stalking. We have set these out using this four-domain model, as set out in Part 1.4.



Stalkers commonly instrumentalized the relational setting and discourses of love and affection to excuse and deny these stalking tactics. This was usually unpredictable, and difficult for victims to anticipate or to explain in a way that would be acceptable to people hearing their disclosures. Victims rarely felt that reporting to police or attempting to seek safety through the criminal or family court led to any perceptible difference in their actual safety, and many found the responses of justice actors marginalizing and discouraging. This can be partially attributable to a weak legislative context and coherent national narrative of stalking and is also testament to the invisibility of stalking significance in our national practices in addressing intimate partner violence. As a result, many victims did not feel they had many options available to them.

There was a ubiquitous sense amongst respondents of feeling hopeless about the lack of options available after the stalking or after attempting to report the stalking. They described the stress of dealing with erratic, unforeseeable abuse, often perpetrated by stealth and with a changeable level of physical danger – signals of which were often obscured so that the threat was only apparent to the victim. As covered above, when reporting the violence, many felt like they were dismissed as hysterical, paranoid, crazy, or unreasonable. Many also had no access to recourse or to the legal mechanisms of safety, until they were eventually physically attacked and could evidence those attacks. They described the debilitating fear and distress that this engendered, usually compounded by the inability of both close supporters or police to grasp the significance of the stalking and contextualise it within a pattern of abuse.

Accordingly, many respondents outlined their frustrations with the way that the abuse was made more invisible by people's refusal to acknowledge it was stalking or to provide support and gave recommendations about what should be done differently in the future. We have used these, in conjunction with the findings in each of the five parts of this report, to develop recommendations for strengthening the system response to stalking and to victims' safety. There are several layers that need to be unpacked before effective and safety-promoting responses to disclosures of stalking can be established.

The first is the national narrative about stalking. As was set out in Part Four, the pervasive lack of understanding about what constitutes stalking behaviour and who perpetrates it meant that when most respondents and participants tried to tell others what was happening, their experiences were minimised, invalidated, or dismissed. The absence of an informed and proactive response from many support people or formal services (whose staff acknowledge their own need for specialist training and access to knowledge) further discouraged many of these victims from attempting to hold the stalker to account through the criminal justice system. Accordingly, the second layer concerns the capacity of victims to report stalking to the police.

If victims and their close support networks are not initially certain of the significance of individual stalking actions, they are unlikely to be equipped to communicate the stalking pattern in its entirety to police. Correspondingly, if police are not hearing a complaint described as stalking, they are also unlikely to categorise it as this themselves – unless it receives targeted and specialist training and attention as a policy priority for policing. As noted by Malsch et al. (2009), the lack of recording of stalking behaviours as stalking means there is little data to track its association with severe and lethal violence. Once this is correctly and consistently recorded, the ways that stalking manifests in the lead-up to intimate partner violence are better captured (Hehemann et al., 2017). Moreover, with sufficient training, police officers can deconstruct their own adherence to staking myths (such as those set out in Part 4.3) and be better equipped to recognise and respond to the subtleties and meaning in victims' accounts of stalking. However, police prioritising of stalking as an area needing improvement cannot effect change in isolation; legislation must provide the legislative framework for stalking offences to be successfully prosecuted. The third layer is therefore the legislative context and the changes that would be needed for victims to feel confident that proceeding with a court process would lead to greater safety.

As outlined in Part Five, although the Harassment Act and other laws (such as the Telecommunications Act and Harmful Digital Communications Act) technically criminalise stalking, the scope of behaviours and the threshold for it to be considered criminal preclude prosecution for most acts of stalking. Strengthening this legislation, and the civil remedies that intersect with family violence legislation and are available to victims, would empower police to improve their responsiveness to stalking risk. In other jurisdictions (Malsch, 2007; Groenan, 2006; Hehemann et al., 2017; Van der Heijden, 2014), stalking law reform has led to an immediate increase in the number of offences per year that are categorised as stalking, and in the number of prosecutions per year. Possibilities include the insertion of a new stalking offence that better encapsulates intimate partner stalking, reforming restraining order eligibility to include ex-intimates, or legislative direction to make stalking a stronger consideration in the granting of protection orders. However, although greater accountability through the criminal justice system and family court may disrupt stalkers' conviction that they may act against victims' lives with impunity, there are likely to continue to be many occasions where victims cannot achieve sufficient physical and digital distance from stalkers to feel safe and free to make their own decisions about their lives without interference. This leads to the final layer – that of support agencies to work with victims.

Specialist family violence organisations were the most commonly contacted source of formal support following intimate partner stalking amongst the research sample. Despite respondents' (mostly) positive reflections of these services, advocates do not always feel well-prepared to work with long-term, insidious, and often digitally-perpetrated stalking, particularly when they have to navigate the stopping of contact, the management of victim impacts, evidential issues, and the subjectivities involved with people's perceptions of stalking significance. The ever-changing digital environment also means that the social sector cannot pre-emptively develop resources for advocates to use without input from technological agencies. To equip the primary workforce that supports these victims with the knowledge and skills to feel confident and competent to do this work, better integration of digitally-proficient services, police efforts, and the social sector needs to be prioritised within government policy efforts.

Stalking by intimate partners invaded multiple domains of victims' lives, including their capacity to enter into new partnerships, their employment and professional reputations, their relationships with their families and friends, their own and their children's sense of safety, their economic and housing security, and their mental health. The risks of stalking therefore extend far beyond physical safety; accordingly, victims' need for support encompasses their physical, emotional, social, and relational wellbeing. Equally, however, stalking is internationally recognized as a high-risk flag for subsequent intimate partner homicide. It therefore demands a cross-government, state and specialist sector partnership, spanning legislative, policy, and practice development to proactively confront intimate partner stalking, hold stalkers accountable, and keep victims safe.

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