Stalking: Perceptions of victim responsibility, attributions of blame and interventions.

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis investigates how perceptions of responsibility and blame are formed, maintained, and challenged in the context of stalking. This thesis considers how cultural narratives, victimisation and cognitive bias inform these perspectives. To address this issue, the thesis adopts a multi-method approach, combining a literature review, empirical research, psychometric critique, and a clinical case study. This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive review of stalking perceptions across public, professional, and offender contexts.

Despite increased recognition of stalking as a serious offence, victims' experiences are often misunderstood or minimised due to persistent myths and attitudinal biases. These perceptions have significant implications for justice outcomes, victim support, and therapeutic intervention. The thesis examines how these beliefs influence judgments of blame and responsibility across different settings.

Chapter Two presents a systematic review of factors influencing perceptions of victim responsibility, including gender, prior experience, the victim–perpetrator relationship, and stalking myth endorsement. Drawing upon extant findings in perception research (Scott et al., 2010; Scott & Sheridan, 2011; Scott & Tse, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2003, Duff & Scott, 2013; Scott et al., 2015), Chapter Three outlines the results of an empirical study using a community sample to examine how these variables predict attributions of blame. The narrative synthesis presented in Chapter Two, and further substantiated in Chapter Three, highlights the role of stalking myths, their role in shaping societal norms, particularly pertaining to gender and cultural perceptions, thus shaping various aspects of the criminal justice system (Scott et al., 2010). Chapter Four critically evaluates the Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012), assessing its psychometric properties and theoretical underpinnings. Chapter Five offers a clinical case study of a convicted offender, illustrating how victim-blaming beliefs and cognitive distortions align with broader societal myths and how they may be addressed through psychological interventions.

Together, the findings offer a comprehensive understanding of how stalking is perceived and how these perceptions shape real-world responses. The thesis contributes to both theory and practice by highlighting the role of attitudes in shaping victim support, legal decision-making, and offender treatment.

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"It always rains hardest on people who deserve the sun".

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Chapter One: Introduction

Stalking in Society

Stalking was formally criminalised in England and Wales in 2012, when the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 (PHA) was amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. These reforms introduced two stalking-specific offences, sections 2A and 4A, which now form the fundamental legal framework for identifying, recording, and prosecuting stalking. Both offences combine a list of intrusive behaviours (e.g., following, online monitoring, unsolicited contact, property damage) with a requirement to assess the emotional and psychological impact on the victim.

Under section 2A, a person commits an offence by pursuing a course of conduct (two or more incidents) that they know, or ought to know, amounts to harassment. Harassment is defined as conduct that causes, or is likely to cause, alarm or distress (PHA 1997, s 7). This offence does not require a jury to be tried and carries a maximum sentence of 12 months. Section 4A, by contrast, defines a more serious offence, when the same pattern of behaviour causes the victim, on at least two occasions, either to fear violence or to experience serious alarm or distress with a significant negative impact on everyday life. Section 4A is an either-way offence, carrying a maximum sentence of ten years. These statutory thresholds are fundamental to how stalking is understood and managed in practice. Police officers are directed to apply section 2A unless there is clear evidence of significant psychological harm or fear of violence, in which case the offence should be escalated to section 4A and referred for specialist investigation (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services [HMICFRS], 2024). Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) policy reflects the legal hierarchy established in section 2A and 4A, recognising impact- related aggravating factors such as coercive controlling behaviour and breaches of protective orders that may elevate a case into the more serious 4A offence (CPS, 2018/2025).In the 2023/24 reporting year, the Crown Prosecution Service brought 5,859 stalking charges to first hearing, an increase of 2,208 cases (approximately 165%) compared with 2018/19 (House of Commons, 2024). Stalking Protection Orders (SPO) were introduced to permit early police intervention, protect victims from more serious harm, or to enforce treatment conditions at earlier stages

(Paladin, n.d.). However, there is evidence to suggest that stalking legislation is frequently misapplied by the police. An example of this is stalking being mischaracterised as malicious communication or harassment (HMICFRS, 2024). This gap between law and practice highlights the crucial role of sections 2A and 4A in understanding stalking.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 1.5 million adults, approximately 3.2% of the population, experienced stalking in 2024. In stark contrast, only 129,076 stalking offences were recorded by the police during the same period (ONS, 2024). Lifetime-prevalence data further suggest that about one in five women and one in eleven men will experience stalking at some point in adulthood (ONS, 2024). Paladin, the National Stalking Advocacy Service, maintains that even these figures significantly underestimate the true scale of victimisation (Paladin, 2019). Recent victimisation data indicated that women comprise approximately two-thirds of stalking victims (ONS, 2024), while multi-agency and prosecution records show that around four-out-of-five perpetrators are male (Tompson et al., 2020; CPS, 2024). Victims typically experience many unwanted stalking experiences, often close to a hundred, before seeking police help (CPS, 2020; West Midlands Police, 2025, as cited in Black Cliff Media, 2025). Recent analysis of Domestic Homicide Reviews shows that stalking behaviours frequently precede lethal violence. Physical stalking was identified as an aggravating factor in 13% of reviews, while technology-mediated (digital) stalking featured in a further 11% (College of Policing, 2024).

Although sections 2A and 4A provide a legal framework for detection and prosecution, stalking is still conceptually complex. Stalking has been described as both an objective social reality, and a socially shaped construct, in which the meaning is shaped by cultural context, schema and social interpretation (Mullen et al., 2001; Finch, 2002). The Suzy Lamplugh Trust defines stalking as "a pattern of fixated and obsessive behaviour which is repeated, persistent, intrusive and causes fear of violence or engenders alarm and distress in the victim". Alternative labels have also emerged, reflecting the shifting nature of the construct, with terms such as obsessional relational intrusions (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003), unwanted pursuit behaviour (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000), and intrusive contact (Haugaard & Seri, 2003) highlighting similar, but not always legally

equivalent, definitions. Because the offences rely not only on observable behaviour but also on its emotional impact, the same behaviour may be interpreted differently, by victims, police and prosecutors. This lack of a clear definition impacts both theory and practice. Parkhill et al. (2022) note that stalking research lacks strong theoretical progress, making it harder to explain or predict when behaviour meets legal thresholds. These challenges can also manifest in stalking scenarios, with both lay people and professionals more likely to identify a case of stalking, if the perpetrator is a stranger, or if it meets section 4A criteria (Scott et al., 2019).

These challenges manifest in the realities of the experience of stalking victims. Qualitative research conducted after the amended 2012 stalking legislation demonstrated that victims are often not believed or told that 'no offence' has occurred unless explicit threats are made. This is a pattern which appears to be linked to the repeated incidents required to determine a course of conduct (Brady et al., 2020; Korkodeilou, 2014), despite victim cooperation being recognised as the strongest predictor of an arrest (Brady et al., 2020). In summary, this evidence highlights that the legal definitions in sections 2A and 4A are essential for the recognition and prosecution of stalking, but also for shaping how stalking is understood within legal, institutional and social contexts.

Perceptions of Stalking within the Community

Misperceptions about stalking can shape the responses of victims, professionals, and members of the public, with consequences for detection, support-seeking, and legal outcomes (Scott et al., 2015). Decisions regarding culpability may ultimately rest with juries whose interpretations are often informed by social and cultural expectations. A substantial body of research has examined how factors such as victim–perpetrator relationship, gender, motivation and perceived seriousness of offending influence these interpretations.

Multiple factors will impact on a victim's decision on how to manage and ultimately understand their experience. Victims' own perceptions play a crucial role in how they interpret and respond to their experiences. Dispositional variables such as past traumatic experiences, cognitive schema, and coping styles may affect whether the victim recognises the behaviour as stalking and chooses to report it.

Some individuals do not label their experience as stalking, especially in the absence of overt threats, which can delay access to support or justice (Phillips et al., 2004). Victims have cited reasons such as fear of not being believed, lack of evidence, uncertainty about the perpetrator's intent (unsure if harm was intended), and feelings of shame as barriers to reporting to police and health professionals (Fisher et al., 2003; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Logan et al., 2006; van der Aa & Groenen, 2011). Additionally, stalking has been found to exert a secondary psychological toll on friends and family members of stalking victims, who often feel helpless (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007).

Fear is a particularly salient element in public and legal interpretations. Research indicates that if a victim does not express fear or recognise that they experience fear, others may not classify the behaviour as stalking (Lippman, 2018). Wood and Stichman (2018) found that women perceived as more vulnerable were more likely to report being stalked than those who did not report fear. Fear also mediates help-seeking, victims who report greater levels of fear are more likely to engage in informal coping strategies such as confiding in friends, family, or authorities (Spitzberg et al., 1998). In some cases, stalking compels life-changing decisions, such as relocating, changing employment, or altering daily routines (Blaauw et al., 2002).

Several studies have explored the effect of contextual information (context of relationship breakdown) on perception. Duff and Scott (2013) showed that participants judged stalking scenarios as more serious when the perpetrator was a stranger or a known physically violent ex-partner, and less serious when the victim had been unfaithful. These findings are consistent with other research, that stalking by ex-partners is often minimised. Although the Suzy Lamplugh Trust Helpline data indicates that approximately 45% of callers are stalked by former intimate partners and a further third by someone they already know (Home Office, 2023), research continues to show that members of the public typically perceive stranger stalkers as the greatest threat (Chung & Sheridan, 2021; Chung et al., 2023). This misperception has practical consequences and sits within a marked justice gap, for example, in the year ending March 2022, only 6.6% of police-recorded stalking cases proceeded to a CPS charge and only 1.4 % resulted in a conviction (House of Commons, 2024).

Gender also plays a significant role in shaping responses to stalking. Female victims targeted by male perpetrators are typically judged to be at higher risk than male victims or victims of same-gender perpetrators. Women are also more likely than men to perceive stalking as serious, particularly in the context of a prior intimate relationship (Dennison & Thomson, 2000, 2002; Dunlap et al., 2012; Hills & Taplin, 1998; Phillips et al., 2004). However, findings are not always consistent. For instance, Sheridan et al. (2003) found that victim gender did not significantly affect participants' severity ratings.

Taken together, these findings underscore the complexity of stalking perception, which is shaped not only by observable behaviours but also by social schemas, victim responses, and contextual information. These factors can influence reporting, police response, and judicial outcomes.

Stalking and Theoretical Frameworks

Understanding stalking requires not only an examination of the behaviour itself but also of how it is perceived, particularly in terms of how responsibility is attributed, and blame is assigned. This thesis is specifically concerned with perceptions of victim responsibility and the psychological mechanisms that underpin these judgments. The use of theoretical frameworks is essential in unpacking these processes, helping to explain why victims are blamed and how observers' interpretations are shaped by cognitive biases, motivations, and emotional defences.

The following subsection draws on two broad categories of theory, those that explore how individuals attribute responsibility and blame in stalking scenarios, and those that provide insight into the internal motivations behind stalking behaviour and how these are perceived.

Theories of Perception and Blame Attribution

These frameworks are central to understanding how members of the public, professionals, and law enforcement form judgments about responsibility in cases of stalking.

Defensive Attribution Theory (Shaver, 1970) suggests that individuals are often more likely to attribute blame to victims rather than perpetrators, particularly

when they perceive similarities with the victim, or anticipate facing similar threats. This cognitive bias, known as 'judgmental leniency,' serves as a self-protective mechanism, allowing individuals to distance themselves from perceived threats by shifting culpability onto the victim. This theoretical framework provides insight into the attitudes and judgements formed when blame and responsibility are directed towards the victim on perceived likenesses with the victim, a perception which increases the individual's belief that they will be vulnerable to a similar experience, such as becoming a target of stalking, or interpersonal violence. According to Defensive Attribution Theory, victim blaming is conceptualised as a defence mechanism used to reduce their own perceived vulnerability (Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2020).

Belief in a Just World Theory (BJW; Lerner & Simmons, 1966), similarly suggests that people maintain a cognitive bias toward seeing the world as fair. Virtuous actions are rewarded, and immoral actions are met with retribution, essentially, good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. This belief can lead to victim blaming, as illustrated by the research which Chapter Three built upon (Duff & Scott, 2013). In cases of ex-partner stalking compared to stalking by a stranger or acquaintance, the BJW framework can provide insight into how victims might be construed as warranting the stalking behaviour, if they are perceived to have incited it, such as through actions that provoke the stalker, especially when contrasted with victims who lack a personal connection to the stalker (Sheridan et al., 2003). Even considering the factual observation that most stalking victims share a prior connection with their stalker (Harris, 2000), the Belief in a Just World (BJW) is upheld. Furthermore, BJW provides insight into situations where victims are perceived as blameless, challenging BJW's underlying assumption (bad things happen to bad people). In such cases, defensive reactions, notably victim-blaming to the victim's individual traits are used to uphold the BJW (Hafer & Rubel, 2015).

Attribution and Victim Blaming in the Context of Stalking

A clear distinction between attribution and victim blaming is critical to understanding how responsibility is perceived in stalking cases. Attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973) describes how individuals interpret the causes of events, often relying on dispositional or situational factors. In stalking contexts,

observers might attribute causality to aspects of the victim's behaviour (e.g. ending a relationship), and this may lead to attributing blame to the victim. Victim blaming, however, goes beyond causal inference to involve moral judgment and psychological distancing, and often functions as a defence mechanism, implying the victim deserved the stalking. This transition often reflects psychological motives, such as to maintain a belief in a just world (Lerner & Simmons, 1966), or avoid identifying with the victim (Shaver, 1970). Thus, while attribution is not inherently blame, it can serve as a gateway to biased judgments, especially when filtered through defensive cognitive processes. In this way, theories such as Defensive Attribution Theory and Belief in a Just World Theory help explain how this shift occurs, from neutral attribution to biased blame, particularly when observers seek to protect themselves from perceived vulnerability. This psychological mechanism allows individuals to distance themselves from the perceived threat of victimisation by assuming that victims are in some way responsible for their own harm.

Together, these theories offer a robust account of how perceptions of victim responsibility are constructed and how blame is attributed in ways that may not align with objective harm or legal definitions. This theoretical lens is foundational to the thesis, which explores how blame is attributed, and victim responsibility is understood across stalking scenarios.

Theories of Perpetrator Motivation and Their Influence on Perceptions

While perception-focused theories explain why victims may be blamed, it is also important to understand how the stalker's behaviour is interpreted, particularly when their motives are seen as emotional or understandable. These perpetrator-focused theories provide insight into why certain forms of stalking are minimised. Relational Goal Pursuit Theory (RGP; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004) proposes that some individuals see relational goals, such as reconciliation or intimacy, as indicative of their self-worth. When these goals are blocked (e.g., after romantic rejection), individuals may escalate their behaviours in harmful ways, interpreting their actions as justified. Importantly, under emotional dysregulation, this persistence may be rationalised by the perpetrator as necessary or justified (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Johnson & Thompson, 2016). RGP also provides a valuable lens through which observers' perceptions may shift, if stalking is

perceived as "goal-directed" or arising from emotional distress, blame may be minimised, and the stalking perceived as less threatening (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014).

Attachment Theory complements RGP by framing stalking as a maladaptive response to perceived abandonment or rejection. Individuals with anxious or preoccupied attachment styles may engage in stalking to maintain a sense of emotional connection (Turner, 2020). MacKenzie et al., (2008) suggests that stalking often reflects pathological attachment, where the need for validation overrides social or legal boundaries. This framing influences perceptions by casting the stalker as emotionally vulnerable rather than deliberately coercive, again potentially reducing perceived threat or culpability. Even in clinical contexts, these dynamics can lead to misinterpretation of empathy or therapeutic alliance as reciprocal emotional intimacy (Farber & Nitzburg, 2016). These frameworks are important because they show how motivations attributed to the perpetrator such as emotional instability or rejection sensitivity can shape how stalking is socially and legally viewed, often leading to minimisation of the behaviour.

Why Perception Matters

Taken together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding both the construction of victim blame and the minimisation of perpetrator responsibility in stalking contexts. They clarify how psychological defences, cognitive biases, and interpretations of relational dynamics shape social responses to stalking. Given that public perception affects how stalking is reported, prosecuted, and supported, examining these theoretical perspectives is crucial. This thesis draws on these frameworks to explore how contextual factors, such as the nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship, belief in stalking myths, and gender influence attributions of blame.

Implications of Victim Blame

The act of blaming the victim aims to depict the individual as somewhat responsible for and warranting their victimisation. The literature has elucidated the obstacles encountered by victims when accessing formal support channels, such as engaging with law enforcement, which may involve not being treated

seriously, receiving passive responses, and victim blaming attitudes (Korkodeilou, 2014; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021). Inconsistencies are apparent within the victim-blaming literature, while some studies indicate that women are more prone to holding perpetrators accountable and recognizing stalking accurately compared to men (Yanowitz & Yanowitz, 2012), others suggest that men are more inclined to diminish the seriousness of stalking and assign greater blame to victims than women (Sinclair, 2012). Responses from others have been shown to impact how victims perceive their experiences (Gordon & Dardis, 2023). Research on juror decision-making in cases of another type of interpersonal violence, specifically rape, has revealed the widespread presence of victim-blaming attitudes and misconceptions (Dinos et al., 2015). These attitudes are reflected in societal misconceptions, which influence victims' willingness to seek informal support, such as assistance from family, as stalking victims often recognise the prevalence of victim-blaming attitudes within societal norms (Korkodeilou, 2014).

The Unique Contribution of this Research Thesis

This thesis addresses a critical gap in the field of stalking research by examining how perceptions of responsibility and blame are formed, reinforced, and potentially challenged. While stalking is increasingly acknowledged as a serious and harmful offence, perceptions held by the public, professionals, and perpetrators continue to be shaped by misconceptions and attitudinal biases. These perceptions can shape legal outcomes, service responses, and recovery trajectories for victims. Despite a growing body of research on stalking, no comprehensive, multi-perspective analysis had previously integrated public attitudes, myth endorsement, psychometric critique, and offender narrative into a single, coherent account. This thesis adopts a multi-method design to provide an analysis of how stalking is perceived and responded to, across different groups and using varied methodologies. In doing so, it makes a unique contribution to both academic literature and practice.

Understanding how perceptions of stalking are formed and applied requires an integrated approach, as these perceptions operate at multiple levels, from public opinion and professional decision-making to the internal narratives of those who perpetrate and are victims of this crime. A single method or perspective would have offered only a partial assessment; only by combining systematic literature

synthesis, empirical investigation, psychometric evaluation, and applied case study analysis can we fully capture the complexity of how blame and responsibility are assigned in stalking contexts.

The research thesis begins with a systematic review (Chapter Two) that explores the existing literature on factors influencing perceptions of victim responsibility in cases of stalking. While several studies have examined individual predictors of blame attribution, there had previously been no comprehensive synthesis of these findings in one review. The aim of this chapter was to synthesise the existing literature on the factors that may influence individuals' experience of stalking-related behaviours, with particular attention to those who identify as victims of this crime. It also sought to examine what is currently known regarding the experiences of stalking victims, and to summarise a range of contextual and dispositional factors that may shape these experiences. This information can be used to better understand the potential consequences of stalking victimisation, and to inform services and wider awareness efforts. It is hoped that the findings of this review will support improvements in practice and highlight the impact of stalking-related behaviours, while also identifying potential risk factors associated with existing attitudes towards victims of this crime. Clear directions for future research are also outlined in the chapter.

Chapter Three followed on from the findings of the systematic review by presenting an empirical study using a community sample to examine how stalking attitudes, prior experiences of victimisation, and endorsement of stalking myths may influence attributions of blame in a hypothetical stalking scenario. The study extends the work of Duff and Scott (2013) and aimed to explore how both contextual and dispositional factors might shape public judgements in cases of stalking. While building on established research, this study offers further insight into how personal experience and cognitive beliefs interact in the attribution of responsibility between victims and perpetrators.

Chapter Four provides a psychometric critique of the Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012), which was used in the empirical study in Chapter Three to measure endorsement of stalking-supportive beliefs. The review focused on assessing the scale's psychometric properties, its conceptual foundations, and its broader research and clinical utility. The review suggests that while the SMS appears to

measure a unidimensional construct of stalking myth endorsement, further research is needed to determine whether a multidimensional structure would better capture the complexity of these attitudes. Updating the scale to reflect evolving cultural, legal, and technological contexts may also improve its relevance and applicability.

Chapter Five presents a case study of an individual convicted of stalking with fear of violence, offering a distinct yet complementary perspective by examining how beliefs around victim blame and responsibility manifest in offender cognition. Drawing on offence-related psychological frameworks, the case focused on assessment, formulation, and partial intervention within a custodial setting. Through clinical engagement and psychometric assessment, the study explored how cognitive distortions, particularly those related to emotional regulation, attachment, and self-perception contributed to the individual's behaviour. The perpetrator frequently justified or minimised his actions and positioned himself as the victim, reflecting the same societal stalking myths identified in earlier chapters. This applied work provides practice-based insight into how such attitudes may be addressed in offender treatment, aligning with findings on public and professional perceptions.

These chapters collectively explore how stalking is perceived and understood, using literature review, data analysis, psychometric evaluation, and clinical application. This integrated approach supports a more nuanced understanding of stalking-related attitudes by examining how public perceptions are shaped, how they may be assessed using available tools, and how similar beliefs emerge in offender narratives. In bringing together these different perspectives, the thesis contributes to both theoretical and applied knowledge, particularly in relation to how attributions of blame and responsibility can inform responses to stalking in research, clinical, and criminal justice contexts.

Chapter Two: Factors that Impact Perceptions of Victim Responsibility in Stalking: A Systematic Review

Abstract

Numerous factors shape perceptions of victim responsibility in stalking cases. This systematic review examines existing evidence on the subject, highlighting how internal and external attributions influence judgements of victims, alongside their self-perception. Using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 23 relevant studies were identified through systematic searches across eight databases, manual screening, quality assessment and communications with experts. The narrative synthesis elucidated that prior victimisation experiences, professional expertise, gender dynamics of involved parties (victims, perpetrators, and observers), severity of stalking behaviour and victim response, the nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship, and misconceptions surrounding stalking (stalking myths) collectively influence perceptions of victim responsibility. Implications for practice and directions for future research are discussed.

Introduction

Stalking perpetrators use diverse methods, some of which may seem benign without insight into their intentions (Logan & Walker, 2017). These strategies, categorised by Logan and colleagues (Logan & Walker, 2017; Logan, 2016), include surveillance (monitoring the victim), life invasion (unwanted contact with the victim), intimidation (threats, behavioural and verbal) and interference through interrupting the victim's life, and physical/sexual assault. Women tend to experience stalking as more persistent, and fear-inducing compared to men (Reyns & Englebrecht, 2012), potentially due to its disproportionate impact on women (Smith et al., 2017) and its prevalence in female homicides by former partners (McFarlane et al., 2002).

Insights into Stalking Victimisation

The Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2022) records approximately 2.5 million cases of stalking each year in England and Wales. Victims of stalking endure significant harm across psychological, social, physical, and financial domains (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), leading to long-term adverse effects such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), poor mental health outcomes, and heightened fear of revictimization (Mechanic et al., 2000; Fleming et al., 2012). This fear correlates with diminished self-efficacy, and concerns about personal safety (Jackson, 2009), potentially fostering feelings of helplessness (Spitzberg, 2002). Despite fear and safety concerns being underestimated in stalking offences (Owens, 2016), victim fear has emerged as a significant predictor of the consequences of stalking (Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012). Victims often resort to precautionary measures, including enhanced security and evading certain social contexts, to avoid their stalker (Sheridan et al., 2003).

Victims' perceptions of their experiences can influence their help-seeking decisions (Cho et al., 2023), leading some to opt for formal help-seeking, such as police reporting, while others resort to self-protective and informal help-seeking measures (Reyns & Englebrecht, 2010; Goldsworthy & Raj, 2014; Podaná & Imríšková, 2016). Various factors impact victims' decisions to report stalking to the police, such as tending to report when the presence of threats or severity of behaviour is high, and a reluctance to report in cases of intimate victim-offender relationships (Ménard & Cox, 2016). Additionally, victims' perceptions of the

severity of the conduct serve as a reason to seek assistance from law enforcement agencies, often delaying help-seeking until they perceive the situation as sufficiently severe (Ameral et al., 2020).

The perception and narrative construction of stalking experiences play a central role in defining and understanding the phenomenon (Mullen et al., 1999). Victims often experience self-blame and perceived vulnerability to further victimisation which can exacerbate their distress (Breitenbecher, 2006; Logan & Walker, 2021). In addition to self-blame, extensive research has shown that victims of crime frequently face victim blaming attitudes, where others hold them responsible for what happened. This may include suggesting that the victim somehow encouraged the perpetrator or failed to clearly reject their advances, ultimately attributing responsibility and blame to the victim (Lonsway et al., 2008). Victim blaming attitudes are pervasive throughout the domestic violence, stalking and rape literature (Sheridan et al., 2016; Krahé & Berger, 2009). Beyond the financial impact of being a stalking victim, individuals often face external judgements that may reflect victim-blaming attitudes, as well as internal struggles such as feelings of vulnerability and self-blame.

External reactions to victimisation can influence a victim's perception of their experience (Gordon & Dardis, 2023). The literature on victim-blaming reveals some inconsistencies; some studies suggest that women are more likely than men to identify stalking behaviours accurately and attribute responsibility to the perpetrator (Yanowitz & Yanowitz, 2012). In contrast, other research indicates that men are more prone to downplay the seriousness of stalking and to assign greater blame to the victim (Sinclair, 2012). In cases of former-partner stalking, male ex-intimate victims are often viewed as more responsible and capable of alleviating the situation than females (Sheridan et al., 2003). Furthermore, adherence to traditional gender roles has been associated with increased victim-blaming perceptions (Dunlap, 2010).

The Role of Just World Beliefs and Attributions of Responsibility

The just world hypothesis (Lerner, 1980) serves various adaptive functions when individuals experience or perceive injustice, whether directed towards themselves (Dalbert & Filke, 2007) or observed in others (Sutton & Douglas, 2005). The belief in a just world (BJW) refers to the concept that the world operates fairly, where

good things happen to good people, and vice versa (Lerner, 1980), functioning similarly to a cognitive schema for individuals. However, within the context of the criminal justice system, the BJW can be at conflict with personal experiences or beliefs, such as injustice, leading to cognitive dissonance (Stupnianek & Schmitt, 2024). Individuals often employ strategies, including behavioural (such as restoring justice, punishing perpetrators) and cognitive (such as victim blaming, bias), to alleviate cognitive dissonance (Bartholomaeus & Strelan, 2016; Hafer & Rubel, 2015). The BJW offers individuals a sense of psychological security, through the belief in a controllable and stable world. Consequently, when victims are perceived as innocent, this challenges the BJW, prompting defensive responses such as victim blaming, through character disparagement (Hafer & Rubel, 2015). Victim blame serves to portray the individual as somewhat responsible for and deserving of their victimisation.

Implications of Victim Blame

The criminal justice system's response to stalking victims has long been acknowledged as inadequate (Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021). Research has shed light on the difficulties victims encounter when seeking formal help, such as reporting to the police. These challenges include not being taken seriously, being told that their experiences do not qualify as a crime (Korkodeilou, 2014), and facing inaction or victim-blaming (Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021). This issue presents a significant societal concern, as experiencing victim blaming, may deter individuals from reporting instances of stalking. Consequently, perpetrators of stalking offenses may go unprosecuted or untreated, with little expectation of reduced recidivism. Research has illustrated that victims of stalking often refrain from reporting to law enforcement, citing reasons such as a perception that the incidents lacked severity; despite experiencing fear, threats from the perpetrator, and taking precautionary measures such as installing security devices at home (Cass & Mallicoat, 2014). Moreover, Fisher et al. (2002) suggested that biases and the assumption that stalking victims are unlikely to report to authorities weaken deterrents against stalking behaviour, further perpetuating the cycle of victimization.

Victims are more inclined to report incidents to the police when they personally perceive their experiences as criminal acts (Fisher et al., 2003). Nevertheless,

qualitative research with female victims of crime has revealed that the portrayal of a victim significantly influences self-perception and engagement with support services. Acceptance of a victim identity stems from the belief that it validates the experience as one of harm beyond the victim's control, warranting empathy. Conversely, rejection of a victim identity arises from the desire to distance oneself from notions of weakness and culpability for victimization, often oscillating between these perspectives throughout their experiences (Leisenring, 2006). Thus, given the profound impact on victims' mental and physical well-being, victim-blaming attitudes play a critical role and carry serious consequences. Moreover, barriers within the criminal justice system relate to evidence collection and lack of communication with victims (van der Aa & Groenen, 2011). Thematic analysis of mock jury deliberations provided further insight into the implications of victim blame. Gavin and Scott (2016) found that female victims were often blamed, while the actions of male perpetrators were excused on the grounds of their emotional state and the nature of their communication with the victim, which was influenced by the dynamics of their relationship. During deliberations, victims were frequently seen as overreacting for involving the police and were held responsible for provoking the perpetrator's behaviour. Similarly, research on juror decision-making in rape cases has highlighted the persistence of victim-blaming attitudes and myths (Dinos et al., 2015). These attitudes extend to societal perceptions, impacting victim's engagement in help-seeking behaviours like therapy, familial and peer support, with stalking victims themselves acknowledging victim-blaming attitudes in societal culture (Korkodeilou, 2014).

Aims of the Review

The aim of this systematic review is to consolidate and synthesise pertinent empirical research, investigating reported factors that influence perceptions of victim responsibility, particularly within the context of stalking behaviour. This review seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the processes used by stalking victims themselves, law enforcement and healthcare practitioners who engage with both victims and perpetrators. Additionally, it seeks to understand societal perceptions of stalking as crime, examining victims multifaceted experiences and acknowledging the impact of lesser-known confounding and dispositional variables.

This interplay has significant implications, particularly in shaping the trajectory of victims' experiences. It involves key stages such as recognising stalking behaviour, identifying as a victim, and deciding whether to report the crime. This review aims to explore how perceptions and biases among healthcare and law enforcement professionals influence victim's engagement with the criminal justice system. This includes judgements by jury members and legal personnel about responsibility and culpability.

Moreover, this review aims to contribute to the discourse on victim blaming by scrutinising whether empirical evidence supports or challenges existing findings within the domain of interpersonal violence. Understanding the broader impact of these perceptions of victim responsibility, at both the individual and societal levels is essential. Therefore, a systematic review of the existing literature is warranted.

Methods

Scoping

On 12/03/2020 scoping searches on PsycINFO, Web of Science and Google Scholar were conducted, identifying papers of possible significance. Both the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews and PROSPERO (the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews) were searched on 12/03/2020 and 05/07/2020 to determine whether any reviews exploring similar concepts had been conducted or were in progress. No completed reviews or protocols were found within either database. On 10/07/2020, the protocol for this review was completed, in line with the PRISMA-P checklist (Moher et al, 2015). Since the original analysis was completed, a further search was conducted by the author on 01/01/2024, and 16 additional papers were found that might go on to contribute and potentially identify other interesting factors in relation to the review question.

Search Strategy

The search process for this review was conducted in collaboration with a library specialist at the University of Nottingham, following their guidance and utilising the search terms described in Table 1, with full details of search terms and syntax used in Appendix A. These terms were adjusted based on the specific database being searched. The searches were carried out over three days (28/08/2020; 02/09/2020; 04/09/2020). The following databases were searched, with the

respective number of citations exported: PsycINFO (2297), OVID Medline (912), OVID Embase (1700), Cochrane (419), Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA; 3413), Epistemonikos (257), OpenGrey (196) and Sociological Abstracts (3247). In total 12441 citations were retrieved from database searches.

Additionally, hand searches of the reference lists of full-text review articles, meeting the inclusion criteria, as well as relevant systematic reviews or meta-analyses (which were excluded from this review), were conducted. Three key authors were contacted to identify any further papers or those that were currently in publication, this resulted in five further papers. The software 'Endnote' was utilised to store the references obtained from the searches.

Table 1

Search syntax

Stalking or Stalk* or harass* or cyberstalk* AND
Victim* AND
Blame or respons* or percep* or perceive* or judg* or jur* or "mock jur*"

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

See Table 2 for the inclusion and exclusion framework used in the review. The PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome; Richardson et al., 1995) framework guided the selection process for inclusion or exclusion of each study. Studies were excluded if, 1) participants were under 18 years of age; 2) exclusively comprising of participants that were perpetrators of stalking-related behaviour; 3) victim responsibility was not assessed using a psychometric measure or method with associated data provided and 4) the participants did not evaluate responsibility within a stalking context, or solely judged perpetrators. Studies assessing interventions or services for stalking victims or perpetrators were excluded, as such studies fell beyond the focus of the review, and the retrieved papers lacked data measuring victim responsibility. Furthermore, studies addressing tangential concepts, such as defining stalking behaviours and cognitions were excluded. Studies with a qualitative component were included if they incorporated a psychometric measure of victim responsibility, while systematic reviews, commentaries, literature reviews, and opinion pieces were excluded. Initial screening of titles and abstracts was conducted to exclude papers

not meeting the inclusion criteria (Stage 1), followed by a full-text review by the author and an independent reviewer, using the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Stage 2). Any discrepancies were resolved through the inclusion of a third reviewer. Table 2 outlines the inclusion and exclusion criteria against which full texts were screened.

Table 2

Inclusion and Exclusion Framework

Elements	**Inclusion**	**Exclusion**
Population	Adults aged 18 and over who have made a judgement about responsibility in a scenario of stalking-related behaviour. This judgement could be about themselves or others, for example victims of stalking-related behaviour. Stalking-related behaviour can be described as the following: pursuit behaviours, harassment, cyberstalking, obsessional-relational intrusion, and has been recognised as a form of interpersonal violence.	Adults aged 18 and over that identify or have been identified as perpetrators of stalking-related behaviour and information that solely focuses on their characteristics or psychopathology will not be considered. Adults aged 18 and over who have been asked to judge responsibility in a scenario involving stalking-related behaviour involving both victim and perpetrator where the data is unable to be separated for victims of this experience. Individuals under the age of 18.
Interest/**E**xposure	Adults aged 18 and over who have either been a victim of, or participated in a study on, stalking-related behaviour, where they have had to judge responsibility of the victim (whether that is themselves or others).	Adults aged 18 and over who have not judged responsibility in a scenario involving stalking-related behaviour. Adults aged 18 and over who have judged solely perpetrators of stalking-related behaviour.
Comparison	No comparator or control group will be involved.	
Outcomes	Psychometric scores, measures or methods pertaining to ascribing responsibility; attribution of blame; beliefs or perceptions individuals hold in relation to stalking-related behaviours and/or victims of this experience.	No psychometric scores, measures or methods used to assess.
Study Design	Quantitative research, Mixed- methods research.	Opinion papers, commentaries, reviews etc.

Data Extraction

Prior to commencing the quality assessment phase, data extraction was carried out with a commitment to maintaining impartiality towards the studies under review. It was determined that no studies would be excluded based on quality criteria, removing a quality cut-off threshold for this review. It was felt that all research findings offered valuable insights into the review, and greater consideration could be given to papers which had higher quality scores. A structured data extraction form, detailed in Appendix B, was employed to systematically capture relevant information aligned with the review's objectives. The information extracted included study design, objectives, participant demographics, measures of victim responsibility and outcomes. To ensure consistency in this process, a second reviewer was used to cross-validate a subset of the extracted data. Detailed summaries of study characteristics are presented in Table 4 and study results are presented in Table 5.

Quality Assessment

The quality assessment process is an integral component of systematic reviews, it enables the evaluation of the strength of study findings whilst considering potential biases and appraising the methodological integrity of research designs (Slutsky et al., 2014). In this review, the quality assessment process was conducted using a tool that was adapted for use to assess the types of studies included, specifically cross-sectional and mixed-method designs. This tool was used by both the author and an assessor. The tool drew upon established frameworks, specifically the Appraisal Tool for Cross-Sectional Studies (AXIS; Downes et al., 2016) and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018). The tool employed a checklist format, using information gleaned from the studies to generate an overall quality score. For further details, refer to Appendix C for the quality assessment tool used in the current review.

Results

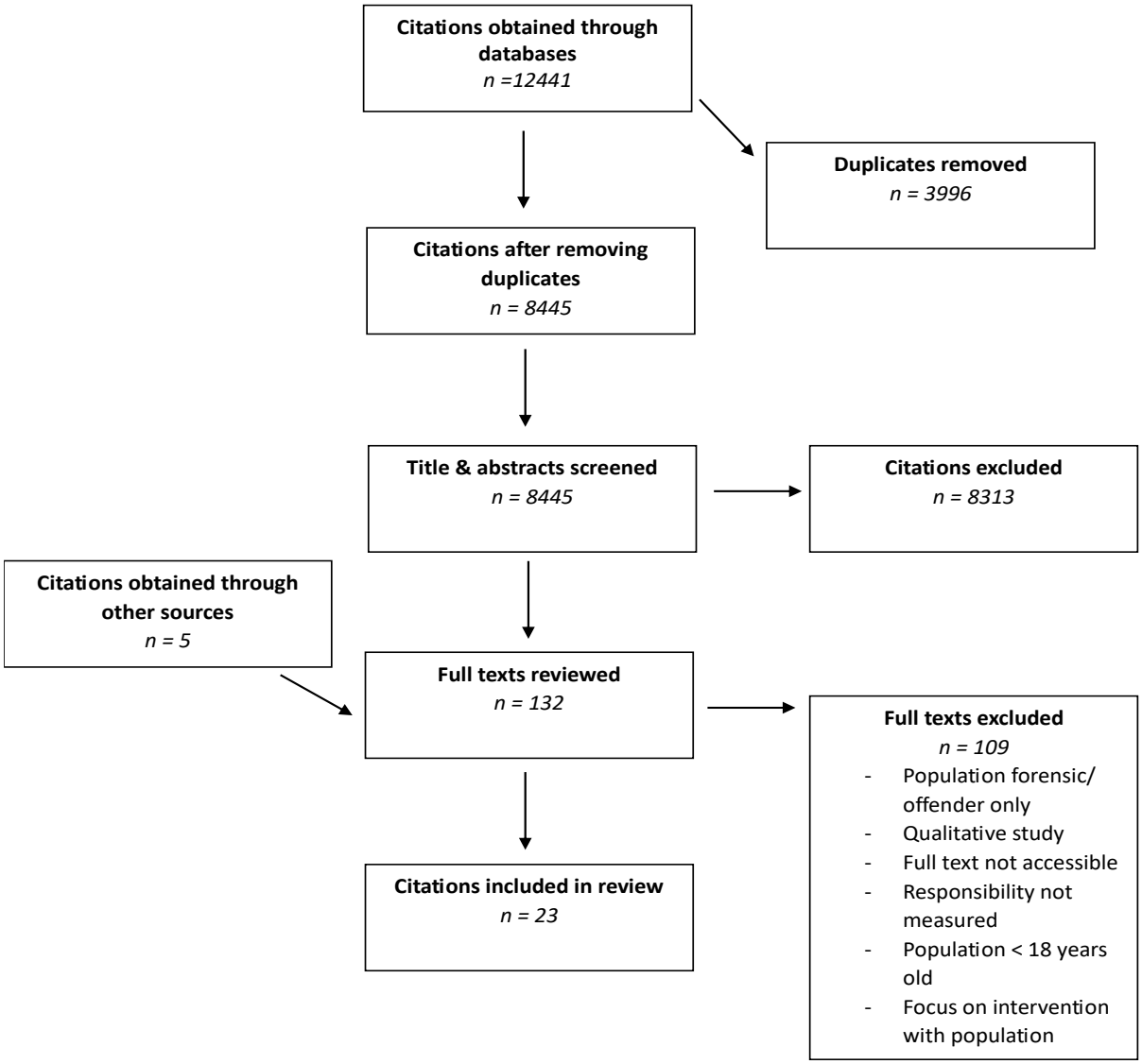
Study Selection

All citations retrieved from the databases were imported into EndNote (n= 12441). Duplicates were subsequently automatically and manually removed. The author then conducted screening for relevance to the review topic on the remaining

citations (*n*= 8445), resulting in 132 full texts being retained for stage 2 review. The full texts were retrieved and reviewed against the relevant criteria (Table 2). During this stage, 109 papers were excluded, leaving 23 citations eligible for inclusion in the review. The first author conducted the quality assessment process for all studies included, while a second reviewer evaluated a randomly selected 25% of the included studies. This approach aimed to ensure transparency in the quality assessment process. A quality assessment correlation coefficient of .8, indicating an agreement in the excellent range (Fleiss, 1986). Papers that were screened and excluded can be found in Appendix D with their respective reasons for exclusion. See Figure 1 for a flow diagram detailing the study selection process.

Figure 1

PRISMA Flow diagram of the study selection strategy



Characteristics of included studies

The included studies will be referred to throughout the present review by their numerical assignment as listed in Table 3. See Table 4 for an overview of the included studies, their sample and comprehensive focus. Within the 23 studies that were included in the review, not all aims and results were relevant to the review question, therefore information not meeting the inclusion criteria was omitted.

Table 3

List of final studies included in the review

Study Number	Author(s)	Title
1	Ahlgrim & Terrance (2018)	Perceptions of cyberstalking: impact of perpetrator gender and cyberstalker/victim relationship.
2	Amar & Alexy (2010)	Coping with stalking.
3	Björklund et al. (2010)	Coping with stalking among university students.
4	Duff & Scott (2013)	Understanding perceptions of stalking: the impact of additional contextual information regarding the breakdown of relationships.
5	Dunlap (2010)	Stalking myth acceptance: An investigation of attitudinal constructs associated with gender differences in judgments of intimate stalking.
6	Dunlap et al. (2012)	Mock jurors' perception of stalking: The impact of gender and expressed fear.
7	Dunlap et al. (2015)	Participant gender, stalking myth acceptance, and gender role stereotyping in perceptions of intimate partner stalking: A structural equation modelling approach.
8	Fais et al. (2020)	Mediators and moderators of the association between stalking victimization and psychological distress.
9	Kamphuis et al. (2003)	Individual differences in post-traumatic stress following post-intimate stalking: Stalking severity and psychological variables.
10	Kamphuis et al. (2005)	Stalking- Perceptions and attitudes amongst helping professions. An EU cross-national comparison.
11	Lambert et al. (2013)	Do men and women differ in their perceptions of stalking: An exploratory study among college students.
12	McKeon et al. (2015)	It's not really stalking if you know the person: Measuring community attitudes that normalize, justify, and minimise stalking.
13	Scott et al. (2013)	The influence of prior relationship on perceptions of stalking: A comparison of laypersons, nonspecialist police officers, and specialist police officers.
14	Scott et al. (2014)	International perceptions of stalking and responsibility: The influence of prior relationship and severity of behaviour.

15	Scott et al. (2010)	The influence of prior relationship on perceptions of stalking in the United Kingdom and Australia.
16	Scott & Tse (2011)	An exploratory study of the influence of perpetrator and victim sex on perceptions of stalking.
17	Scott & Sheridan (2011)	Reasonable perceptions of stalking: the influence of conduct severity and the perpetrator-target relationship.
18	Scott et al. (unpublished)	Understanding the mediating role of responsibility in perceptions of stalking.
19	Sheridan & Scott (2010)	Perceptions of harm: Verbal versus physical abuse in stalking scenarios.
20	Sheridan et al. (2003)	'There's no smoke without fire': Are male ex-partners perceived as more 'entitled' to stalk than acquaintance or stranger stalkers?
21	Sheridan et al. (2016)	Police officer perceptions of harassment in England and Scotland.
22	Weller et al. (2013)	Police and public perceptions of stalking: The role of prior victim–offender relationship.
23	Wong (2014)	Stalking: The effects of gender on jury perception of stalking cases.

Table 4

Overview of included studies, demographics of sample and focus

Study Number	Study design	Country of Origin	Population Demographics	Study focus
1	Cross-sectional	USA	N = 245 Age range: 18-74 years (M = 32.52, SD = 11.19) Gender: 136 males, 109 females Race: White (n = 230, 93.9%) Personal history of cyberstalking victimisation (n = 60, 24.5%).	- To examine the impact of perpetrator gender, and the relationship between the perpetrator and victim (ex-intimate vs. stranger) on perceptions of cyberstalking.
2	Cross-sectional	USA	N = 69 students Age range: 18 – 26 years (M = 21.13, SD = .97) Gender: 17 males, 52 females Race: White/ non-Hispanic (n = 62, 89.9%), Black/African American (n = 4, 5.8%), Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic and Mixed/Multiracial (n = 3, 1%) All participants self-identified as being victims of stalking.	- To describe stalking behaviour experienced by participants. - To describe the coping strategies employed by participants who have been victims of stalking.
3	Cross-sectional	Finland	N = 615 students Age range: 18 – 42 years, M = 24.2, SD = 3.49 Gender: 533 females, 82 males. Race: Data not reported.	- To investigate how university students cope with stalking. - To identify the most frequently used behavioural coping actions (personal and legal) and to determine whether these actions were related to the nature of stalking (violent vs. nonviolent, and to examine if the

			N = 298 confirmed that they had personal experience with stalking-related behaviour.	coping strategies are related to contextual factors such as victim and stalker characteristics.
4	Cross-sectional	UK, European Union & Rest of the world	N = 180 females Age range: 18 – 55 years (M = 29.98, SD = 9.57) Race: UK (n = 159, 88%), European Union (n = 11, 6%) and the rest of the world (n = 10, 6%)	- To examine the influence of prior relationship and additional contextual information regarding the breakdown of ex-partners' relationships on perceptions of stalking; specifically, to which the perpetrators behaviour is perceived to constitute stalking, necessitate police intervention, cause alarm or personal distress, and cause fear of violence. - To investigate whether prior relationship influences the extent to which participants perceive themselves to be responsible for encouraging the behaviour, as they are placed in the role of the victim during this study.
5	Mixed-method	USA	N = 360 students Age range: 18 – 43 years (M = 20) Gender: 202 females, 158 males Race: White/Caucasian (n = 306), Black/African American (n = 29), Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 14), Hispanic/Latino (n = 7), Other (n = 4). N= 126 confirmed that they had personal experience with stalking-related behaviour.	- To examine the extent to which beliefs that support stalking (i.e., stalking myth acceptance – SMA victim blame, SMA flattery, and SMA nuisance) predict individual trial judgments of men and women, and to test whether endorsement of SMA can be predicted from attitudinal correlates (e.g., hostility toward women).
6	Cross-sectional	USA	N = 306 students (Experiment 1 = 177 students; Experiment 2 = 129 students)	- To examine how participant gender impacted trial judgements (verdict, victim perceptions, defendant perceptions) when the gender of both

			Age range: 18 – 49 years (Experiment 1 – 18-49 years; M=19, SD = 2.79) (Experiment 2 – 18 – 23 years; M = 19, SD 1.02) Gender: 168 females, 138 males (Experiment 1 – 90 females and 87 males; Experiment 2 – 78 females and 51 males) Race: Data was not collected.	the defendant and victim were manipulated (Experiment 1). - To examine how victim fear (high or low) impacted trial judgements (verdict, victim perceptions, defendant perceptions) on a prototypical type of intimate stalking (female victim/ male defendant) (Experiment 2).
7	Cross-sectional	USA	N = 360 students Age range: 18 – 43 years (M = 20) Gender: 202 females, 158 males Race: White/Caucasian (n = 306), Black/African American (n = 29), Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 14), Hispanic/Latino (n = 7), Other (n = 4). N= 126 confirmed that they had personal experience with stalking-related behaviour.	- To examine the direct and indirect effects of participant gender, stalking myth acceptance, and gender role stereotyping on guilt ratings in a stalking trial. - To examine the role of perceived victim fear and distress, and defendant intended danger on perceptions of a stalking trial. - To examine whether personal experience with stalking impacted perceptions of both defendant and victim.
8	Cross-sectional	USA	N = 127 students Age range: 18 – 22 years (M = 18.92, SD = 1.00) Gender: 73 females, 54 males Race: White (n = 112); Black (n = 4); Other (n = 11). N = 65 confirmed that they had personal experience with stalking-related behaviour.	- To understand mediators and moderators of the relationship between stalking victimization and depression.

			Length of victimization ranged from 0.5 to 84 months (M = 8.82 SD = 15.92). Among victims, 33.1% specified that their "most persistent unwanted pursuer" was female, and 47.2% specified that the perpetrator was male.	
9	Cross-sectional	Netherlands	N = 131 females from a Dutch Anti-Stalking Foundation Organisation Age range: 22 – 70 years (M = 42.7) Race: Data not reported. All respondents confirmed that they had personal experience with stalking-related behaviour. Of these, 161 (63%) respondents reported a prior intimate relationship with the stalker. The duration of stalking varied from 2 months – 19 years (M = 36 months).	- To provide an analysis of the distinctive maladaptive psychological reactions that are associated with being a victim of post-intimate stalking using the Traumatic Constellation Identification Scale (TCIS); and clarify the (relative) traumatic impact of specific stressor-related variables, including violence, and individual psychological variables.
10	Cross-sectional	Belgium; UK; Netherlands; Italy	N = 516 (GPs = 188; Police Officers = 328) Belgium: 134 Police Officers; 51 GPs. Italy: 50 Police Officers; 50 GPs. Netherlands: 64 Police Officers; 49 GPs. UK: 80 Police Officers; 38 GPs. Age range: None reported. Gender: None reported. Race: None reported.	- To examine to what extent do professionals (GPs and Police Officers) hold specific dysfunctional attitudes about stalking, and to what extent are these dysfunctional attitudes related to recognition of stalking.
11	Cross-sectional	USA	N = 2174 students Age range: None reported. Gender: 1150 females; 1024 males Race: Black (n = 326); Hispanic (n = 65); White (n = 1631); other (n = 152)	- Establish whether and how men and women differ in their perceptions of the pervasiveness of stalking, the harmfulness of stalking, victims and perpetrators of stalking, motivations for stalking, if there is a blurry line

			N = 761 (473 females; 290 males) confirmed that they had personal experience with stalking-related behaviour.	between courtship and stalking, and if the victims are to blame for being stalked.
12	Cross-sectional	Australia	N = 524 (244 Community members; 280 Police Officers) Age range: 20 – 84 years (M = 43.2; SD 13.3). Police Officers – 20 – 63 years, M = 38.5, SD = 8.0. Community members – M = 48.9, SD = 16.1. Gender: 205 females, 319 males (Community 130 females, 114 males; Police Officers 75 females, 205 males) Race: Data not reported.	- Examine the underlying structure of the SRAQ and whether these factors reflect commonly held stalking misconceptions or stereotypes found in existing literature. - Investigate potential gender differences in attitudes toward stalking, compare attitudes and beliefs between the general community and law enforcement personnel, and explore how endorsing certain attitudes might impact the judgment of guilt in a hypothetical stalking scenario.
13	Cross-sectional	UK	N = 307 Study 1 = 101 non-specialist police officers; 108 laypersons (61 students, 47 members of the public) Study 2 = 49 specialist police officers; 49 non-specialist police officers Age range: Study 1 = Police sample M = 33.88, SD = 8.19, Layperson sample M = 29.02, SD = 12.38 Study 2 = Specialist police sample M = 36.08, SD = 8.99, non-specialist police sample M = 33.24, SD = 7.98	- To examine the influence of prior relationship on perceptions of stalking (including whether the perpetrator's behaviour is considered to constitute harassment, necessitate police intervention, cause the victim alarm or personal distress, cause the victim to fear the use of violence and whether the victim is responsible for encouraging the perpetrator's behaviour) and compares the perceptions of laypersons, nonspecialist police officers and specialist police officers.

Gender: 210 females, 97 males
Study 1 = Police sample – 68 females, 33 males. Lay person – 75 females, 33 males.

Study 2 = Specialist police sample – 33 females, 16 males. Non-specialist police sample – 34 females, 15 males.

Race: Data not reported.

Experience of stalking:
Study 1 = non-specialist police officers had received basic training in risk assessment and domestic violence. Average service length = 10.78, SD = 6.97. 86 were constables and 79 had experience of investigating stalking/harassment cases.

Study 2 = specialist police officers had received specialist training in risk assessment, child protection, domestic violence, and stalking. Average service length of specialist police officers = 12.10, SD = 7.78. 39 specialist officers were constables. 43 specialist police officers had experience of investigating harassment cases.
Average service length of non-specialist police officers = 9.61, SD = 6.72. 43 non-specialist police officers were constables. 38 specialist police officers had experience of investigating harassment cases.

14	Cross-sectional	Australia, UK & USA	N = 1080 Community members (Australia = 360, USA = 360, UK = 360) Age range: Australia = 18 – 60 years, M = 39.36, SD = 12.03; USA = 18 – 60 years, M = 41.13, SD = 11.81; UK =19 – 60 years, M = 39.21, SD = 11.05 Gender: Australia = 180 females, 180 males; USA = = 180 females, 180 males; UK = 180 females, 180 males Race: Data not reported.	- To establish whether prior relationship, severity of behaviour and country, influence perceptions of stalking and the extent to which the perpetrator's behaviour is viewed to constitute stalking, necessitate police intervention, necessitate a criminal conviction, will cause the target alarm or personal distress, and will cause the target fear of violence. Additional outcomes are to understand perceptions of victim and perpetrator responsibility.
15	Cross-sectional	UK & Australia	N = 315 students UK = 152 Australia = 163 Age range: UK – M = 21.08, SD = 1.66 Australia – M = 23.65, SD = 7.05 Gender: 209 females, 106 males UK – 90 females, 62 males Australia – 119 females, 44 males Race: Data not reported.	- To investigate the impact of whether the nature of the prior relationship between the perpetrator and the target and/or the nationality of participants (UK & Australia) influence perceptions of whether the perpetrator's behaviour: Constitutes stalking, necessitates police intervention, will cause fear or apprehension, will cause mental or physical harm and influences perceptions of whether the target is responsible for encouraging the perpetrator's behaviour.
16	Cross-sectional	UK	N = 124 students Age range: M = 21.11, SD = 2.66 Gender: 61 females, 63 males. Race: Data not reported.	- To investigate whether perpetrator sex and/or victim sex influence the extent to which the perpetrator's behaviour is perceived to constitute stalking, necessitate police

				intervention and/or criminal charges, and cause the victim alarm, personal distress and/or fear of violence and the extent to which the victim is responsible for encouraging the perpetrator's behaviour.
17	Cross-sectional	UK, European Union & Rest of the world	N = 328 students (UK – 265; European Union – 32; Rest of the world – 31) Age range: M = 20.68, SD = 3.12 Gender: 263 females, males. Race: Data not reported.	- To investigate perceptions of stalking by considering the influence of both conduct severity and the perpetrator target relationship.
18	Mixed - method	Australia, USA & UK	N = 900 community sample from Australia, USA & UK. Age range: 18 – 60 years, M = 39.60, SD = 11.91. Gender: 450 females, 450 males Race: Data not reported.	- To assess the impact of level of prior relationship and perpetrator-target sex on perceptions of a stalking scenario. - To assess themes that participants highlight in guiding their assessments of whether the scenario constituted stalking or not.
19	Cross-sectional	UK	N = 514 mixed student and community sample. (238= Students; 276= Community sample) Study 1- 238 students Study 2 – 161 community members Study 3 – 115 community members Age range: Study 1- 19 – 30 years, M = 20.36, SD = 1.59 Study 2 - 18 – 72 years, M = 26.96, SD = 12.53 Study 3- 19 – 89 years, M = 26.16, SD = 13.02	- To identify whether physical harm is considered to be more serious than verbally administered harm in stalking scenarios, when considering consequences to and responsibility of the victim and perpetrator.

			Gender: Study 1 – 193 females, 42 males, 3 did not provide response. Study 2 – 111 females, 47 males, 3 did not provide response. Study 3 – 79 females, 31 males, 5 did not provide response. Race: Data not reported.	
20	Cross-sectional	UK	N = 168 students Age range: 18 – 54 years, M = 20.73, SD = 5.48 Gender: 120 females, 48 males Race: Data not reported.	- To examine the perceptions of prior relationship, gender of stalker and victim, and the extent to which these impact on judgements relating to responsibility.
21	Cross-sectional	UK	N = 262 (English Police Officers = 135; Scottish Police Officers = 127) Age range: English Police Officers – M = 34.42, SD = 8.42; Scottish Police Officers – M = 37.42, SD = 8.38 Gender: English Police Officers – 53 females, 82 males Scottish Police Officers – 29 females, 41 males, 57 did not indicate gender. Race: Data not reported.	- To examine the influence of prior relationship (stranger, acquaintance, and ex-partner) and sample (English and Scottish) on police officers' perceptions of whether the perpetrator's behaviour is considered to constitute harassment, necessitate police intervention, cause the victim alarm or personal distress, cause the victim to fear the use of violence and whether the victim is considered to be responsible for encouraging the perpetrators behaviour.

			Length of Service: English Police Officers – M = 11.67, SD = 7.59 Scottish Police Officers – M = 13.30, SD = 7.84 Experience of investigating stalking/harassment cases: English Police Officers – 115 (85%) have experience; Scottish Police Officers – 74 (58%) have experience.	
22	Mixed - method	UK	N = 357 Police Officers = 132 Lay Persons = 225 Age range: Police Officers = None recorded Lay Persons = 19 – 70 years, M = 40, SD = 14.38 Gender: 203 females, 154 males Police Officers = 54 females, 78 males Lay Persons = 149 females, 76 males Race: Data not reported. 80 Officers had direct of dealing with a stalking case.	- To investigate and compare how members of the public and serving police officers perceive the significance of prior relationships in stalking scenarios. - To determine whether direct experience with handling stalking cases affects the perceptions of serving police officers regarding stalking situations.
23	Cross-sectional	USA	N = 42 community Group A - 20 Group B – 22 Age range:	- To explore how misconceptions about gender in stalking influence people's perceptions of the behaviour.

	Group A – M = 32.25, SD = 10.05 Group B – M = 33.45, SD = 9.8 Gender: 20 females, 22 males (Group A – 10 females, 10 males; Group B – 10 females, 12 males) Race: Group A – African American (n = 1), Asian (n = 16), Caucasian (n = 1), American Indian or Alaska Native (n = 2) Group B - African American (n = 3), Asian (n = 14), Caucasian (n = 3), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (n = 1), Other (n = 1)	- To analyse the gender of both the jury and perpetrator with the aim of revealing similarities and differences between men and women in how they perceive stalking, paying particular attention to the perceived victim role, victim intervention and the punishment the participants believe should be received.

The studies varied in their years of publication, ranging from 2003 (9, 2003; 20, 2003) to 2020 (8, 2020). Study 18 was obtained through personal communication with the author and is awaiting publication. Most of the studies were conducted in Europe (*n*=9), though in some different countries, Finland, UK, Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy; followed by the USA (*n*=8). A further number of studies were conducted jointly across multiple countries (*n*=5), collaborating participants and researchers across Australia, UK, USA, Europe, and other countries. One study was conducted in Australia. From the information available to the author, stalking was a criminal offence, within the participants country of response, in most of the included studies (*n*=17), with stalking not being defined as a standalone criminal offence in three of the studies, being understood as harassment. This information was unable to be yielded from the remaining three studies as it was not clear where the participants were recruited from.

The number of participants within the study ranged from 42 to 2174, including the population of interest and any comparison controls, with a total of 10,004 participants across the studies. The majority of studies (*n*=11) obtained their sample from a student population. Some studies elected for purposive sampling and recruited from specific groups of professions *(n*=3), namely police officers, GPs, and representatives from a victim organisation. A group of studies utilised community sampling (*n*=5) and the remainder of the studies (*n*=4) intentionally recruited from a mixed sample pool. 12, 13, 22 recruited from both community settings and police settings. Study 19 recruited from both student and community settings. Participants ranged in age from 18 – 89 years of age, though several studies (*n*=7) did not report age ranges for their participants. Study 21 reported that approximately 32% of their sample of police officers did not indicate their age (along with length of service or experience of investigating stalking/harassment cases) as they stated that they had received negative consequences after participating in previous research and did not wish to compromise the anonymity of their responses through providing this information. It is unclear why this was not reported for the remaining studies. However, it was made apparent that all participants were over the age of inclusion for the current review.

The majority of studies were cross-sectional in design (*n*=20), with the remaining studies consisting of a mixed-method design (*n*=3). Many studies used an

experimental vignette design (*n*=18), these consisted of hypothetical stalking/harassment scenarios (*n*=14), case scenarios of criminal trials (*n*=3), and newspaper article describing a fictious stalking scenario (*n*=1). The remaining studies used a non-experimental vignette design (*n*=5). Several studies reported that their participants identified as victims of stalking/harassment or had experienced stalking-related behaviours (*n*=8) with a group of studies identifying police officer participants who had experience of dealing with or investigating stalking/ harassment cases (*n*=3). The remaining studies did not explicitly retrieve this information from participants (*n*=12). Furthermore, most of the studies measured victim responsibility through the judgements made from the vignettes (*n*=18), within Study 4, participants were requested to place themselves in the role of a stalking victim prior to making judgements of victim responsibility. The remaining studies used participants own experiences of stalking to inform perceptions of victim responsibility which was then measured (*n*=5). Most studies did not explicitly use the terms of victim, perpetrator or similar within the material (questionnaire, psychometrics) provided to participants (*n*=17), the rest of the included research did, using terms such as victim, defendant, alleged victim, perpetrator (*n*=6).

Quality of Included Studies

The quality of the studies varied from 23 to 39 out of a possible 42 (or 48). Each study addressed different research objectives and yielded different outcomes; all using a quantitative psychometric approach to measure victim responsibility (such measures are displayed in Table 5). However, clarity in defining victim responsibility was not consistent across studies, with the term often used interchangeably with 'victim blame'. There was notable variation in how the concept was operationalised and used within the measure. For instance, 5 defined victim responsibility as the culpability of the victim for instigating the perpetrator's behaviour, whereas 8 framed it as self-blame attributed to stalking victimisation, and 19 construed it as responsibility for encouraging the perpetrators behaviour. It is of note, that the author was unable to obtain the completed draft paper of 18, the version used did not include the introduction or discussion section, and as such the study information included in the quality assessment was limited as opposed to being a reflection on the quality of the study (Boland et al., 2017).

Table 5 details the measure of victim responsibility used and how victim responsibility was defined within the measure through the questions asked of participants.

The present review identified three overarching categories among the measures analysed: Stalking-related attitudes, encompassing tools addressing stereotypes, beliefs, and attitudes endorsing victim blame (n=5); Stalking victimisation, consisting of measures seeking to elucidate the experiences of stalking victims by investigating coping strategies and the repercussions of such encounters (n=4); and a final cluster of measures concentrating on the role of victim responsibility, capturing perspectives implying victims possess the capacity to mitigate, react differently to, or bear culpability for the perpetrators behaviour, often with suggestions of encouraging such actions from perpetrators (n=14). These distinct focuses offer valuable insights into the multifaceted factors influencing perceptions of victim responsibility in the context of stalking. The internal reliability of the measures varied across the samples, within the papers that reported Cronbach's alpha (n=7), as ranging from 0.62 to 0.91, thus impacting the overall study quality.

While the studies employed psychometric measures aligned with their research objectives and reported the corresponding analytical results, several methodological weaknesses were identified. Notably, most studies failed to disclose any funding sources or conflicts of interest that could have potentially impacted on the authors interpretation of results. Moreover, only five of the studies mentioned if or how ethical approval was gained, and only three of the included studies justified their chosen sample sizes. Remarkably, 61% of the studies omitted information regarding non-responders, despite acknowledging attrition from initial recruitment to study completion. For a comprehensive evaluation, quality ratings for each study are displayed in Table 5, with a maximum score of 42 for cross-sectional studies and 48 for mixed-methods studies.

Table 5

Study measures, results, and quality ratings

Study Number	Quality score	Measure of Responsibility	How Responsibility was defined within the measure	Analyses	Findings
1	32/42	Author's own Victim Blame Subscale Measure (Ahlgrim & Terrance, 2018)	Items within the Victim Blame Subscale: (a) "Is [female victim/male victim] responsible for encouraging [male perpetrator/female perpetrator] behaviour," (b) "Could the actions of [female victim/male victim] have alleviated the situation," (c) "[female victim/male victim] overreacted to the situation," (d) "[female victim/male victim] reaction to [male perpetrator/female perpetrator] behaviour was unexpected," (e) "How normal was [female victim/male victim] reaction," (f) "Did [female victim/male victim] bring it on themselves."	Means, ANOVA	- Perpetrator gender significantly impacts perceptions of the level of victim blame in a cyberstalking scenario. - Participant perceptions are consistent with some findings of offline stalking. - When the perpetrator was female, participants were more likely to blame the victim (M = 2.15) than when the perpetrator was male (M= 1.76). - The relationship between the cyberstalker and the victim (ex-intimate vs stranger) did not have a significant impact on victim blame scores. - Male participants (M = 2.01) were slightly more likely than female participants to blame the victim (M= 1.88).
2	31/42	Authors own Coping Measure (Amar & Alexy,	This 40-item scale measures five categories of coping, with associated coping strategies.	Means	- Moving inward was found to be one of the most reported categories of coping with

		2010) based upon Cupach & Spitzberg, (2004) coping with stalking behaviours	The category of moving inward describes responsibility with coping strategies of minimise the problem, blame yourself, deny the problem and seek meaning in context.		stalking behaviour in the sample. - Coping strategies within moving inward had means of: Ignore (97%), Minimise (92%), Deny (58%), Seek meaning in general (44%), Blame yourself (41%), Seek therapies (23%), Seek meaning in context (25%). - The most common stalking behaviours reported to have been experienced by the sample were receiving unsolicited phone calls (62%), being followed, or spied on (65%) and receiving unwanted attempts at communication (47%).
3	31/42	Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ-R; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985)	The subscales (factors) represent ways of coping, items within the 'Accepting Responsibility' Subscale: a) Criticized or lectured myself b) Realized I brought the problem on myself c) I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time d) I apologized or did something to make up	Means, MANOVA. ANOVA	- Victim–stalker relationship and level of stalking violence had a significant effect on accepting responsibility (self-blame).

4	30/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Duff & Scott, 2013)	Scale items: "To what extent are you responsible for encouraging this person's behaviour?"	ANOVA	- Participants were less likely to perceive behaviour as stalking, requiring police intervention, and more likely to perceive self as responsible, when perpetrator was ex-partner (M= 3.33) rather than stranger (M= 1.77). - Contextual information regarding breakdown of the relationship impacted perceptions: believed they would be more responsible in the ex-partner 'unfaithful' (M = 4.04, compared to stranger (M = 1.77), acquaintance (M = 2.45) ex-partner 'physical violence' (M = 2.14), ex-partner 'verbal abuse' (M = 2.14) and ex-partner 'relocation' (M = 2.39) condition.
5	37/48	Stalking Related Attitudes Questionnaire (SRAQ; McKeon, 2010)	Scale items captured attitudes attributing responsibility through the 'Victims are to blame' factor. (i.e., attitudes that accentuate the culpability of the victim for	Principal Components Analysis, Means, Regression	- Increased Hostility toward women (HTW) and Romantic Belief Scale (RBS) scores appeared to predict an increase in the endorsement of Stalking Myth Acceptance (SMA) victim blame beliefs.

		causing the perpetrator's behaviour) Qualitative: Participants were asked to complete an open question relating to the reason for their verdict decision.	- Gender Role Stereotypes (GRS): as GRS scores increased, adherence to SMA victim blame beliefs increased [SE = .50, t(357) = 7.87, p = .000]. - Males were more likely than females to view the victim as responsible. (As SMA victim blame scores increased, perceptions of Victim Responsibility increased by [SE = .22, t(357) = 3.56, p = .000]) - Males were more likely to endorse SMA victim blame [B = .66, SE = .098, t(357) = 6.68, p = .000], SMA flattery and SMA nuisance beliefs. - Males were less likely than females to predict that the defendant's behaviour would cause fear and distress. - Qualitative Reason for Verdict data: - Guilty verdict (n = 252 women = 160, men = 92). Themes of reasons given: Questionable defendant behaviour, negative consequences to the victim,

					evidence proved guilt and identified with female victim. - Not guilty verdict (n = 108; women = 42, men = 66). Themes of reasons given: victim blame [40% women > 21% men; t(30) = 4.97, p = .000], lack of evidence, defendant's behaviour not Intentional, defendant proving love and defendant's positive characteristics.
6	29/42	Author's own Measure (Dunlap, Hodell, Golding & Wasarhaley, 2012)	The measure included 8 witness-rating items designed to capture perceptions of victim and defendant: (a) how much did you believe the defendant/ victim was telling the truth (b) how much did the testimony of the defendant/ victim influence your verdict. (c) how would you rate the defendant's/ victim's general ability to remember and report the events in question (d) how much sympathy did you feel toward the defendant/ victim Questions resulted in a two-factor solution: Positive Victim	Principal Components Analysis, Means, MANOVA	- Study 1: Women rendered more guilty verdicts, had higher guilt ratings, had more positive perceptions of the victim (Women: M=7.08; Men: M=6.75, *significant), and had more negative perceptions of the defendant than men (Women: M=6.06; Men: M=5.43, *significant), in the prototypical type of intimate stalking (female victim/male defendant) compared to other pairings of victim and defendant gender (i.e., female victim/ female defendant, male victim/male defendant, male victim/ female defendant), reaching significance.

			Perceptions (victim believability, victim memory, influence of victim's testimony and sympathy toward victim) and Negative Defendant Perceptions (defendant believability, defendant memory, influence of defendant's testimony and sympathy toward defendant).		- Study 2: Different levels of fear did not impact women, men yielded fewer guilty verdicts in the low victim fear condition compared to the high victim fear condition. Positive Victim Perceptions (Women: M=7.72; Men: M=7.08).
7	34/42	Authors own scale modified from Stalking Related Attitudes Questionnaire (SRAQ; McKeon, 2010)	Scale items captured attitudes attributing responsibility through the 'Victim blaming' factor. Additional factors report perceptions of 'minimising stalking' and 'flattery'.	Factor Analysis, Structural Equation Modelling, Test of Indirect effects	- Women reported lower stalking myth acceptance (SMA) scores, lower victim blame scores and lower gender role stereotyping scores than men. (SMA Victim blaming - Women: M= 2.88; Men: M= 3.57). - Lower stalking myth acceptance scores were linked to perceiving the victim experiencing more fear and distress, rated the defendant as more guilty and lower endorsement of SMA despite controlling for their own stalking experience.
8	32/42	Adapted the Behavioural and Characterological Self-Blame Scale (BCSB; O'Neill & Kerig, 2000)	The scale measures the amount and type of self-blame the participant attributes to stalking victimization: e.g., "If I had done things differently, it wouldn't have happened".	Means, ANOVA, Zero-order correlations	- Stalking victimisation was significantly related to characterological self-blame, and behavioural self-blame. - The more stalking experiences that the

			e.g., "It happened because of the kind of person I am". - Behavioural self-blame items assess the degree to which a respondent feels blame because of specific, modifiable behaviours (e.g., not leaving the situation). - Characterological self-blame items assess the degree to which a respondent feels blame because of an inherent quality (e.g., one's personality).		participant reported, the more likely they were to attribute the causes to internal self-blame; (M=14.69), global helplessness; (M=0.95), and stability factors (M=1.05).
9	31/42	The Traumatic Constellation Identification Scale (TCIS). The 30-item TCIS (Dansky et al., 1990)	Scale items captured attitudes attributing responsibility through the 'self-blame' factor. The first factor (including self-blame) labelled 'negative self-schemata and affects', describes affect and schema categories that involve negative feelings and attitudes about the self. The second factor is labelled 'hostile world' and encompasses hostile feelings and attitudes toward the world and other people.	Means, Correlation	- Post-intimate stalking has major detrimental effects on the psychosocial health of its victims and can lead to the development of maladaptive schemata, including a decreased trust in others, an increased sense of alienation and isolation, and attributions of self-blame. - Particularly high scores of self-blame and shame.
10	36/42	Stalking-Related Attitude Questionnaire	Scale items captured attitudes attributing responsibility	Means,	- Police Officers: Dutch (M= 46.57) and English (M= 47.08) police officers least

		(McKeon, Mullen & Ogloff, unpublished)	through the 'Blaming the Victim' factor.	Principal Components Analysis, ANOVA	inclined to endorse 'blaming the victim' attitudinal statements compared to Belgian (M= 53.46) and Italian (M=53.96) colleagues. GPs: Italian GPs (M= 53.36) were more likely to blame the victim than their English (M= 43.90), Belgian (M= 49.43) and Dutch (M= 47.30) colleagues.
11	29/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Lambert, Smith, Geistman, Cluse-Tolar & Jiang, 2013)	Scale items captured attitudes of victim blaming: (a) People who claim they are being stalked are oversensitive about the matter (b) I think most of the concern over stalking is because women overreact in our society.	Means, ANOVA	- Gender but not prior stalking had a significant effect on the victim blaming measure. Men (M= 5.30) were much higher (more likely to blame victims) on this variable than were women (M= 3.84).
12	36/42	Stalking Related Attitudes Questionnaire (SRAQ; McKeon, 2010)	Scale items captured attitudes attributing responsibility through the 'Victims are to blame' factor.	ANOVA, Factor analysis, T-test, MANCOVA, Mann Whitney	- Men (M= 95.26) were much more likely to endorse stalking myths than women (M= 81.60). - Women (M= 12.52) endorsed beliefs that assign blame to stalking victims less than men (M= 15.33). - Community Sample (M= 14.97) endorsed more victim blame myths, in comparison

					to the police sample (M= 13.81). - Strong endorsement of stalking myths were associated with a not guilty verdict.
13	29/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Scott, Nixon & Sheridan, 2013)	Scale items: "To what extent is [victim] responsible for encouraging [perpetrator] behaviour?	MANOVA, ANOVA	- Prior relationship influenced views of responsibility in all samples. The victim was perceived more responsible in ex-partners rather than strangers or acquaintances condition. - Non-specialist police sample perceived intervention as necessary and victim as less responsible than laypersons. - Non-specialist police sample and laypersons shared misperception that stranger stalkers present a greater threat to the personal safety of their victims than acquaintance or ex-partner stalkers.
14	39/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Scott, Rajakaruna, Sheridan & Sleath, 2014) modified with items taken from Sleath and Bull's (2010)	Scale items: "How much do you blame [the target] for what happened?" "To what extent did [the target] communicate that she was not interested in a	Principle Components Analysis, MANOVA	- Prior relationship and severity of behaviour influenced perceptions of responsibility, across all samples.

		Victim and Perpetrator Blame Scale	relationship with [the perpetrator]?" "To what extent was [the perpetrator] responsible for what happened?" "How much do you consider the situation to be (the target's) fault?" "How much do you blame [the perpetrator] for what happened?" "Do you think [the perpetrator] could persuade [the target] to become interested in a relationship sometime in the future?" "How much do you consider the situation to be [the perpetrator's] fault?" "Was it reasonable for [the perpetrator] to believe that [the target] would be interested in a relationship sometime in the future?" "To what extent was [the target] responsible for what happened?"		- Victims were perceived as less responsible, necessitate police intervention and conviction with stranger perpetrator, rather than ex-partner or acquaintance ($p < .05$). - Victims perceived as less responsible when persistence was high rather than low, intent was threatening rather than non-threatening and in higher-level offence compared to ambiguous/ low-level (both $p < .001$). - Country influenced perceptions of target responsibility but not perpetrator responsibility.
15	31/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Scott, Lloyd & Gavin, 2010)	Scale item: "To what extent is [the victim] responsible for encouraging [the perpetrator's] behaviour?"	Means, MANOVA, ANOVA	- Prior relationship influenced perceptions of victim responsibility. - Target was perceived to be least responsible for perpetrator's behaviour in

					the stranger condition (M = 0.58), followed by acquaintance (M = 1.29) and ex-partner (M= 2.10) conditions. - Australian participants perceived the target to be less responsible for encouraging the perpetrator's behaviour (M= 1.15) than participants in the UK (M= 1.79).
16	27/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Scott & Tse, 2011)	Scale item: "To what extent is [the victim] responsible for encouraging [the perpetrator's] behaviour?"	Means, MANOVA, ANOVA	- Perpetrator gender was not significantly associated with victim responsibility (female perpetrator M= 4.25; male perpetrator M= 3.29). - Female victims (M= 3.88) were perceived to be more responsible for encouraging the perpetrator's behaviour than male victims (M= 3.70).
17	28/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Scott & Sheridan, 2011)	Scale item: "To what extent is [the victim] responsible for encouraging [the perpetrator's] behaviour?"	Means, MANOVA, ANOVA	- Perceptions of victim responsibility are independent of the persistence (low/high) or intent (non-threatening/ threatening) of the perpetrator. - Victim was perceived as more responsible in the ex-partner condition (M= 2.61)

					compared to stranger (M=1.88) condition.
18	23/48	Authors own Scale Measure (Scott, Sleath, Stathi & Duff, unpublished) modified with items taken from Sleath and Bull's (2010) Victim and Perpetrator Blame Scale	Scale items: "How much do you blame [the target] for what happened?" "To what extent did [the target] communicate that she was not interested in a relationship with [the perpetrator]?" "To what extent was [the perpetrator] responsible for what happened?" "How much do you consider the situation to be (the target's) fault?" "How much do you blame [the perpetrator] for what happened?" "Do you think [the perpetrator] could persuade [the target] to become interested in a relationship sometime in the future?" "How much do you consider the situation to be [the perpetrator's] fault?" "Was it reasonable for [the perpetrator] to believe that [the target] would be interested in a relationship sometime in the future?"	Principal Components Analysis, Means, MANOVA, Mediation Analyses, Thematic Analyses	- Prior relationship influenced perceptions of responsibility. - Target considered less responsible than the perpetrator in stranger, acquaintance, and ex-partner 'physical violence' conditions compared to the ex-partner 'no future' and ex-partner 'unfaithful' conditions (all $p \leq .05$). - Targets perceived as less responsible in the male perpetrator-female target condition compared to female perpetrator-male target condition, in the ex-partner 'physical violence' (M=6.33) and ex-partner 'unfaithful' (M= 5.79) conditions. Qualitative: - Themes depicted relating to Victims: Clear rejection of the perpetrator, Lack of clear communication, Impact of stalking, and Criminal justice engagement.

			"To what extent was [the target] responsible for what happened?" Qualitative: Participants were asked to complete an open question - "Explain why you think [perpetrator's] behaviour does or does not constitute stalking.",		- Themes depicted relating to perpetrator: Perpetrator's behaviour (Problematic and excessive stalking behaviour, stalking as unwarranted, pestering contact, Minimization of Perpetrator's behaviour, and Exceeding normal romantic pursuit) and Perpetrator's character.
19	29/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Sheridan & Scott, 2010)	Scale item: "To what extent is [the victim] responsible for encouraging [the perpetrator's] behaviour?" "How far could the actions of [the victim] alleviate the situation?"	Means, MANOVA, ANOVA	- Study 1: Non-physical stalking may not be regarded as serious as physical stalking; the victim's role is consistently viewed as that of passive helplessness. When victims are viewed as less responsible, this is linked to perceptions of shorter victim recovery time, decreased need for police intervention and requirement of custodial sentence. - Study 2: responsibility placed on the victim did not change significantly when no (M= 1.81), explicit (M= 1.85) or implicit threat (M= 1.82) was made. Male (M= 1.84) and female victims

					(M= 1.82) were viewed as similarly blameless. - Study 3: The victim was perceived as more responsible when the perpetrator was female and the victim male (M= 1.92). Female victims were viewed as less responsible for their plight than male victims (M= 1.68).
20	28/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Sheridan, Gillett, Davies, Blaauw & Patel, 2003)	Scale item: "To what extent is [the victim] responsible for encouraging [the perpetrator's] behaviour?" "How far could the actions of [the victim] alleviate the situation?"	Means, MANOVA	- Victims were judged as more responsible for encouraging the perpetrators behaviour when the perpetrator was an ex-intimate (M= 3.43) or acquaintance (M= 2.31) rather than a stranger (M= 1.65). - Male victims were judged as having a greater capacity (M= 5.14) to alleviate the situation than female victims (M= 4.40). - Male victims were viewed as more responsible for encouraging the perpetrator's behaviour (M= 2.69) than female victims (M= 2.09).

21	33/42	Authors own Scale Measure (Scott & Sheridan, 2011; Scott & Tse, 2011; Scott et al., 2010, 2013)	Scale item: "To what extent is [victim] responsible for encouraging [perpetrator] behaviour?"	Means, MANOVA, ANOVA, Sobel Test	- Victim responsibility partially mediated the association between prior relationship and police officers' perceptions of whether the perpetrator's behaviour is considered to be harassment, require police intervention, cause the victim alarm, distress, or fear violence when both police officer (Scottish and English) samples were jointly analysed. - Scottish police officers (M = 1.56) assigned more responsibility to the victim than English police officers (M = 1.21). - English police officers were least likely to assign responsibility to the victim of a stranger stalker (M = 0.38), followed by acquaintance (M= 1.13) and most likely to assign responsibility to the victim of an ex-partner stalker (M = 2.13).
22	39/48	Authors own Scale Measure (Weller, Hope & Sheridan, 2013)	Scale item: "To what extent is [victim] responsible for encouraging [perpetrator] behaviour?"	Means, MANOVA, ANOVA,	- Police officers who had direct experience of working on stalking cases (M = 1.32) were significantly less likely

				Qualitative: Question requesting further information concerning the crime of stalking, particularly beliefs concerning the current prevalence of stalking as a crime and adequacy of current legislation.	Grounded Theory	to attribute blame to the victim than officers without experience (M = 2.82). - Victim–offender relationship did not impact on perceptions of severity, risk, responsibility of the victim, and perceived duration of stalking. - Qualitative: - 54% of officers believed that the number of stalking reports had risen in the past 5 years and identified 3 main factors for this increase: (a) media influence, (b) advances in technology, and (c) a proactive criminal justice system. - Officers identified several difficulties when dealing with cases of stalking and identified the following three main issues: (a) insufficient evidence, (b) victim retraction, and (c) the likelihood of the case being dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service.
23	32/42	Authors own questionnaire: Victim		Victim Role: assessed participants' beliefs about the role of the victim regarding	Means, Chi-Square,	- Male participants were more likely to believe that the victim provoked the

	Role and Victim Blame (Wong, 2014)	active prevention and intervention – "Do you think that [victim] could have taken certain actions to prevent [stalker] from pursuing [them]?" Victim Blame: assessed participants' beliefs regarding victims playing a role in provoking perpetrators and instigating victimization – "Do you think that [victim] might have done something to provoke [stalker] actions?"	Fisher's Exact Test	perpetrator when the victim was female (40%), compared to when the victim was male (22.2%). - Female participants were more likely to believe that the victim provoked the perpetrator when the victim was male (44.4%), compared to when the victim was female (20%). - Among male participants, a higher percentage believed male victims could have been more proactive in victimization prevention and intervention compared to female victims, whereas a higher percentage of female participants believed that female victims could have taken more action against being stalked than male victims.

Narrative summary of findings

Meta-analyses are typically used within systematic reviews, to detect smaller clinically significant differences from several combined studies, providing an overall measure of the effect of an intervention. However, considering the current review objectives and data retrieved, and owing to the heterogeneity of the included studies methodology and outcomes, a narrative synthesis was considered appropriate (Boland et al., 2017). Table 5 provides an overview of the findings from the included studies.

The 23 included studies will now be summarised within the narrative synthesis, in relation to the aim of the current review, which is to explore what factors might impact perceptions of victim responsibility in stalking-related behaviour. This section summarises five main themes that were identified in the findings from the studies included in the systematic review, to provide a structure for addressing the systematic review question, whilst integrating the quality assessment conclusions.

Understanding the influence of stalking awareness: exploring perceptions of victim responsibility through victimisation and professional experience - Twelve studies explored the influence of previous victimisation and/or professional experience on perceptions of victim responsibility (2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 21, 22). Studies which captured the perceptions and experiences of professionals, namely police officers and general practitioners offered mixed results, in terms of the impact that their role and experience may have had in relation to assessing victim responsibility.

Direct experience or specialised training in risk assessment and handling of stalking cases, was observed to influence judgements in stalking scenarios, within three studies (13, 21, 22). These studies indicated through the specifically collected demographic information, that police officers with greater experience or specialised training were less likely to attribute responsibility to the victim compared to their counterparts without such experience (22). Additionally, they perceived intervention in stalking behaviours as more necessary, and believed that the perpetrators actions would cause the victim greater distress or alarm, in contrast to non-specialist colleagues (13). Moreover, officers with specialist

experience were found to be less susceptible to relational biases than colleagues without this specialist experience (21).

Comparison between police officers and laypersons revealed that non-specialist police officers (identified as police officers that had not received specific training in stalking), perceived scenarios as more likely to require police intervention and held victims less responsible compared to laypersons (13). This perception persisted regardless of the officers' length of service. Moreover, police officers tended to minimise stalking behaviour and endorsed victim blaming beliefs less compared to laypersons. However, the police cohort showed a lesser degree of seriousness towards stalking than laypersons (12). Both general practitioners (GPs) and police officers across various countries recognized stalking as abnormal behaviour, although differences were noted among countries. Italian GPs and police officers displayed lower levels of recognition of stalking and tended to perceive such behaviour as transient and normal compared to their counterparts from Belgium, the UK, and the Netherlands (10).

Further qualitative investigation (22) revealed challenges faced by police officers in advancing stalking cases, with reasons attributed to insufficient evidence, victim retraction, and the likelihood of the case being dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service. Reasons attributed to the increase in stalking reports included media influence, advanced in technology, and a proactive criminal justice system.

Further studies examined the influence of personal experience with stalking victimisation or knowing a victim (2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11). Coping strategies commonly reported among stalking victims included accepting responsibility, experiencing self-blame (characterological self-blame and behavioural self-blame), developing maladaptive schemata (including low self-worth beliefs), seeking help from friends or family and attributing causes to internal factors (2, 3, 8, 9). These studies identified prominent affective reactions associated with stalking victimisation, including depression, shame, fear, isolation, and mistrust of others (3, 8, 9). Unwanted attempts at communication emerged as the most prevalent stalking behaviours experienced (2, 3) and the victim-stalker relationship, level of stalker violence and frequency of stalking episodes, were significantly associated with the type of coping strategies adopted by victims (3, 8). Furthermore, two studies elucidated the impact of stalking victimisation, which was found to be significantly

related to trial outcomes, perceived degree of defendant guilt, evaluations of victim fear, distress, and credibility. Individuals with stalking victimisation experiences were more inclined to provide guilty verdicts. However, contrary findings suggested that personal experience with stalking did not affect attributions of guilt in trial scenarios (7), and prior victimisation did not influence attributions of victim blame (11).

The nexus of fear, violence, and victim responsibility - Ten studies (1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14, 17, 19) examined the relationship between fear, violence, and factors such as persistence and threats in relation to perceptions of victim responsibility. Findings varied across these studies. Three studies (14, 17, 19) revelated a positive association between the severity of behaviour and victim responsibility. Specifically, victims in stalking scenarios were perceived as more responsible for encouraging the perpetrator in lower-level offences, low persistence, and in non-threatening intent scenarios, compared to higher-level offences, high persistence, and threatening intent scenarios (14, 17, 19). However, perceptions of victim responsibility did not significantly correlate with conduct severity across all levels (17).

Expressed fear and distress were found to influence judgements of guilt, with higher levels of expressed fear resulting in more guilt judgements (6,7). Additionally, the presence of tangible danger, such as life-threatening harm, increased perceptions of seriousness and responsibility (19). Qualitative data from (5) supported these finding, indicating that negative consequences to the victim, specifically fear, distress or discomfort were cited as reasons contributing to guilty verdicts. Furthermore, victim responsibility was negatively associated with victim recovery time, need for police intervention and the imposition of custodial sentences (19).

The level of violence experienced in stalking victimisation was significantly linked to self- blame, post-traumatic stress, and other negative health outcomes (3, 9). Victims of violent stalking were more inclined to seek informal support rather than professional help compared to victims of non-violent stalking. Gender differences were evident in three studies (1, 6, 11), where males were less likely to render guilty verdicts when victims expressed less fear, particularly compared to females (6). Additionally, males were more inclined to perceive stalking as less severe and

less harmful compared to females (11), even when the behaviour of male and female perpetrators was identical (1). It is worthwhile to note that (1) reported this finding within the context of a cyberstalking scenario, and the other studies mentioned refer to offline/typical stalking scenarios.

Exploring the Impact of Victim-Offender Relationship Dynamics on Perceptions of Responsibility and Judgment - Eleven studies investigated how the victim-offender relationship affects perceptions of victim responsibility and self-judgements among victims of stalking. Specifically, these investigations have examined how varying types of relationships between victims and perpetrators, such as former intimates or acquaintances, affect attributions of responsibility and responses to stalking incidents (1, 3, 4, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22).

Seven studies consistently found that victims were more likely to be deemed responsible for encouraging perpetrator behaviour and perceived as better equipped to alleviate the situation when the perpetrator was a former intimate partner or otherwise acquainted with the victim, compared to instances involving a stranger perpetrator (13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21). This finding was reaffirmed by (4), who found that participants when prompted to imagine themselves in the role of a victim, tended to attribute greater responsibility to victims when the perpetrator was an ex-partner, along with decreased recognition of the behaviour as stalking and reduced inclination of law enforcement involvement. (1, 3) highlighted victim's tendencies to engage in self-blame behaviours, and perceive the perpetrator differently (1), perceived to be mentally unstable and in need of therapeutic help), based on the intimacy of the relationship. Conversely, (3) found that the more intimate the victim-stalker relationship was, associated with increased positive appraisal, which has been linked to creating positive meaning and personal growth.

However, findings regarding the influence of victim-offender relationships on police perceptions were more varied. (22) revealed no discernible impact of the relationship on attributions of victim responsibility and other related factors, such as, risk, severity, and perceived duration of stalking episode. (13, 21) demonstrated that non-specialist police officers were more likely to believe the victim was responsible for encouraging victimisation in comparison to specialist

police officers (13). Study 21 found discrepancies between English and Scottish police officers regarding attributions of victim responsibility, with English police officers more likely to view the victim as responsible in the ex-partner scenarios rather than others.

Furthermore, additional studies, including (4, 18), emphasised the role of contextual information in stalking scenarios involving ex-partners, with perceptions of responsibility varying depending on factors such as the reason for the relationship breakdown. Notably, instances where the relationship ended due to infidelity committed by the victim were associated with higher attributions of victim responsibility, while those stemming from experiences of physical violence towards the victim within the relationship resulted in lower attributions (4,18). The presence of physical violence in the breakdown of the relationship was also associated with perceptions of required police intervention, perceived fear of violence, alarm and distress experienced by the victim and increased likelihood of recognising the situation as stalking (4). Eight studies attributed responsibility, in cases of stranger stalking, consistently to the perpetrator and away from the victim (4, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22), associated with heightened perceptions of necessary police intervention, recognition of stalking behaviour (4, 14, 20), victim distress and alarm (13, 15) and anticipated duration of the stalking episode (22). (13, 21, 22)'s findings demonstrate the perceptions of police officers.

The influence of stalking myths on perceptions of victim responsibility - Four studies investigated the endorsement of stalking myths, focusing on the subset of myths linked to victim blame (5, 7, 10, 12) yielding varied results. Study 5 found a positive correlation between victim blame scores and perceptions of victim responsibility, particularly noting gender disparities with male respondents exhibiting greater endorsement of stalking myths related to victim blame (5, 7, 12). Furthermore, (5) highlighted associations between increased victim blame scores and elevated measures of gender role stereotypes, hostility towards women, and romantic beliefs. Greater acceptance of stalking myths was also linked to lower guilt ratings and diminished perception of the defendant's behaviour as dangerous (7, 12). (10) found that police officers were more prone to normalise stalking behaviours compared to GP colleagues, with most of the variance being attributed to adherence to stalking myths, particularly

the attitudes of viewing stalking as a nuisance, and blaming the victim. Conversely, (12)'s study, found that although police officers were less inclined to minimise the severity of stalking compared to community members, they exhibited similar endorsement of stalking myths concerning the romanticisation of stalking and attributing blame to the victims.

Gender interactions in the attribution of responsibility – Nine studies investigated the impact of gender on perceptions of victim responsibility in stalking scenarios (1, 5, 6, 11, 16, 18, 19, 20, 23). Results varied, showing complex interactions among victim, perpetrator, and participant gender. While some studies (1, 18) found no influence of victim-offender gender on perceptions of victim responsibility, they did reveal that the perpetrators gender affected perceptions of responsibility, with male perpetrators judged as more responsible than female perpetrators, particularly when the victim was female. Female participants tended to show more pro-prosecution attitudes, negative perceptions of the offender, guilty verdicts, perpetrator responsibility, and positive perceptions of the victim compared to male participants (5, 6). Qualitative insight provided further evidence of gender interactions, highlighting factors contributing to guilt, such as intrusive perpetrator behaviour, fear and distress experienced by the victim, evidence indicative of guilt and female respondents identifying with the female victim (5). The same study also offered insight into reasons for a not guilty verdict, such as victim blame, non-intentional perpetrator behaviour, perpetrator proving love and lack of evidence.

Similarly, other studies (19, 20) found that victims were considered less responsible when the perpetrator was male, and the victim was female. There was also a perception that male victims might handle threats and alleviate the situation better than female victims. Male perpetrators were also associated with higher perceived risk of bodily harm to the victim and a greater need for police intervention (20) and cause the victim alarm, distress, and fear of violence (16) in comparison to female perpetrators. Similar results have been found in cyberstalking scenarios, in which the female perpetrator was significantly more likely to be perceived as mentally unwell, in need of therapeutic help, and their behaviour was more likely to be viewed as courtship behaviour than male perpetrators (1). Qualitative findings further supported perceptions of victims as

less responsible in scenarios involving male perpetrators and female victims, with victim related themes of clear rejection of the perpetrators, lack of clear communication, impact of stalking and criminal justice engagement. Perpetrator related themes attribute perceptions to the problematic and excessive stalking behaviour of the perpetrators, stalking as unwarranted, exceeding normal romantic pursuit and perpetrator character (18).

In contrast, (11) found that male respondents were significantly more likely to attribute responsibility to the victim rather than the stalker, compared with female respondents, despite having received education on stalking. The same study also reported that male respondents tended to discount the severity of the stalking scenario, perceiving it as less dangerous and less harmful than female respondents. (23)'s study revealed differing perceptions among male and female respondents regarding victim responsibility, with male respondents believing that female victims provoked perpetrators more, while female respondents believed the opposite. Additionally, in the same study, male respondents thought male victims could have been more proactive and alleviated the situation, while female respondents believed female victims could have taken more preventative measures.

Limitations of Included Studies

The studies included reported both strengths and limitations of their research. Notably, all measures of victim responsibility were administered through self-report methods. The studies did not include a measure of social desirability, which could have influenced the quality of data concerning victim responsibility (Van de Mortel, 2008). The majority of studies used a sample from an appropriate population base, as to be representative of the target population; however, six studies recognised limitations within their results such as data collection being limited to majority or solely female sample (3, 4, 9, 17) or using a primarily Caucasian population (1, 8) which may limit the generalisability of the findings. The predominant use of cross-sectional designs and correlational analyses in most of the studies included, restricts the ability to establish any causal relationships between victim responsibility and the measured variables. Nonetheless, three studies (5, 18, 22) integrated a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative analysis (content analysis, thematic analysis, and grounded theory)

alongside quantitative findings to offer richer insight into participant decision-making processes.

Discussion

This systematic review has consolidated and evaluated factors influencing perceptions of victim responsibility in incidents of stalking. Implications with practical significance for both research and clinical practice were drawn from the findings.

Drawing from an extensive search yielding over 12,000 results, this review synthesised a final selection of 23 studies published between 2003 and 2020. Of these, 20 studies employed a cross-sectional design while three used a mixed-method design. Across these studies, psychometric assessments were used to measure victim responsibility, involving over 10,000 participants across three continents, namely Australia, the Americas and Europe. It is noteworthy that the cultural contexts of these regions are predominantly westernised, and as such cautions against overly broad generalisations to countries outside of those included in this review must be taken. Thus, future research should prioritise from exploring whether such perceptions of victim responsibility are held across diverse cross-cultural contexts.

Moreover, eight studies (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11) included in the review examined prior stalking victimisation experience among respondents, yielding mixed results regarding its influence on perceptions of victim responsibility. While some of these studies clearly defined their victim groups, the majority did not address victimisation in relation to perceptions of responsibility, either due to absence of measurement, or omission from the analysis. Nevertheless, noteworthy collective findings emerged from this review, which will be discussed within the context of the review question, as a subset of participants in the included studies self-identified as stalking victims.

Four studies (2, 3, 8, 9) established a correlation between stalking victimisation and self-blame, negative self-perception, depression, shame, distrust of others and overwhelming emotions, some of which were recognised as maladaptive coping strategies. These findings suggest that stalking victims tend to attribute responsibility internally. (4) offered additional insight, indicating that respondents,

when prompted to envision themselves as victims, tended to attribute more blame and responsibility for being stalked to themselves, which was associated with the dynamics of their relationship with the offender. The Just World Theory (JWT) is frequently used to elucidate attributions of blame, proposing that individuals tend to believe in a just world where people get what they deserve, leading them to reinterpret unjust situations by attributing personal characteristics of the victim or introducing additional context to justify the victim's suffering. In (5), qualitative analysis revealed that female respondents provided reasons contributing to their decision to find the defendant guilty, in that they identified with the female victim. However, reasons supporting a not guilty verdict indicated that female respondents engaged in victim blaming, twice as much as male respondents who concurred with this verdict. In this instance, JWT seemed to apply when those making judgements identified with the victim, but within the same gender, it led to judgements of victim blame. It could be assumed that females would be less likely to victim blame, on the basis that they are more likely to have experienced stalking, or stalking-like behaviours, or have been victims of other events that are also plagued by victim blaming, such as rape, yet this does not appear to result in no victim blaming at all. Further research is warranted to elucidate the mechanisms through which stalking victimisation leads to the development of psychological distress and attributions for stalking, examining the internal and external cognitions of both observers and victims.

Three studies (13, 21, 22) examined the influence of professional experience in dealing with stalking cases on perceptions of victim responsibility. The conclusions varied, but generally indicated that greater experience and specialised training in stalking cases correlated with reduced biases, victim blaming, and adherence to stalking myths, along with heightened awareness of victim distress and the need for intervention. However, despite demonstrating lower levels of stalking minimisation and endorsement of stalking myths compared to the general public, law enforcement officials tended to perceive stalking as less serious than the public, which is concerning. Moreover, considering that four studies (2, 3, 8, 9) revealed stalking victim's tendencies to report feelings of mistrust, suspicion of others, and a preference for informal support networks over reporting to the police, there is a need for careful evaluation of law enforcement training programmes. Such programmes should incorporate an understanding of the risks

associated with stalking and appropriate responses to victimisation. The present review underscores the disparity between perceptions and reality in stalking cases, highlighting the potential for inappropriate professional responses that could increase risks for victims due to misperceptions (Scott, 2020).

Among the contributing factors, the victim-offender relationship dynamic emerged as a significant correlate of perceptions of victim responsibility across eleven studies (1, 3, 4, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22), all of which scored above 48% in the quality assessment of the present review. The consistent recurrence of this finding strengthens the evidence indicating an association between the victim-offender relationship and perceptions of victim responsibility in stalking cases. This association was further confirmed in two studies (1, 3) examining the experiences of self-identified stalking victims, suggesting that judgements relating to the victim-offender relationship represents an additional adversity experienced by stalking victims.

Furthermore, the victim-offender relationship was found to be linked to perceptions of heightened violence, fear, and distress in seven studies (1, 3, 4, 13, 14, 15, 20), particularly highlighted in (4). Specifically, nine studies (3, 4, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21) indicated a tendency to place greater responsibility on the victim when the perpetrator was an ex-intimate partner. Despite evidence suggesting that ex-intimate stalkers pose significant danger to victims, with increased likelihood of violence and persistent stalking episodes (McEwan et al., 2017), most studies reviewed tended to attribute blame towards the victim in such cases, seemingly overlooking the significant danger to victims. Future research is needed to better understand judicial decisions involving ex-intimate stalking scenarios, with a focus on understanding how jurors weigh and interpret information in reaching their decisions.

Perpetrator responsibility was consistently perceived as higher in nine studies (1, 4, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21), when the perpetrator was an unknown stranger to the victim. This association was linked to increased victim fear, distress, and helplessness in cases of stranger stalking. Gender differences in perceptions of victim responsibility were evident in nine studies (1, 5, 6, 11, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23) examining the role of victim-offender relationship, yielding mixed results. Victims were more often deemed responsible when the perpetrator was of the opposite

sex (1, 5, 18, 19) and when the respondent was of the opposite sex to the victim (6, 23). Further investigation into the underlying reasons for these gender differences would enhance the interpretation of these findings.

Four studies (5, 7, 10, 12) investigated beliefs associated with stalking myths or stereotypes, revealing associations between victim blame, acceptance of stalking myths, attitudes towards gender stereotypes, hostility towards women, and romantic beliefs. Research involving victims of stalking highlighted the discrepancy between victim's experiences and public perceptions of stalking. Victims expressed frustration that the public often fail to recognise the emotional toll of stalking, downplaying the severity, and trivialising the term 'stalking' (Boehnlein, 2020). Five studies within the present review (1, 3, 5, 7, 12) indicated perceptions of stalking as courtship behaviour, aligning with stalking myths that portray stalking as non-serious or even romantic, thereby minimising the impact of stalking behaviours on victims and potentially undermining the recognition of stalking as a serious crime. Further exploration is warranted to understand the continuum wherein stalking myths, stalking behaviour, and courtship behaviours overlap. Recent research has begun to investigate when observers differentiate between appropriate behaviour and stalking. Scott et al., (2022) demonstrated that behaviour is more readily identified as stalking when the perpetrator's motivation is to upset the victim rather than to romantically pursue them. This finding aligns with literature, and that within the present review, indicating the normalisation of stalking behaviour through its romanticisation, perpetuates negative impacts on victims (De Fazio et al., 2015). This reiterates the importance of considering additional factors that influence individual's perceptions of stalking and the need to incorporate such insights into targeted interventions for stalking victims and relationship education programmes.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

This review has contributed to understanding the implications of attributions of victim responsibility within the criminal justice system and the psychosocial ramifications for victims of stalking, thereby informing intervention and support strategies. It sheds light on how victims perceive their experience of stalking, indicating the salient psychological distress, maladaptive schemata and internal attributions of blame associated. Such perceptions influence the likelihood of

reporting incidents and using formal coping mechanisms, thus serving as a barrier to seeking assistance (Bjorklund et al., 2010). Research underscores the necessity for emotional and practical support post-stalking incidents, including validation of victims' experiences, safety planning and support recording perpetrator behaviour (Boehnlein, 2020). Despite recognised needs, services for stalking victims often fall short of providing comprehensive treatment (Taylor et al., 2019). The National Stalking Consortium (2019) emphasised the importance of empathy, acknowledgement of severity, and accessible referral pathways for stalking victims, yet these elements are not consistently provided (Taylor et al., 2019).

The present review identified barriers hindering the cessation of stalking and victim wellbeing, including inadequate training and awareness among law enforcement and healthcare professionals, biases, victim blaming myths, gender stereotypes, and discernment issues regarding lower-level stalking offences. Understanding these barriers can aid practitioners in tailoring support to individual needs, such as addressing internal attributions, impact of negative mental health, and distrust of others, thereby enhancing intervention efficacy.

Given the significant risk factors associated with stalking, and its association to interpersonal violence, notably statistics demonstrating that at least ten people die in the UK every week due to interpersonal violence, with stalking behaviours being recognised in the events leading up to their deaths (Monckton-Smith et al., 2017). Improved education and training for professionals, coupled with a deeper understanding of the victim experience, are imperative. Further research utilising qualitative methodologies could elucidate victim experiences from the point of reporting to informal help-seeking, aiding law enforcement and public understanding and dispelling misconceptions surrounding stalking. Moreover, the present review offers insight into the decision-making processes of stalking cases within the criminal justice system, including juror decisions. Included studies within the review recognised the impact of prior relationship dynamics and contextual information, which significantly influence judgements of responsibility and perceived threat levels, albeit not demonstrated consistently across sample populations.

The current review recognised previously well-established findings, such as the perception of stranger stalkers as most dangerous compared to ex-partners, or

acquaintances, and only through the addition of contextual information of ex-partner physical violence, does this perception change, and recognition towards this perpetrator group begin to reflect the reality. Increased awareness of contextual factors can inform jury deliberations, potentially mitigating harm e.g. recognition of accounts of ex-partner behaviour during the relationship (Duff & Scott, 2013). Additional research focusing on victims of stranger stalking could further deepen understanding and awareness of the heterogeneity of this behaviour (such as initiation and culmination of behaviour) in comparison to ex-intimate stalking.

Raising awareness of stalking risks and its impact is crucial for providing adequate support to victims and preventing problematic responses across various support forums. Improved understanding can inform victim's decisions regarding available services, educate support networks (informal and formal), healthcare providers, and the criminal justice system, and mitigate societal minimisation of stalking, thereby removing barriers to assistance (Boehnlein, 2020).

Strengths and Limitations of the review

While the review adhered to rigorous standards, it is not without its limitations. The sampled population primarily consisted of female university students, limiting the generalisability of findings as this is not fully representative of the population. This bias is compounded through research indicating higher rates of stalking victimisation among university students compared to the general population (Sheridan et al., 2003), potentially skewing self-reported victimisation rates. However, as females tend to be victims of stalking, it is valuable to have a sense of what a population of potential victims might be influenced by in relation to victim blame. Future research should strive for the inclusion of more heterogenous samples.

Moreover, some studies utilised direct victimisation experience to assess factors influencing victim responsibility, with the majority using self-report measures, however the information collected yielded inconsistent conclusions, and as such exploration of prior victimisation experiences was limited and could not be fully concluded as a mediating or moderating factor. Additionally, varied terminology such as 'harassment', 'cyberstalking' and 'stalking' were used across studies, which may have influenced respondent perceptions of conduct severity and victim

responsibility. Despite concerns raised about confirmatory bias, due to the framing of research materials (Dennison & Thomson, 2005), research suggests the framing of such behaviour as stalking or harassment does not impact upon perceptions (Scott et al., 2014). Future research could investigate participants prior knowledge of stalking and relevant legislation to account for contextual factors that could reflect within judgments of stalking.

The review employed a second reviewer for quality assessment, enhancing the validity of included references and minimising bias. PRISMA guidelines (Moher, 2009) ensured methodological rigor. The present review focused on individuals who have judged themselves as victims of stalking or judged others portrayed as victims of stalking, in relation to attribution of responsibility. Future reviews could benefit from broader inclusion criteria, such as considering perspectives of stalking perpetrators, to provide a comprehensive understanding of attribution of responsibility in stalking cases.

Conclusions

This systematic review synthesises relevant studies to ascertain empirical conclusions into the factors that influence perceptions of victim responsibility in cases of stalking. This was an important stage in advancing current understanding and elucidating potential explanations for challenges in effectively supporting individuals who have experienced stalking victimisation, their formal and informal support networks, and those tasked with making judgements regarding stalking offences.

23 studies underwent narrative synthesis, wherein high-quality available evidence was analysed alongside commentary regarding assessments of reliability and validity. The synthesis reveals that prior victimisation experiences, professional expertise, gender dynamics of involved parties (victims, perpetrators, and evaluator), severity of stalking behaviour and victim response, nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship, and misconceptions surrounding stalking (stalking myths) collectively influence perceptions of victim responsibility.

Acknowledging these factors is imperative to inform support frameworks for stalking victims, creating a greater understanding of their experiences, and offering meaningful recommendations for practitioners. Furthermore, the findings

of this review hold relevance for decision-making processes, informing practices within the criminal justice system to better align with victim experiences, and considerations pertinent to judgements of stalking.

Chapter Three: Public Perceptions of Stalking: the relationship between Stalking Attitudes and Attribution of Blame in Stalking

Abstract

Perceptions of stalking have been extensively studied, with the current research aiming to synthesise previous findings and explore the influence of stalking myths and dispositional variables, such as prior stalking victimisation, on decision-making related to blame attribution and sentencing in stalking cases. The current study aimed to determine whether prior victimisation and endorsement of stalking stereotypes or biases affect blame attribution.

Participants were presented with a hypothetical stalking scenario, in which the nature of the relationship breakdown was manipulated. They were then asked to evaluate the seriousness of the behaviour, assign blame, and determine sentencing outcomes. Further questionnaires assessed participants' endorsement of stalking myths and experiences of prior victimisation.

Results indicated that individuals who endorsed a greater amount of stalking myths were more likely to assign blame to the victim, perceive the victim as more capable of resolving the situation independently, and view the scenario as less severe. Gender differences emerged, with female participants being less likely to attribute responsibility to the victim, more likely to reject stalking myths, and more inclined to perceive greater risk and severity in the scenarios compared to males.

Prior experiences of stalking victimisation did not significantly influence attributions of responsibility or perceptions of severity. These findings highlight a relationship between blame attribution and the endorsement of stalking myths, underscoring the need to understand public attitudes towards stalking. This understanding is crucial in evaluating how such perceptions influence victims' willingness to seek help or report incidents.

Introduction

Stalking Victimisation and Perpetration

Stalking, defined as unwanted and repeated harassment through various actions that cause distress or fear, is recognised as a form of interpersonal aggression (Spitzberg & Cupach 2007; Scott, 2020). It frequently occurs after a relationship ends, with former partners attempting to re-establish contact. Such behaviours are understood to exist along a continuum from reasonable to unreasonable actions. Research indicates that approximately 79% of victims know their stalker, and 49% of cases involve previous romantic relationships (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Mullen et al., 2001). Victim perception is crucial for understanding and recognising stalking (Mullen et al., 1999), although there is ongoing debate about whether a victim's experience of fear is necessary for the behaviour to be classified as stalking (Dennison & Thomson, 2005). The expectation of fear appears to place responsibility on the victim to prove that they experienced subjective fear, for their experience to be discerned as stalking and to result in a successful prosecution (Dietz & Martin, 2007; Dunlap et al., 2012). This potentially leads to underreporting, as it is known that victims experience various emotions, and may not recognise they experienced fear, over other prominent emotions (Ngo, 2014; Reyns & Englebrect, 2013).

Despite the significant prevalence of stalking, perceptions of stalking often diverge from the reality of the phenomena (Sheridan et al., 2003; Scott, 2019). This is concerning as one in ten men, and one in five women in the UK will be stalked, with approximately 1,472,000 victims of stalking in England and Wales in 2018/19 (ONS, 2019; Bracewell et al., 2020). This could also explain the low conviction rates of stalking offenders (Boehnlein et al., 2020), as society may hold misperceptions, some of which have been detailed in Chapter Two, which have the potential to influence responses to stalking victimisation, through immediate help-seeking, societal understanding of stalking and decision-making within legal settings. Victims experience barriers when reporting stalking victimisation to law enforcement, such as victim blaming, minimisation of perpetrators actions and police inaction (Taylor-Dunn, 2021; Korkodeilou, 2014). Prior victimisation has

been reported to influence blame attribution, increase judgements of guilt and perceptions of victim fear and credibility (Amar & Alexy, 2010; Dunlap, 2010).

The impact of prior relationship on stalking perceptions

Perceptions of stalking have been extensively researched within the literature, with prior relationship between the perpetrator and the victim consistently influencing judgements made (Scott et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2010). A meta-analysis revealed that stalkers are more likely to be ex-partners than strangers or acquaintances (Spitzberg, 2002), with Farnham et al. (2000) highlighting that non-psychotic ex-partners are the greatest risk of perpetuating serious violence to victims, compared to strangers, or those with mental illness. Misconceptions within the literature exist, such as the victim being perceived as responsible for the perpetrator's actions, and the perpetrator being viewed as less likely to necessitate police intervention, or the behaviour recognised as stalking in cases involving ex-partner stalkers compared to a stranger or acquaintance stalker (Sheridan et al., 2003; Scott et al., 2010). This is concerning, as ex-partner stalkers are the most common and violent subtype of relational stalkers (Smith et al., 2017; McEwan et al., 2017), and are less likely to incur criminal convictions (Sheridan & Davies, 2001b), irrespective of perpetrator and victim gender (Sheridan et al., 2014). Further research in this area has explored the specific reasons for the breakdown of the relationship, whether the cause is external to the victim (e.g., physical abuse), neutral to both victim and perpetrator (e.g., a mutual decision to separate), or internal to the victim (e.g., infidelity) (Scott et al., unpublished; Duff & Scott, 2013). Findings suggest that greater blame is placed on the victim in cases where the victim had been unfaithful to the perpetrator prior to the relationship ending compared to cases where the ex-partner had been physically violent to the victim prior to the relationship ending. The current study aims to add to the literature by examining how contextual information influences perceptions of stalking in scenarios involving ex-partners.

Victims of stalking have reported inadequate support from law enforcement with ex-partner stalkers, in part, due to the interpretation of such behaviour being considered 'normal' in the breakdown of a relationship (Dennison, 2007). This is reflected in findings of stalking cases involving ex-partner stalkers, being more likely to be dropped than stranger or acquaintance stalkers (Harris, 2000). This

finding was replicated in samples of police personnel, in which police officers were less likely to believe behaviour constituted stalking and use stalking legislation in cases of ex-partner stalking (Weller et al., 2013; Pearce & Easteal, 1999).

The role of Stalking Myths

Research indicates that individuals holding biased attitudes toward stalking, often termed 'stalking myths', are more likely to make judgements and decisions based on these biases (Ervin, 2015; Sinclair, 2012; McKeon et al., 2015) exacerbating victim blaming and minimising the severity of stalking behaviour (Scott et al., 2019). Stalking myths can link to broader societal attitudes such as gender and cultural norms, influencing various stages of the criminal justice system (Scott et al., 2010) whilst having a negative impact on victims through minimising the risks associated with stalking such as propensity for violence and risk of harm to the victim (Dunlap, 2010; Dunlap et al., 2015; Kamphius et al., 2005). Gender-based differences in perceptions further complicate the issue with men more likely than women to endorse stalking myths and hold negative attitudes towards the victim (McKeon et al., 2015; Ervin, 2015), and an association between adherence of stalking myths and gender role stereotyping when assigning blame, typically to the victim (Dunlap, 2010; Dunlap et al., 2015). Women have been found to perceive stalking to be more harmful to the victim, judge the scenario as more serious and attribute responsibility to the perpetrator (Lambert et al., 2013). Further information relating to stalking myths, and a method of measurement, the Stalking Myth Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012) is discussed within Chapter Four. Stalking myths encompass a subset of beliefs which depict stalking as a courtship behaviour, research has recognised the concept of a 'blurry line' between normal courtship behaviour and stalking (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000). Men have been found to perceive different motivations and intent of stalking behaviour compared to women (Lambert et al., 2013). Recently published research found that participants defined behaviour as crossing the line between normal and stalking in non-intimate pairings, when the motivation of the perpetrator changed to upset the victim (Scott et al., 2022).

Addressing these biases through education and awareness training is crucial to minimising misperceptions, improving responses to stalking and providing

appropriate support to victims to the general public and professionals (Truman & Mustaine, 2009; Scott et al., 2014; McKeon et al., 2015).

Belief in a Just World (BJW), Defensive Attribution Theory and Stalking

Theoretical frameworks such as the Belief in a Just World (BJW; Lerner & Simmons, 1966) and Defensive Attribution Theory (Shaver, 1970) offer insights into biases in blame attribution, and have been reviewed in relation to stalking. The BJW posits that individuals maintain the belief that the world is fair, where good actions are rewarded, and bad actions are punished. This concept influences perceptions of blame in stalking scenarios, leading participants to attribute more blame to victims in cases involved ex-partner stalking compared to those involving strangers or acquaintances, despite the reality that most victims have a prior relationship with their stalker (Harris, 2000). According to the BJW, victims may be perceived as deserving of the stalking behaviour if they are perceived to have done something to warrant it, such as upsetting the stalker, compared to victims that do not know their stalker as well (Sheridan et al., 2003).

Defensive attribution theory helps to explain why individuals may show leniency towards perpetrators and blame victims, particularly when they share similarities with the perpetrator or fear a similar threatening situation. This phenomenon, termed 'judgemental leniency', occurs as the individual seeks to protect themselves from perceived threats by distancing themselves from the victim. This could explain the greater number of women, who are more likely to experience stalking victimisation, may exhibit lower victim blaming and higher perceptions of severity and fear due to their heightened vulnerability (Smith et al., 2017). This theory highlights how individuals may engage in victim blaming as a defence mechanism to alleviate their own fears of vulnerability (Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2020). This study will aim to further add to the literature around the impact that stalking victimisation has on perceptions of responsibility.

Research aims & hypotheses

The existing literature has examined the adverse effects of stalking on victims, encompassing aspects such as victim blaming and societal perceptions of stalking, including initial beliefs and potential biases. However, to the author's knowledge a gap remains in establishing a relationship between prior experiences of being

stalked, endorsement of stalking stereotypes or biases, and attributions of blame. The study seeks to address this gap by investigating whether such relationships exist. Additionally, it aims to provide insight into the prevalence of stalking experiences among the general public and the influence of contextual information on perceptions of both victims and perpetrators in stalking cases.

The following hypotheses will be tested:

1) Participants who endorse stalking myths more strongly will attribute more responsibility to the victim, and believe the victim is more able to resolve the stalking scenario.

2) Participants will attribute more responsibility to the victim when the reason for the breakdown of the relationship, is due to infidelity, rather than physical violence by the perpetrator.

3) Participants who endorse more stalking myths, as indicated by higher scores on the Stalking Myths Scale (SMS), will be less inclined to perceive the behaviour in the scenario as constituting stalking, causing alarm or distress to the victim, eliciting victim fear of violence, or perceived physical violence.

4) Participants who have experienced stalking victimisation will demonstrate attitudes indicative of taking stalking more seriously than people that have not been victims of stalking.

5) Participants who have experienced stalking victimisation will attribute less blame to the victim and endorse fewer stalking myths compared to individuals who have not experienced stalking victimisation.

6) Female participants will attribute less blame and responsibility to the victim, endorse fewer stalking myths, and report higher severity scores in relation to the potential harm caused by the perpetrator. Female participants will also perceive police intervention and criminal conviction are more necessary, compared to male participants.

Methods

Design

The current study employed a between-subjects design. The design draws upon prior research conducted by Sheridan, Scott, and colleagues into perceptions of stalking (e.g., Scott et al., 2010; Scott & Sheridan, 2011; Scott & Tse, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2003, Duff & Scott, 2013; Scott et al., 2015). It expands upon this established framework by including additional predictor variables including stalking myth endorsement, using the Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012) and prior experience of stalking victimisation.

Participants were allocated to one of six hypothetical stalking scenarios, presented via a short vignette that manipulated two underlying independent variables, with the six scenarios representing combinations of these variables. The first independent variable is the nature of the relationship breakdown, which had three levels. The second independent variable was the gender configuration of the victim and perpetrator. These two variables combined to produce six scenario conditions, each of which portrayed the same pattern of stalking behaviour but differed in the context of the relationship breakdown and the genders of those involved. The dependent variable is the attribution of responsibility, measured through participants' ratings. Predictor variables included stalking myth endorsement, prior victimisation, and participant gender.

All hypotheses tested in this study were directional and developed a priori, based on findings identified in the literature and the systematic review presented in Chapter Two. For instance, past research has consistently shown that individuals who endorse stalking myths tend to attribute greater blame to the victim and are less inclined to perceive the behaviour as constituting stalking (McKeon et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015). Moreover, the literature has identified that personal experience with stalking influences perceptions of defendant guilt and is associated with higher attributions of victim fear (Duff & Scott, 2013). Research has also found that females are generally more likely than males to view stalking as more severe, assign blame to the perpetrator, and support more punitive outcomes and pro-prosecution attitudes (Dunlap et al., 2012). These findings formed the basis for specific directional predictions concerning attribution of responsibility, perceived severity, and gender differences. The decision to use one-tailed tests aligns with best practice when hypotheses are a priori, unidirectional, and theoretically grounded. This approach maximises statistical power without

inflating the risk of Type I error beyond acceptable thresholds (Ruxton & Neuhäuser, 2010).

Participants

A power analysis was performed using G*Power software to determine the appropriate sample size. It was established that, to identify a medium effect size (f^2 = .5) with a power level of .95, and significance level of .05 a minimum sample size of 138 participants was required (Lakens, 2022).

208 individuals completed the study, comprising 152 females, 55 males, and one individual who opted not to disclose their gender. Due to the gender-specific hypothesis, recruitment efforts were extended to attempt to gain equal representation of genders, aiming to detect potential heterogeneity effects within the sample. Consequently, the participant count exceeded the anticipated number suggested by the G*Power analysis. Ethical considerations were paramount in this decision-making process. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study, and details regarding accessing support services and contacting both the author, and affiliated ethics committee were provided. No participants contacted either the author or the ethics committee with concerns.

All participants fell within the age range of 18 to 64 years. Among them, 155 identified as White, 27 as Asian, 6 as Black, and 20 as belonging to other ethnicities. Regarding sexual orientation, 176 participants identified as heterosexual, 6 as homosexual, and 17 as bisexual, while 5 chose not to disclose and 4 identified with another sexual orientation. The majority of participants, (n=135) were residents of the UK, with (n=73) residing in other countries. The distribution of participants varied across the six experimental conditions, ranging from 20 to 49 participants per condition. The distribution across scenarios is shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Participant distribution across experimental conditions

Scenario Condition	***n***
Pink: Reason for relationship breakdown: Physically Violent Ex-Partner *(Female Victim / Male Perpetrator)*	27
Green: Reason for relationship breakdown: Physically Violent Ex-Partner *(Male Victim / Female Perpetrator)*	41

Orange: Reason for relationship breakdown: Unfaithful Ex-Partner *(Female Victim / Male Perpetrator)*	25
Grey: Reason for relationship breakdown: Unfaithful Ex-Partner *(Male Victim / Female Perpetrator)*	20
Blue: Reason for relationship breakdown: No Future Ex-Partner *(Female Victim / Male Perpetrator)*	49
Purple: Reason for relationship breakdown: No Future Ex-Partner *(Male Victim / Female Perpetrator)*	46

While optional, participants were invited to share their experience of stalking victimisation. The majority of the sample (*n*=144) reported that they did not have any stalking experiences/ victimisation. Among the (*n*=64) participants that did disclose, (*n*=50) reported direct victimisation, (*n*=2) reported indirect victimisation, and (*n*=12) reported experiencing both. Further questions pertaining to stalking victimisation were posed to participants who had indicated prior experience, and these findings are detailed in the results section. Full participant demographics are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Participant demographic information

	Total	
Characteristic	**N**	**%**
Gender		
Male	55	26.4%
Female	152	73.1%
Other (prefer not to say)	1	0.5%
Age (years)		
18-24	73	35.1%
25-34	91	43.8%
35-44	24	11.5%
45-54	10	4.8%
55-64	10	4.8%
65+	0	0
Ethnicity		
White – UK heritage	95	45.7%
White – other	60	28.8%
Pakistani	2	1%
Bangladeshi	1	0.5%
Indian	17	8.2%
Black – African heritage	3	1.4%
Black – Caribbean heritage	3	1.4%
Chinese	7	3.4%
Other	19	9.1%
Prefer not to say	1	0.5%
Relationship status		

Single	75	36.1%
In a relationship	130	62.5%
Prefer not to say	3	1.4%
Employment status		
Full time employment	44	21.2%
Part time employment	66	31.7%
Unemployed, looking for work	6	2.9%
Unemployed, not looking for work	2	1.0%
Retired	5	2.4%
Student	74	35.6%
Unable to work	4	1.9%
Self-employed	4	1.9%
Homemaker	2	1%
Prefer not to say	1	0.5%
Highest education level achieved		
Less than GCSE	2	1%
GCSE/ O-Level or similar	4	1.9%
A-Level	13	6.3%
Undergraduate degree	89	42.8%
Postgraduate degree	79	38%
MBA	5	2.4%
Doctorate/ PhD	10	4.8%
Other	4	1.9%
Prefer not to say	2	1%
Stalking Victimisation		
No experience of stalking victimisation	144	69.2%
Experienced stalking victimisation directly	50	24%
Experienced stalking victimisation through others and provided support	2	1%
Experienced stalking victimisation directly and through supporting others	12	5.8%
Stalking/ Harassment Legislation Awareness		
Familiar with legislation	20	9.6%
Not familiar with legislation	108	51.9%
Unsure	80	38.5%
Total	208	100%

Materials

The study began by inviting participants to read the information sheet (Appendix G) and subsequently consent to participate in the study (Appendix G).

For the purpose of description, after the measures detailed below, participants were prompted to provide demographic information at the end of the survey: age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, relationship status, level of education and current employment status. Additionally, a debrief page was included at the end of the questionnaire (Appendix F).

Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012)

The SMS was used to assess a participant's endorsement of stalking myths. Comprising of 21 items, this self-report questionnaire presents common stalking myths, such as *"Many instances of stalking by would-be-lovers could be avoided if the alleged victim would have just told his/her stalker clearly that s/he was definitely not interested in a romantic relationship"* and *"Stalkers often suffer from serious mental illness"* (full questionnaire in Appendix H). Participants rated items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 6 ('Strongly Agree'). Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire ranged from .76 - .84 across different studies (Sinclair, 2012; Lippman, 2018) and was found to be α=.8 within the current sample. Six items within the scale are reverse coded, so higher total scores signify greater endorsement of stalking myths. Total scores on all items are summed to derive the SMS score.

Stalking- related experiences

The participants' experiences of stalking were assessed using eight questions. This measure was constructed for the study, to capture participant experiences of stalking victimisation. Initially, participants were asked the following question *"Has anyone (I.e. stranger, ex-partner, prior acquaintance, friend) on more than one occasion, engaged in repeated, unwanted contact or behaviour with you that impacted on your life or intruded on your sense of privacy. This may have caused you to fear for your own safety or the safety of people close to you, and/or led you to feel distressed?".* The answer was binary for this response, measuring if participants experienced this (Yes) or did not (No). Participants that answered 'No' proceeded to the final questionnaire, while those that answered 'Yes' continued to questions depicting stalking behaviours and practices. These questions inquired about the frequency and nature of behaviours experienced, ranging from unwanted contact, online and offline monitoring, sending regular presents and coercion through children or family. The frequency of these practices was

measured through an eight-point scale with the options: never, once, 2-3 times, 4-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-25 times, >25 times, Prefer not to say. Behaviours were grouped into four categories, direct contact (such as physical assault including threats of harm, getting too physically close in public spaces), indirect contact (using deceitful means to obtain information, breaking into the home), monitoring (contacting or attempting to contact via letters, emails, telephone calls, observing or watching you) and non-contact intrusion (posting material in a public space with an intent to damage reputation, asking others about them to elicit information). These categories were derived from prior research on stalking behaviours (e.g., Podaná & Imríšková, 2014; Logan, 2020; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003; Miller, 2012). The following questions with the options listed were then asked in relation to these experiences:

1) What was your age at the time of these events? *(This was measured in eight categories of, younger than 18 years; 18-19; 20-24; 25-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-59; 60+)*

2) How frightened did your experiences make you feel? (If you selected more than one experience, then please select the experience which made you feel most fearful) *(This was measured on an eleven-point scale, 0-10, from 'not at all frightened' to 'the most frightened I have felt').*

3) Thinking about these experiences *(this was measured in three responses of: was this something you experienced directly towards you, or did you experience this through others e.g. a friend, family member or colleague had this experience and you supported them in some way, or both).* Full questionnaire is detailed in Appendix J.

Hypothetical Stalking Scenarios and Perceptions of Stalking

The research used a questionnaire consisting of one of six versions of a hypothetical stalking scenario, eleven scale items assessing attitudes towards the described behaviours and perceptions of stalking, and two additional questions. These questions prompted participants to indicate the most appropriate outcome should the perpetrator be arrested, and the case brought to trial *(case dropped, restraining/intervention order, or criminal conviction)*. The second question solicited participants' responses regarding their familiarly with legislation governing unlawful stalking/ harassment in their country/state, asking them to

indicate the most accurate response *(Yes, No, Unsure)*. Full questionnaire in Appendix I.

Participants were allocated to one of six hypothetical stalking scenarios using a method based on colour selection. Each participant was prompted to choose one of six colours (Blue, Purple, Green, Pink, Orange, Grey), with each colour corresponding to a pre-set vignette that varied by gender pairing and relationship breakdown context. Participants were informed that their involvement would entail reading a short vignette (approximately 139 words), followed by responding to questions relating to the behaviour described. Importantly, participants were unaware of the scenario linked to each colour. Although the allocation process was not formally randomised by software, participants had no information that would allow them to predict which scenario they would receive. This method of randomisation was adopted due to limitations within the survey software used, which did not support built-in random assignment. To overcome this, the colour selection technique acted as a workaround to enable participant blinding to each condition.

Although the method is not free from the possibility of colour attribution bias (i.e. participants choosing colours they personally prefer), this potential source of bias was mitigated by several design features. Firstly, the colour choice bore no apparent or implied connection to the content of the vignettes. As such, any participant bias in colour preference could not have been based on knowledge of the scenario content. Secondly, scenario distribution was actively monitored during data collection. When certain scenarios became overrepresented due to disproportionate colour selection, data collection for those specific conditions was paused. This active approach ensured a more balanced distribution across conditions, allowing for sufficient sample sizes for parametric analyses. Thus, while the allocation was not perfectly random in the strict statistical sense, it was functionally random from the perspective of participant awareness and was sufficiently balanced to support robust between-group comparisons.

Additionally, the vignettes were consistent with those used in previous studies (Scott et al., 2010; Scott & Sheridan, 2011; Scott & Tse, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2003; Duff & Scott, 2013; Scott et al., 2015). Six versions of the vignette were used, each representing different levels of additional contextual information

regarding the breakdown of the relationship and manipulations of the genders of the victim and perpetrator. All scenarios portrayed the same behaviour within the context of the perpetrator seeking the attention of the victim. The manner in which the victim ended the relationship was manipulated. Consequently, the perpetrator was depicted as an ex-partner, with supplementary contextual information regarding the relationship breakdown, including scenarios such as: an ex-partner whom the victim left due to repeated instances of physical violence (Ex-partner physically violent); an ex-partner who the victim left because the victim had become romantically involved in another relationship whilst in the relationship with the perpetrator (Ex-partner unfaithful) and an ex-partner who the victim left as both the victim and perpetrator wanted things (Ex-partner no future). The genders of the victim and perpetrator were manipulated to ensure that each hypothetical stalking scenario included both a female victim/ male perpetrator and male victim/ female perpetrator. An example scenario for the ex-partner physically violent, male perpetrator/ female victim condition is provided below:

"Sarah first met James when she started working in the same estate agents office as him. A romance developed and subsequently they dated for six months. Sarah ended the relationship because James had been physically violent towards her on several occasions. During the two months that followed, James sent Sarah more than 30 text messages asking why she was no longer interested in him. James also approached Sarah several times on her way to work and telephoned her at home. Sarah asked James not to call her, but he still called frequently. When Sarah screened her calls James left messages expressing his interest in resuming a relationship. Most recently, James approached Sarah while she was walking her dog in the local park. James asked Sarah to change her mind on the grounds that they could still be good together."

After reading the vignette, participants were directed to complete eleven questions relating to the vignette. All scale items were measured on 11-point Likert-type scales (0-10), as detailed below. For all items, higher numbers represented higher levels of agreement.

1. To what extent do you consider James' behaviour to constitute stalking? *(definitely not stalking to definitely stalking)*

2. How serious do you believe this situation to be? *(not at all serious to extremely serious)*
3. Do you think James' behaviour will cause Sarah alarm or personal distress? *(definitely not to definitely)*
4. Do you think James' behaviour will cause Sarah to fear that he will use violence against her? *(definitely not to definitely)*
5. Do you think this situation will lead to James physically assaulting Sarah? *(definitely not to definitely)*
6. To what extent does James' behaviour necessitate police intervention? *(not at all necessary to extremely necessary)*
7. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary for the resolution of this situation? *(not at all necessary to extremely necessary)*
8. To what extent is Sarah responsible for encouraging James' behaviour? *(not at all responsible to totally responsible)*
9. Do you think Sarah could help resolve the situation? *(definitely not to definitely)*
10. How long do you believe this situation will continue for? *(not at all long to a very long time)*
11. How long do you think it will take Sarah to recover after the situation is resolved? *(not at all long to a very long time)*

Justification for the Use of Vignettes

The use of the above scenarios, although adapted from prior studies, warrants further discussion regarding the use of vignette-based scenario methodology, including the strengths, limitations, and relevance to the aims of the present study. This is discussed in the following section.

The present study used a vignette-based scenario methodology to examine perceptions of stalking across different relationship contexts. Vignette methods are well-established in research, particularly where direct manipulation of real-life variables is either ethically sensitive or impractical. By presenting participants with realistic scenarios, vignettes avoid ethical concerns such as deception or distress while still eliciting emotional responses and judgements in a structured way, allowing for comparison whilst maintaining internal validity.

However, despite their utility, vignette methods hold several potential limitations. Vignettes have been criticised for lacking ecological validity and emotional realism, with research indicating that vignettes may fail to capture the complexity of emotions experienced in real-life (Collett & Childs, 2011). Text-based stimuli have been found to elicit weaker self-reported emotional responses compared to video or photo-based stimuli (Koehler et al., 2005). Individual interpretation of vignettes may vary based on personal factors such as prior stalking experience or the influence of stereotypes about stalking behaviour (Lambert et al., 2013; Sinclair, 2012). These variations should be considered when analysing participant responses.

In the present study, the vignettes were adapted directly from those used by Duff and Scott (2013). The decision to use this methodology was necessary given the study's partial replication design; to extend Duff and Scott's (2013) findings faithfully, it was essential to maintain fidelity to their original scenario structure and content. Without replicating the original vignettes, any possible observed changes could then be attributed to methodological differences rather than genuine differences in participant perception. All scenarios described identical stalking behaviours enacted following the end of a romantic relationship, with contextual factors such as the reason for the relationship breakdown (e.g., physical violence, infidelity or mutual ending) systematically manipulated.

Although vignette methodology is not without criticism, its use in the present study was a deliberate and considered decision. The primary objective of replication necessitated adherence to the scenario design which was established in previous research. Taking this into consideration, the strengths of the scenario methodology, namely the ability for standardisation and links with previous perception research, outweighed the limitations. Scenario methodology enabled the present study to build upon existing findings, whilst maintaining methodological consistency.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through various social media platforms such as such as Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit as well as the participant recruitment website

www.surveycircle.com. The study was an online study, upon accessing the survey link, participants were directed to an information page hosted on Jisc (formerly Bristol Online Surveys), detailing the overarching objectives of the study, information about how their data would be used, and contact details. This page informed participants on their rights to withdraw and elucidated the confidentiality and anonymity protocols governing participant information. Information regarding the Ethical Committee was provided prior to participants consenting to participation. Subsequently, participants then proceeded to the survey, comprising distinct questionnaires across multiple pages, taking approximately 30 minutes for completion. Participants then completed the Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012) and following this, participants were prompted to select a colour randomly (Blue, Purple, Green, Pink, Orange, Grey), directing them to one of six vignettes describing a stalking scenario. After reading the vignette, participants were directed to complete eleven questions regarding their perceptions held about the vignette.

Following this, participants would then complete eight questions pertaining to their own experiences of stalking victimisation. Finally, participants provided demographic information about themselves (Appendix K, before accessing a debrief page. The debrief page included information about support services and organisations in the event of adverse effects following participation, along with the researchers' contact information (Appendix F).

Ethical Approval

The study was granted ethical approval by the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Nottingham (reference number 287-1904) and was conducted in accordance with the ethical requirements of the British Psychological Society. Please see Appendix E.

Results

Analytical Strategy

Although the study included several dependent variables capturing different aspects of participants' perceptions of the stalking scenarios, a multivariate analysis such as MANOVA was not appropriate. MANOVA requires multivariate normality, homogeneity of covariance matrices, linear relationships among

dependent variables, and reasonably balanced group sizes (Field, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). These conditions were not met in the present study: the scenario groups were unequal in size, the dependent variables showed non-normal distributions, and they represented conceptually distinct constructs rather than a single multivariate dimension. Because these factors already indicate that MANOVA assumptions could not be satisfied, formal tests such as Box's M were not conducted.

Given these violations, univariate analyses were selected as the most suitable and defensible approach. Parametric univariate tests such as ANOVA and Pearson's correlation are well-established as robust to moderate violations of normality when group sizes are adequate (Field, 2013; Blanca et al., 2017). As the study met these conditions and the hypotheses were defined for individual dependent variables, the univariate approach aligned with both the research aims and the characteristics of the dataset.

The analytical plan was originally designed to use non-parametric statistical tests, as preliminary screening suggested that the data violated assumptions of normality. Shapiro-Wilk tests, skewness and kurtosis values, and visual inspections (e.g., histograms, boxplots) indicated non-normality (Field, 2013). However, following further review, the data were determined to be sufficiently robust to justify the use of parametric tests. This decision was supported by research demonstrating that parametric tests are robust to moderate violations of normality, particularly when group sizes are reasonable. The smallest group size in this study was 20 participants, meeting the conditions under which parametric tests retain acceptable Type I error rates and statistical power with group sizes of 20 or more (Rana et al., 2016). Parametric tests have been found to maintain validity under non-normal conditions, provided no extreme outliers or highly kurtotic distributions are present (Blanca et al., 2018; Bishara & Hittner, 2012). Outlier checks revealed no extreme cases, supporting the use of parametric techniques.

To ensure transparency and to allow for comparison, non-parametric tests were also conducted and are reported in Appendix L, with a summary comparison Table 9. The non- parametric findings were consistent with the parametric results and did not alter interpretation of the hypotheses. In cases where the parametric and

non-parametric results vary, this is considered in the discussion section, however the results were broadly consistent. This dual approach increases confidence in the results while acknowledging the more conservative nature of non-parametric tests and their potential limitations in terms of statistical power and information retention (Blanca et al., 2018).

Statistical Assumptions and Data Cleaning

Prior to conducting the analysis, the data were screened for parametric assumptions. There was no missing data within the sample. An assessment for outliers was conducted using the box plot method (Dawson, 2011) on all variables, this indicated several potential outliers, however as no cases were flagged as extreme outliers (Field, 2013), all participants were kept in the subsequent analysis. A Bonferroni correction was applied to the alpha level to control for the overall Type I error rate. This is recommended when multiple significance tests are carried out (Field, 2013). All significance tests were one-tailed, consistent with the directional hypotheses established in the Methods section.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 8
Stalking Victimisation Experience (n=64)

	N	**%**
Age at the time of Stalking Victimisation		
Younger than 18	15	23.4%
18 – 19	10	15.6%
20 – 24	13	20.3%
25 – 34	15	23.4%
35 – 44	6	9.4%
45 – 54	2	3.1%
55 – 59	2	3.1%
60+	1	1.6%
Frequency of Direct Contact		
Never	12	18.8%
Once	3	4.7%
2 – 3 times	10	15.6%
4 – 5 times	10	15.6%
6 – 10 times	12	18.8%
11 – 25 times	7	10.9%
> 25 times	9	14.1%
Prefer not to say	1	1.6%
Frequency of Indirect Contact		
Never	20	31.3%
Once	8	12.5%

2 – 3 times	8	12.5%
4 – 5 times	11	17.2%
6 – 10 times	8	12.5%
11 – 25 times	2	3.1%
> 25 times	5	7.8%
Prefer not to say	2	3.1%
Frequency of Monitoring		
Never	5	7.8%
Once	7	10.9%
2 – 3 times	10	15.6%
4 – 5 times	13	20.3%
6 – 10 times	9	14.1%
11 – 25 times	10	15.6%
> 25 times	9	14.1%
Prefer not to say	1	1.6%
Frequency of Non-contact Intrusion		
Never	24	37.5%
Once	7	10.9%
2 – 3 times	16	25%
4 – 5 times	6	9.4%
6 – 10 times	5	7.8%
11 – 25 times	3	4.7%
> 25 times	2	3.1%
Prefer not to say	1	1.6%
Level of fear felt (0, not at all frightened; 100, the most frightened I have felt)		
0 – 50%	19	29.69%
60 – 100%	45	70.31%
Method of Stalking Victimisation		
Experienced Directly	50	78.1%
Experienced Indirectly e.g. supporting friends, family	2	3.1%
Experienced both Directly and Indirectly	12	18.8%
Gender		
Male	9	14.06%
Female	54	85.71%
Prefer not to say	1	0.23%

N.B. The 'frequency of' categories encompass the following behaviour: Direct Contact (physical assault including threats of harming you; damaging your property; flirting verbally or making sexually suggestive remarks towards you, persistently touching you; trying to repair or further the relationship with you; verbally aggressive with you or having arguments with you; spreading harmful information about you; coercion through using family members; sexual assault;

getting too close to you in public spaces; publicly embarrassing you; physically trapping you; endangering your life); Indirect Contact (Threats or assaults against those you care about; harming/threatening to harm themselves; breaking into your home, work or vehicle; regularly sending you presents; using deceitful means to obtain information about you; turning others against you); Monitoring (they contacted/attempted to contact you via letters, emails, text messages, fax, phone calls, blogs, tagging your photos, internet sites or chatrooms etc; watching you; doing things to contact you or monitor you both offline and online; they showed up uninvited where you were; changing their routine to coordinate with yours; using tracking software, social media, cameras or listening devices to monitor you; encouraging others to spy or contact you); Non-contact Intrusion (reading your emails; posting statements about you, rumours or material about you online/in a public space which suggests intent to damage your reputation; seeing your friends or family without your approval; asking others about you to elicit information; stealing possessions from you).

Table 8 shows frequencies of stalking victimisation experiences responses. The data highlights that some participants reported they experienced victimisation occurring before the age of 18 (*n*=15, 23.4%). Similarly, 23.4% (*n*=15) experienced this between the ages of 25 – 34 and 20.3% (n=13) experienced this between the ages of 20-24. The majority of individuals that reported stalking experiences, identified as female (*n*= 54, 85.71%). In terms of the frequencies of the experiences reported, monitoring was the type of behaviour that was experienced the most in those that responded, recognising experiences such as unwanted contact, and being observed through online and offline methods and using technology to monitor. The data shows that direct contact was experienced between 2 - >25 times by 94.12% (*n*=51) of those that reported this. Indirect contact was experienced by the majority of participants on 4-5 occasions (*n*=11, 17.2%). Non-contact intrusion was experienced by the majority of participants who reported this experience on 2-3 occasions (*n*=16, 25%). 70.31% (*n*=45) reported their experiences led them to experiencing higher levels of fear. The majority of participants experienced stalking victimisation directly, with 78.1% (*n*=50) confirming this, a smaller proportion of individuals reported experiencing this victimisation indirectly through others, such as supporting someone who was

stalked (*n*=2; 3.1%) and 18.8% (*n*=12) experienced both direct and indirect stalking victimisation.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis 1:

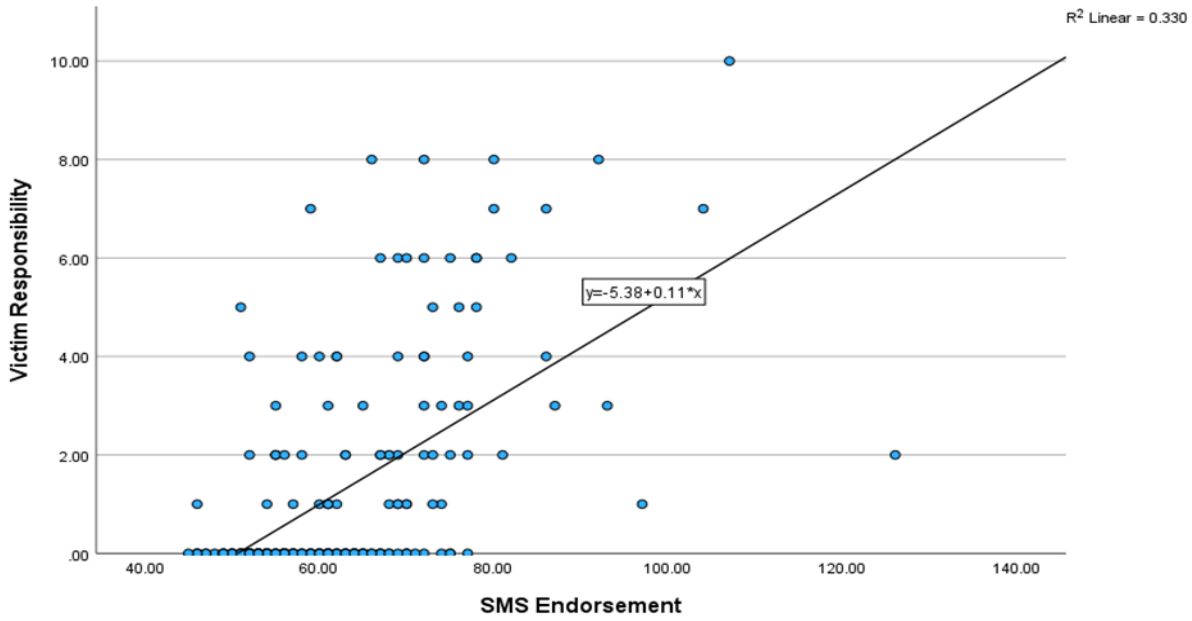
- Participants who endorse stalking myths more strongly will attribute more responsibility to the victim, and believe the victim is more able to resolve the stalking scenario.

A Pearson's correlation was conducted to identify relationships between stalking myth endorsement and attribution of victim responsibility within stalking scenarios. Two significant relationships were found, both demonstrating moderate strength, based on Cohen's (1988) effect size guidelines (see scatterplots in Figure 2 and Figure 3). Tests were conducted using Bonferroni-adjusted alpha levels of .025 per test (.05/2).

There was a significant positive correlation between endorsement of stalking myths and attribution of victim responsibility (r = .57, N = 208, p < .001, one-tailed). Stalking myth endorsement accounted for approximately 33% of the variance in responsibility judgements (r^2 = .33). This indicates that higher endorsement of stalking myths is associated with greater attribution of responsibility to the victim for encouraging the perpetrator's behaviour, supporting Hypothesis 1 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

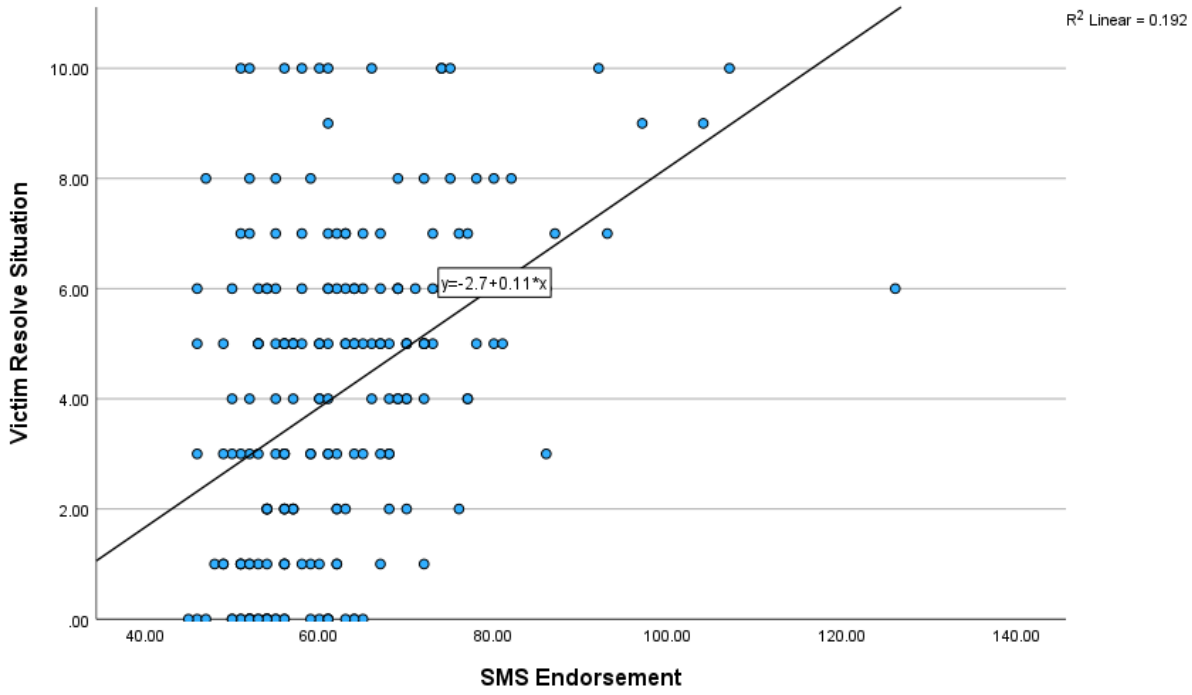
Scatterplot for the correlation between stalking myth endorsement and attribution of victim responsibility.



Similarly, a significant positive correlation was found between endorsement of stalking myths and the belief that the victim could resolve the situation (r = .44, N = 208, p < .001, one-tailed). This suggests that greater myth endorsement is associated with stronger beliefs that the victim could resolve the stalking scenario, also consistent with Hypothesis 1 (see Figure 3). The correlation between stalking myth endorsement and belief in the victim's ability to resolve the situation indicates a moderate relationship, accounting for approximately 19% of the variance in that belief (r^2 = .19). These findings support the hypothesis that greater stalking myth endorsement is associated with increased attribution of responsibility to victims in stalking scenarios.

Figure 3

Scatterplot for the correlation between stalking myth endorsement and victim resolve scores.



Hypothesis 2:

- Participants will attribute more responsibility to the victim when the reason for the breakdown of the relationship is due to infidelity, rather than physical violence by the perpetrator.

Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted to assess whether the reason for the breakdown of the relationship (victim infidelity, perpetrator physical violence, or mutual reasons such as no future) influenced (a) attribution of victim responsibility and (b) perception of the victim's ability to resolve the situation.

(a) Victim Responsibility

Levene's Test based on the mean indicated a potential violation of homogeneity of variance, $F(2, 205) = 4.35$, $p = .014$. However, tests based on the median and adjusted degrees of freedom were non-significant ($p = .32$), indicating the assumption was likely met well enough to proceed with ANOVA.

The one-way ANOVA showed no significant effect of relationship breakdown condition on victim responsibility ratings, $F(2, 205) = 1.13$, $p = .324$, partial $\eta^2 = .011$. Participants attributed relatively low levels of responsibility to the victim in all conditions, with mean scores of $M = 1.44$ ($SD = 2.27$) in the victim infidelity condition, $M = 0.93$ ($SD = 1.74$) in the physical violence condition, and $M = 1.38$ ($SD = 2.33$) in the no future condition. Although the trend was consistent with the hypothesis, higher responsibility in the victim infidelity condition and lower in the physical violence condition, the differences were not statistically significant.

(b) Victim's Ability to Resolve the Situation

Levene's Test confirmed that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, ps > .56 across all metrics. The one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of the reason for relationship breakdown on participants' perceptions of the victim's ability to resolve the situation, $F(2, 205) = 3.11$, $p = .047$, partial $\eta^2 = .029$. Although the effect size was small, this indicates that the reason for the breakup influenced perceived victim agency. Participants perceived the victim as more able to resolve the situation in the victim infidelity condition ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 2.72$) and the no future condition ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 2.88$), compared to the perpetrator physical violence condition ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 2.91$).

Post hoc comparisons using the Games-Howell procedure indicated that participants perceived the victim as marginally more able to resolve the situation in the victim infidelity condition compared to the physical violence condition, M difference = 1.14, $SE = 0.54$, $p = .092$, 95% CI [-0.14, 2.41]. Similarly, the no future condition was also marginally higher than the physical violence condition, M difference = 1.00, $SE = 0.46$, $p = .078$, 95% CI [-0.09, 2.09]. No significant difference was found between the victim infidelity and no future conditions, $p = .962$.

Overall, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. While there was no significant difference in victim responsibility, participants did perceive victims as having more ability to resolve the situation when the relationship ended due to infidelity or mutual agreement of no future, compared to physical violence by the perpetrator. This highlights the role of contextual information in shaping perceptions of victim agency. Given the lack of significant differences in responsibility and the modest

effect observed for perceived victim resolve, conditions were collapsed for follow-up analyses.

Hypothesis 3:

- Participants who endorse more stalking myths, as indicated by higher scores on the Stalking Myths Scale (SMS), will be less inclined to perceive the behaviour in the scenario as constituting stalking, causing alarm or distress to the victim, eliciting victim fear of violence, or perceived physical violence.

Pearson's correlations were conducted to examine relationships between endorsement of stalking myths, and perceptions of scenario severity, (victim distress, victim fear of violence, perceived perpetrator violence, and recognition of the scenario as a stalking offence). Several significant relationships emerged, ranging from small to moderate strength according to Cohen's (1988) standards. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, greater endorsement of stalking myths was associated with lower perceptions of scenario severity across most measures (see scatterplots in Figure 4, Appendix M; Figure 5, Appendix N; Figure 6; Figure 7, Appendix O; Figure 8, Appendix P). A Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .001 per test was applied (.05/5).

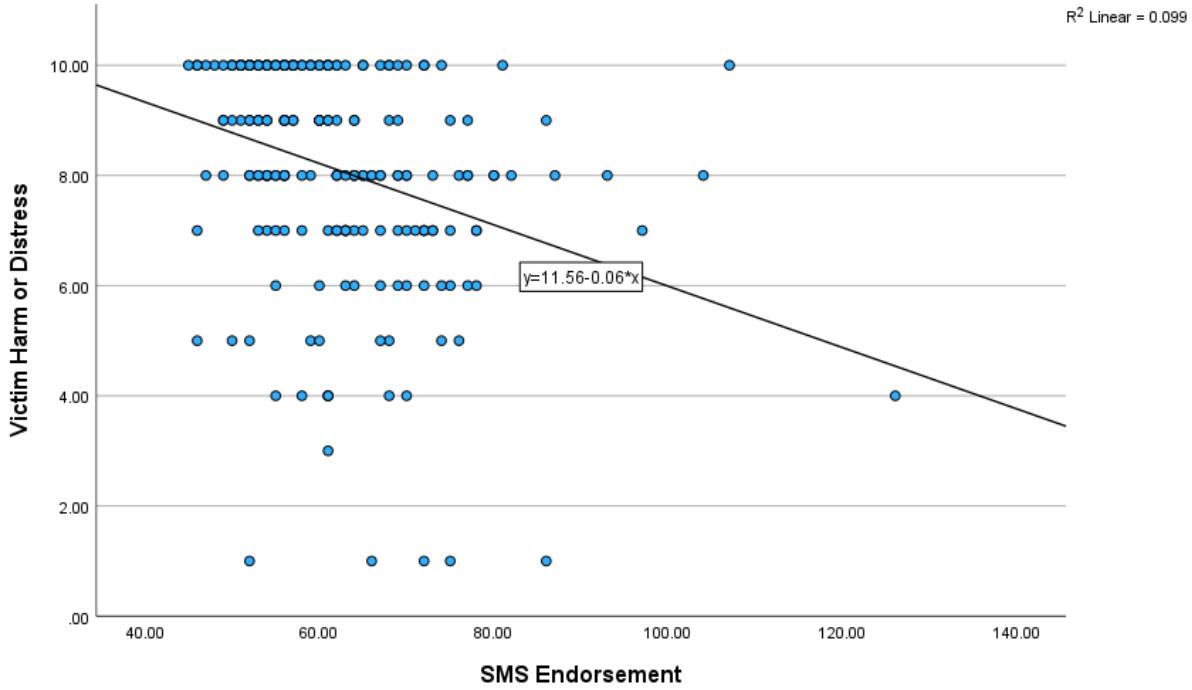
Recognition of Stalking: A moderate, negative correlation was found between stalking myth endorsement and participants' recognition of the perpetrator's behaviour as stalking; $r(206) = -.47$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [−.57, −.36]. Participants who more strongly endorsed stalking myths were less likely to label the perpetrator's behaviour as stalking. Approximately 22 % of the variance in stalking recognition scores ($r^2 = .22$) was explained by endorsement of stalking myths, supporting Hypothesis 3 (Figure 4, Appendix M).

Severity: A weak, negative association was found between endorsement of stalking myths and perceived seriousness of the scenario, $r(206) = -.24$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [−.36, −.11]. Endorsement of stalking myths explained roughly 6 % of the variance in seriousness ratings ($r^2 = .06$). Thus, participants who more strongly endorsed stalking myths tended to judge the situation as less serious, consistent with Hypothesis 3 (Figure 5, Appendix N).

Victim harm or distress: A moderate, negative association was found between endorsement of stalking myths and perceptions that the perpetrator's behaviour would cause the victim harm or personal distress, $r(206) = -.32$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [−.43, −.19]. Approximately 10 % of the variance in harm/distress ratings was explained by stalking-myth endorsement ($r^2 = .10$). In other words, participants who more strongly endorsed stalking myths were less likely to believe the perpetrator's behaviour would harm or distress the victim, consistent with Hypothesis 3 (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Scatterplot for the correlation between SMS and perceived victim harm scores.



Risk of physical violence: A weak, negative association was found between endorsement of stalking myths and the perceived likelihood that the perpetrator would use physical violence towards the victim, $r(206) = -.20$, $p = .002$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [−.32, −.06]. Endorsement of stalking myths accounted for about 4 % of the variance in assault-risk judgments ($r^2 = .04$). Thus, participants who more strongly endorsed stalking myths were less likely to believe the situation would escalate to physical violence, (Figure 7, Appendix O). Although this finding is consistent with Hypothesis 3, the result did not remain statistically significant after applying a Bonferroni correction to control for multiple comparisons

(adjusted α = .001). Thus, the observed relationship should be interpreted with caution.

Victim fear of violence: A weak-to-moderate, negative correlation between endorsement of stalking myths and perceived victim fear of violence, $r(206) = -.27$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [−.40, −.14]. Endorsement of stalking myths accounted for about 8 % of the variance in perceived victim fear of violence ratings ($r^2 = .08$). Participants who more strongly endorsed stalking myths were less likely to believe the victim would fear violence from the perpetrator, consistent with Hypothesis 3 (Figure 8, Appendix P).

Hypothesis 4:

- Participants who have experienced stalking victimisation will demonstrate attitudes indicative of taking stalking more seriously than people that have not been victims of stalking.

A series of independent-samples *t*-tests compared participants that had identified as experiencing stalking victimisation (n = 64) and participants that had not reported experiencing this (n = 144) on seven attitudinal variables: recognition of the behaviour as stalking, perceived severity, perceived likelihood of victim harm/distress, victim fear of violence, perceived risk of physical assault, perceived need for police intervention, and perceived need for a criminal conviction. A Bonferroni-adjusted alpha of .007 (0.05/7) was applied to control family-wise error.

In addition, a multinomial logistic regression examined whether prior stalking victimisation predicted the case outcome each participant selected (case dropped, restraining/intervention order, or criminal conviction). Victim status did not improve model fit, likelihood-ratio $\chi^2(2) = 0.32$, p = .85, and none of the individual log-odds coefficients were significant (all Wald *ps* > .40). Collectively, the parametric analyses provided no evidence that prior stalking victimisation leads individuals to perceive the stalking scenario as more serious or to advocate more punitive case outcomes; consequently, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Recognition of Stalking: Participants who had experienced stalking victimisation (M = 8.11, SD = 2.25) rated the perpetrator's behaviour as stalking slightly more strongly than participants who had not been victimised (M = 7.72, SD = 2.04).

The independent-samples *t*-test was non-significant, $t(206) = 1.24$, $p = .108$, 95 % CI [-0.23, 1.02]. The effect size was small, $d = 0.19$. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported, prior stalking victimisation did not lead to meaningfully higher recognition of the behaviour as stalking.

Severity: Participants who had experienced stalking victimisation ($M = 7.19$, $SD = 2.03$) judged the scenario as only marginally more serious than participants who had not been victimised ($M = 7.09$, $SD = 1.68$). Levene's test indicated equal variances, $F(1, 206) = 1.73$, $p = .189$, so the pooled error term was used. The independent-samples *t*-test showed that the difference was not statistically significant, $t(206) = .36$, $p = .36$, 95 % CI [-0.44, 0.63]. The effect size was minor $d = 0.05$. Hypothesis 4 was not supported; prior stalking victimisation did not lead participants to perceive the situation as more serious.

Victim Harm or Distress: Participants who had experienced stalking victimisation ($M = 8.08$, $SD = 2.21$) and those who had not ($M = 8.09$, $SD = 1.99$) did not differ in how likely they thought the perpetrator's behaviour would cause the victim harm or personal distress. Levene's test indicated equal variances, $F(1, 206) = .33$, $p = .57$, so the pooled error term was used. The independent-samples *t*-test was non-significant, $t(206) = -.04$, $p = .48$, 95 % CI [-0.62, 0.60]. The effect size was essentially zero, Cohen's $d = -0.01$. These findings do not support Hypothesis 4; prior stalking victimisation did not increase perceptions of potential harm or distress to the victim.

Victim fear of violence: Participants who had experienced stalking victimisation ($M = 6.41$, $SD = 2.71$) did not differ from non-victims ($M = 6.69$, $SD = 2.44$) in the extent to which they believed the victim would fear using violence against the perpetrator. Levene's test indicated homogeneous variances, $F(1, 206) = 0.80$, $p = .372$, so the pooled error term was used. A independent-samples *t*-test was non-significant, $t(206) = –0.76$, $p = .224$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [–1.04, 0.46]. The mean difference (–0.29 scale points) corresponded to a minor effect, Cohen's $d = 0.11$. Therefore, these findings do not support Hypothesis 4, prior stalking victimisation did not reliably heighten perceptions that the victim would fear violence.

Risk of Physical Assault: Participants who had experienced stalking victimisation ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 2.63$) did not judge the scenario as more likely to escalate to

physical assault than participants who had not been victimised (*M* = 5.87, *SD* = 2.27). Levene's test indicated homogeneity of variance, *F*(1, 206) = 3.52, *p* = .062, so the pooled error term was retained. The independent-samples *t*-test was non-significant, *t*(206) = –0.50, *p* = .31, 95 % CI [–0.89, 0.53]. The mean difference was –0.18 scale points, and the effect size was minor (Cohen's *d* = 0.08). Hypothesis 4 was not supported; prior stalking victimisation did not increase participants perceived risk that the perpetrator would physically assault the victim.

Police Intervention: Participants with prior stalking victimisation (*M* = 6.97, *SD* = 2.65) judged the behaviour as only marginally more deserving of police intervention than participants without such experience (*M* = 6.40, *SD* = 2.55). Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance, *F*(1, 206) = 0.02, *p* = .880, so the pooled error term was retained. The independent-samples *t*-test was not significant, *t*(206) = 1.46, *p* = .073 (one-tailed), 95 % CI [–0.20, 1.33]. The mean difference of 0.57 scale points corresponds to a small effect, Cohen's *d* = 0.22. These findings do not support Hypothesis 4; prior stalking victimisation did not reliably increase perceptions that the perpetrator's behaviour necessitated police intervention.

Criminal Conviction: Participants who had experienced stalking victimisation (*M* = 4.59, *SD* = 2.73) did not rate a criminal conviction as more necessary for resolving the situation than participants with no such experience (*M* = 4.83, *SD* = 2.70). Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance, *F*(1, 206) = 0.05, *p* = .827, so the pooled error term was used. An independent-samples t-test showed no significant difference, *t*(206) = −0.59, *p* = .28 (one-tailed), 95 % CI [−1.04, 0.56]. The mean difference (−0.24 scale points) corresponded to a minor effect, Cohen's *d* = 0.09. Thus, these results do not support Hypothesis 4, prior stalking victimisation did not reliably increase perceptions that a criminal conviction was necessary to resolve the situation.

Case Outcome: A multinomial logistic regression was conducted to determine whether prior stalking victimisation predicted the single outcome that participants chose for the stalking scenario (*case dropped*, *restraining/ intervention order*, or *criminal conviction*). The likelihood-ratio test shows that adding victim status did not improve the prediction of which outcome participants selected, $\chi^2(2) = 0.32$,

p = .85. Victims and non-victims were statistically indistinguishable in their likelihood of choosing to drop the case, impose a restraining/ intervention order, or pursue a criminal conviction (all Wald *ps* > .40; table not shown). Thus, the analysis provides no support for Hypothesis 4 in the context of preferred case outcome.

Hypothesis 5:

- Participants who have experienced stalking victimisation will attribute less blame to the victim and endorse fewer stalking myths compared to individuals who have not experienced stalking victimisation.

To address the hypothesis, three parametric analyses were performed. First, independent-samples *t*-tests compared attributions of responsibility and stalking attitudes between participants who had experienced stalking and those who had not. Second, a one-way ANOVA examined whether endorsement of stalking myths differed across type of victimisation categories—direct, indirect, or both. Finally, a Pearson's correlation assessed the association between stalking-myth endorsement and the level of fear reported by victims from their prior stalking experiences.

The following tests were conducted using Bonferroni adjusted alpha levels of .025 per test (.05/2).

Prior stalking experience and stalking myth endorsement: Participants who had identified as experiencing stalking (*n* = 64, *M* = 60.61, *SD* = 11.01) did not differ significantly from those who had not (*n* = 144, *M* = 63.13, *SD* = 11.79) in endorsement of stalking myths. Variances were equal, *F*(1, 206) = 0.002, *p* = .969, so the pooled-variance test was used. This result was non-significant, *t*(206) = −1.45, one-tailed *p* = .074, 95% CI [−5.95, 0.90]. The mean difference (−2.53 points) represents a small effect (Cohen's *d* = −0.22). Thus, prior victimisation did not significantly reduce stalking-myth endorsement, providing no support for the hypothesis.

Prior stalking experience and attribution of responsibility: Participants who had identified as experiencing stalking (*n* = 64, *M* = 0.92, *SD* = 1.87) did not assign reliably less responsibility to the victim than those who had not (*n* = 144, *M* = 1.39, *SD* = 2.24). Levene's test indicated unequal variances, *F*(1, 206) = 3.95, *p*

= .048, so Welch's *t* was used: $t(143.46) = -1.56$, one-tailed $p = .06$, 95 % CI [−1.06, 0.12]. The mean difference (−0.47 scale points) represents a small effect (Cohen's $d \approx -0.22$). Hence, prior stalking victimisation did not significantly reduce attributions of responsibility to the victim, offering no support for the hypothesis.

Prior stalking experience and victim ability to resolve: Participants with prior stalking victimisation experience ($n = 64$, $M = 3.36$, $SD = 2.84$) believed the victim could resolve the situation significantly less than did non-victims ($n = 144$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 2.85$). Variances were homogeneous, $F(1, 206) = 0.29$, $p = .588$, so the pooled-variance test was retained. The result was significant, $t(206) = -2.50$, $p = .007$, with a 95 % CI for the mean difference of −1.91 to −0.23. The difference of −1.07 scale points corresponds to a small-to-moderate effect (Cohen's $d = -0.38$). Thus, prior stalking victimisation was associated with reduced confidence that the victim could resolve the situation, supporting the hypothesis for this attribution item.

The following tests were conducted using Bonferroni adjusted alpha levels of .02 per test (.05/3).

Type of prior stalking experience and stalking myth endorsement: To test whether how participants had previously experienced stalking influenced their endorsement of stalking myths, total SMS scores were compared across three groups: direct experience ($n = 50$, $M = 59.72$, $SD = 9.90$), indirect experience — i.e., they had supported someone else who was stalked ($n = 2$, $M = 86.00$, $SD = 25.46$), and both direct and indirect experience ($n = 12$, $M = 60.08$, $SD = 8.84$).

Levene's test indicated unequal variances, $F(2, 61) = 3.41$, $p = .039$, so the ANOVA was interpreted cautiously. Even so, the omnibus effect was significant, $F(2, 61) = 6.44$, $p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .17$, meaning that roughly 17 % of the variance in myth endorsement was associated with the type of stalking victimisation they experienced. Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc comparisons showed that the indirect experience group endorsed substantially more myths than either group with direct experience (direct vs. indirect: M diff = −26.28, 95 % CI [−44.33, −8.23], $p = .002$; both vs. indirect: M diff = −25.92, 95 % CI [−45.04, −6.80], $p = .004$). Endorsement did not differ between the two groups who had a level of direct experience ($p = 1.000$, M diff = −0.36). A variance-robust

Games–Howell test, which is advisable given the very small indirect-only cell, found no pairwise differences, reflecting the large standard errors that arise when only two cases are available.

Victims who had only indirect experience with stalking, reported higher acceptance of stalking myths than those who had experienced stalking directly (alone or in combination with indirect experience). Although the omnibus effect supports the hypothesis that type of prior experience matters, the unequal variances and the small size of the indirect-only group (n = 2) warrant caution.

Level of fear experienced and stalking myth endorsement: There was a moderate, negative correlation found, $r(62) = -.38$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [−.57, −.15]. Higher levels of fear were associated by less endorsement of stalking myths; conversely, victims who felt less frightened tended to accept more myths. The effect accounted for roughly 15 % of the variance in myth endorsement ($r^2 = .15$) (Figure 9, Appendix Q).

Hypothesis 5 was partially supported. Prior stalking experience did not, overall, lower myth endorsement or reduce victim blame, but it was associated with reduced confidence that the victim could resolve the situation. The exploratory analyses suggest that how one experiences stalking (only indirectly vs. any direct experience) and how frightening the experience was, may further moderate myth acceptance, though these findings require replication with larger samples.

Hypothesis 6:

- Female participants will attribute less blame and responsibility to the victim, endorse fewer stalking myths, and report higher severity scores in relation to the potential harm caused by the perpetrator. Female participants will also perceive police intervention and criminal conviction are more necessary, compared to male participants.

Independent-samples t tests were conducted to analyse perceptions of stalking and endorsement of stalking myths held, between male participants and female participants. For this analysis, participants who had indicated 'prefer not to say' when asked to describe their gender, were removed from this analysis (n=1). The following analysis consisted of (n=152) female and (n=55) male participants. The

following tests were conducted using Bonferroni adjusted alpha levels of .005 per test (.05/10).

Victim recovery time: Female participants (M = 6.66, SD = 2.43) thought the victim would need longer to recover than male participants (M = 4.93, SD = 2.34). The difference was significant, $t(205) = 4.58$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [0.99, 2.48], with a medium–large effect (d = 0.72). Hence, Hypothesis 6 was supported for perceived severity of harm.

Victim resolve: Female participants (M = 3.51, SD = 2.69) judged the victim as less able to resolve the situation than did male participants (M = 5.73, SD = 2.81). The difference was significant, $t(205) = -5.18$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [-3.07, -1.38], with a large effect ($d \approx 0.82$). Thus, in line with Hypothesis 6, women attributed less responsibility for resolution to the victim.

Criminal conviction: Female participants (M = 5.11, SD = 2.59) rated a criminal conviction as more necessary than male participants (M = 3.87, SD = 2.80). The difference was significant, $t(205) = 2.98$, $p = .002$, 95 % CI [0.42, 2.06], with a medium effect ($d \approx 0.47$). This supports Hypothesis 6 for perceived need of legal intervention.

Police intervention: Female participants (M = 6.96, SD = 2.39) judged police involvement as more necessary than male participants (M = 5.45, SD = 2.80). The difference was significant, $t(205) = 3.83$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [0.73, 2.28], with a medium effect ($d \approx 0.60$). This supports Hypothesis 6 for perceived need of police action.

Stalking-myth endorsement: Female participants (M = 59.61, SD = 8.99) endorsed markedly fewer myths than male participants (M = 70.04, SD = 14.38). Levene's test indicated unequal variances, $F(1, 205) = 6.72$, $p = .010$, so Welch's test was used: $t(69.85) = -5.03$, $p < .001$, 95 % CI [-14.56, -6.29]. The effect was large ($d \approx 0.98$). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was supported for stalking-myth endorsement.

Severity: Female participants (M = 7.30, SD = 1.64) judged the scenario as more serious than male participants (M = 6.56, SD = 2.06). Welch's $t(80.06) = 2.40$, $p = .009$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [0.13, 1.35]; Cohen's $d \approx 0.42$. Thus, Hypothesis 6 is supported for perceived seriousness.

Victim Harm: Female participants (M = 8.45, SD = 1.84) believed the perpetrator's behaviour would cause more harm or distress than male participants (M = 7.05, SD = 2.27). The difference was significant, $t(205) = 4.51$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [0.78, 2.00], with a medium-to-large effect ($d \approx 0.71$). Thus, Hypothesis 6 is supported for perceived victim harm.

Fear of perpetrator violence: Female participants (M = 6.91, SD = 2.34) expected the perpetrator behaviour to provoke more fear of violence than male participants (M = 5.71, SD = 2.78). The difference was significant, $t(205) = 3.09$, $p = .001$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [0.43, 1.96], with a medium effect ($d \approx 0.49$). This finding supports Hypothesis 6.

Perpetrator physical assault: Female participants (M = 6.04, SD = 2.19) believed the situation was more likely to lead to the perpetrator physically assaulting the victim than did male participants (M = 5.13, SD = 2.74). Welch's $t(80.18) = 2.22$, $p = .014$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [0.10, 1.73]; $d \approx 0.39$. This supports Hypothesis 6.

Victim responsibility: Female participants (M = 0.84, SD = 1.70) attributed less responsibility to the victim than male participants (M = 2.38, SD = 2.77). Welch's $t(69.3) = -3.86$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed), 95 % CI [-2.33, -0.74]; Cohen's $d \approx 0.75$ (large). Thus, Hypothesis 6 is supported for victim-blame attributions.

In summary, female participants judged the perpetrator's conduct to constitute stalking more strongly and to be more serious than did male participants. They also anticipated substantially greater victim harm or distress, greater fear of violence, and a higher likelihood that the perpetrator would physically assault the victim. Female participants viewed formal intervention as more necessary, assigning higher levels of police involvement and criminal conviction. They expected the victim's recovery to take longer and were less confident in the victim's ability to resolve the situation than male participants. Female participants attributed markedly less responsibility to the victim and endorsed fewer stalking myths than male participants.

All differences were statistically significant on the planned one-tailed tests. Collectively, these results provide robust support for Hypothesis 6, relative to male participants, female participants perceived the stalking scenario as more harmful

and severe, attributed less responsibility to the victim, and favoured stronger legal and protective responses.

Discussion

The current study seeks to examine whether prior stalking victimisation is associated with endorsement of stalking myths and attribution of responsibility towards stalking victims. It is hypothesised that individuals with past experiences of stalking, either directly or indirectly, are less likely to endorse stalking myths or assign blame to other victims of stalking. In addition, the study explored how contextual information (specifically, the reason the relationship ended) and participant gender, shape judgements made in hypothetical stalking scenarios. Drawing upon established findings in perception research, this study aims to contribute insights into the expanding field of stalking research.

Although the study examined several outcome variables that each captured different aspects of participants' perceptions of the stalking scenarios, these variables were analysed individually rather than within a multivariate model. A multivariate analysis such as MANOVA could have assessed whether these outcomes were jointly influenced by the predictors; however, the data did not meet the assumptions required for such analyses. Accordingly, the findings discussed in this chapter reflect the univariate analyses described in the analytical strategy.

Six hypotheses were formulated regarding contextual factors impacting the breakdown of victim-perpetrator relationships, perceptions, participant victimisation experience, gender and stalking myths within a hypothetical stalking scenario. Of these, three of these hypotheses were supported, while two were partially supported and one was not supported. The consistency between the parametric and non-parametric results enhances the robustness of the study's findings. Although the data violated normality assumptions, research suggests that parametric tests remain valid with adequate samples and moderate deviations from normality (Field, 2013; Blanca et al., 2018; Bishara & Hittner, 2012). The minor differences observed between the two approaches, detailed in Appendix L, did not alter the interpretation of any hypothesis. As non-parametric tests are generally more conservative, their alignment with the parametric outcomes strengthens confidence in the observed effects.

The current research elucidates the underlying assumptions influencing attributions of responsibility and highlights the mechanisms through which participants reinterpret the given situation. Attributions of victim responsibility were influenced by two primary factors: belief in and adherence to stalking myth stereotypes and gender. Personal experience of stalking victimisation and contextual information of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim also demonstrated some influence within the current research. 30.8% (*n*=64) of participants reported experiencing stalking victimisation, with 78.1% (*n*=50) being stalked directly, i.e. being stalked themselves and 70.31% (*n*=45) reporting heightened levels of fear. Among those who identified as experiencing stalking victimisation, 85.71% (*n*=54) identified as female and 14.06% (*n*=9) as male, consistent with documented prevalence rates (e.g. Logan, 2019). This underscores the implication that stalking victimisation evokes fear (Podaná & Imríšková, 2016) and is associated with a range of adverse psychosocial effects, such as depression, suicidality, PTSD, social withdrawal, and financial strain (Dressing et al., 2005; Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Amar, 2006).

Participants who had experienced stalking victimisation perceived the victim as less capable of resolving the situation, compared to those without such experiences, despite no differences in attributions of victim responsibility, situation severity or requirement of law enforcement, between these groups. This finding appears consistent with Defensive Attribution Theory (Walster, 1966), suggesting that observers might assign blame and responsibility to the victim due to personal experiences and perceived similarities, potentially rendering them vulnerable to similar experiences, thereby eliciting more empathy-based responses (Elkins et al., 2002). Consequently, this could lead to the judgement that the stalking victim is less effective in mitigating the situation, as evidenced in the present study.

Contrary to predictions, the relationship between stalking victimisation and victim responsibility was not significant. Amacker and Littleton (2013) proposed that attributing responsibility to a victim in interpersonal crimes serves a 'distancing function', wherein individuals, in this study exclusively women, attempt to reassure themselves of their dissimilarity to the victims, thus perceiving themselves as less susceptible to similar experiences. This could elucidate why participants perceive themselves as situationally distinct from the victims, as

explained by Amacker and Littleton (2013) as *'I would not act that way'*, which may further clarify attributions of responsibility. Subsequently, these attributions may progress to perceptions of personal dissimilarity to the victims, characterised by '*I am not like her'*, which could explain the responses observed in the current study, wherein participants believed the victim was unable to resolve the situation. Thus, in turn, establishing a psychological distance between themselves and the victim, consistent with the principles of Defensive Attribution Theory, whereby individuals defensively attributed blame by reducing perceived similarities and vulnerability with the victim (Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2020). This is further evidenced in the findings of the present study that participants who identified as experiencing stalking victimisation indirectly (experienced through others e.g. a friend, family member or colleague had this experience, and they supported them in some way) reported higher endorsement of stalking myth acceptance. This is in comparison to participants that had experienced stalking victimisation directly (towards them), or both directly and indirectly. This tentatively suggests that vicarious exposure alone may not generate the same cognitions or affect as personal victimisation.

The present study hypothesised that female participants would attribute less blame and responsibility to the victim and perceive the victim as less able to resolve the situation compared to male participants. This hypothesis was supported, potentially due to the higher proportion (85.71%) of the sample of female participants among those identifying as experienced stalking victimisation, leaving women to identify more strongly with the victim role and attribute responsibility based on personal judgement of potential similarity in experiences (Grubb & Harrower, 2008), consistent with the existing literature on stalking (Sinclair, 2012; Scott et al., 2015). This explanation could also account for other significant findings regarding gender differences within the sample, such as female participants expressing greater beliefs in victim harm, longer recovery time, and necessity of criminal conviction or police intervention to resolve the situation compared to male participants. These findings can be interpreted within the framework of gender stereotypes, which are prevalent in interpersonal violence literature (Sinclair, 2012).

The present study also noted a consistent trend established in prior research wherein male participants are more likely to blame the victim, than female

participants (Lambert et al., 2013; Dunlap et al., 2015). Gender role stereotypes, delineating societal expectations for behaviour based on traditional constructs (high in gender role beliefs) or egalitarian constructs (low in gender role beliefs) (Chen et al., 2009) have been extensively studied. Research indicates that individuals adhering to traditional gender roles are more likely to engage in victim blaming, perceive less victim fear in stalking scenarios and endorse stalking myths (Dunlap et al., 2015; Yamawaki et al., 2020). Furthermore, women demonstrate a greater awareness of stalking behaviours and the psychological impact of victimisation compared to men (Miglietta & Maran, 2017; Chan & Sheridan, 2020).

Further exploration of the present findings may shed light on the attitudes of male participants, who exhibit tendences to downplay the severity of stalking incidents and the experiences of victims, as indicated by lower scale scores and significant endorsement of stalking myths compared to women. This discrepancy could be attributed to the differing stalking experiences of men. Research suggests that men, when subjected to stalking, report lower levels of fear, and empirical data indicate a lower prevalence of stalking victimisation among men compared to women (Smith et al., 2018). This phenomenon may be understood through the lens of the defensive attribution theory and gender stereotypes, wherein men are less likely to perceive themselves as potential victims in such contexts (Shaver, 1970; Burcar, 2013). A diminished sense of fear may lead men to interpret stalking as less serious, a perception that can be understood through attribution theory (Heider, 1958). This theoretical framework posits that individuals are inclined to attribute victimisation to internal characteristics of the person involved, rather than to external circumstances.

Participants did not exhibit significant differences in their attribution of victim responsibility, irrespective of whether the cause of the relationship breakdown was portrayed as external to the victim (e.g., physical abuse) or internal to the victim (e.g., infidelity). However, participants were more likely to view the victim as having greater ability to resolve the situation when the relationship ended due to infidelity or mutual agreement, compared to when the breakdown was due to physical violence by the perpetrator. These findings highlight the role of contextual factors in shaping perceptions of victim agency and responsibility in stalking scenarios. Understanding this influence on decision-making regarding stalking

cases is crucial, particularly within legal contexts. Previous research has acknowledged that similar behaviours may be interpreted differently depending on the nature of the prior relationship (Duff & Scott, 2013; Scott et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2010; Sheridan et al., 2003; Scott & Sheridan, 2011). Some studies have found that participants are more likely to attribute greater responsibility to the victim when the perpetrator was portrayed as a former intimate partner (Sheridan et al., 2003; Phillips et al., 2004).

Findings from the present study suggest that the use of using vignettes to convey experiential nuances may be limited, particularly in portraying emotions such as anxiety, loss of control, fear, and mistrust, as reported by victims in prior research (Dressing et al., 2014). The absence of emotional depth in vignettes is a notable limitation, given that victim fear is a key component in the legal conceptualisation of stalking (Dietz & Martin, 2007). This underscores the importance of accurately representing victims' emotional responses in order to capture the perceived threat posed by the perpetrator, which is central to the legal and social understanding of stalking (Emerson et al., 1998). When vignettes fail to adequately express these emotions, it may unintentionally shift responsibility onto the victim, an effect observed in the current research. Vignettes have been criticised for lacking experimental realism, which could compromise participant responses and the generalisability of the study (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Moreover, the portrayal of the victim always terminating the relationship, irrespective of the circumstances, may perpetuate misconceptions regarding mutual decision-making and potentially exacerbate victim blaming through suggesting the victim may have misled the perpetrator, particularly regarding breakdown of relationships (Scott et al., 2019), in addition to the vignette not necessarily portraying the impact of such an experience on the victim.

Research indicates that participants, when asked to take the role of the victim, tended to attribute more blame to themselves in scenarios involving victim infidelity compared to instances of physical violence by the ex-partner (Duff & Scott, 2013) reflecting a nuanced relationship between victim responsibility and the level of intimacy in the relationship (Scott et al., 2010). Such attributions of blame hold implications for victims' subsequent help-seeking behaviours, with higher levels of self-blame associated with a reluctance to engage in formal help-

seeking, such as reporting to law enforcement, particularly in cases involving ex-partner stalkers (Amar, 2006; Björklund et al., 2010).

Existing research indicates that victim fear influences perceptions of stalking severity and the attribution of responsibility, particularly when there is explicit fear and perpetrator intent to cause harm (Scott et al., 2003; Dennison & Thomson, 2002). In the current study, participants who identified as experiencing high levels fear from their own stalking victimisation experiences, were less likely to endorse stalking myth acceptance. This finding appears to provide further evidence for the impact of victim fear, whilst extending through the observation that fear experienced when a victim of stalking, also appears to influence judgements made on a hypothetical stalking scenario. However, additional research is warranted to ascertain whether participants' personal assumptions or past experiences affect their judgements and to explore the impact of relationship breakdown on victim perceptions, thus examining the replicability of the current findings.

These findings can be understood in light of stalking myths. In the current study, participants who more strongly endorsed stalking myths were significantly more likely to attribute responsibility to the victim and view the victim as more capable of resolving the situation themselves. They were also less likely to recognise stalking behaviours and the harm or distress experienced by the victim, leading to a reduced perception of the seriousness of the situation. Consequently, they were less likely to anticipate the possibility of physical assault by the perpetrator, thereby downplaying the victim's fear of violence. Participants who strongly endorsed stalking myths were significantly more likely to place responsibility and blame on the victim and to believe the victim was more capable of resolving the situation independently. They were also less likely to identify stalking behaviours and to acknowledge the harm or distress experienced by the victim. This led to a reduced perception of the seriousness of the situation and a lower expectation that the perpetrator might escalate to physical violence, thereby downplaying the victim's fear of harm.

Consistent with both the current study and existing literature, the endorsement of stalking myths has been shown to contribute to increased victim blaming. This is particularly evident when dispositional attributions, such as infidelity, are used to downplay the perpetrator's behaviour, including physical violence. Thereby

culpability is assigned to the victim (Sinclair, 2012; McKeon et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2019). These findings can be also be interpreted through the framework of BJW, which posits that individuals maintain stability and safety by assuming that negative events only happen to those who somehow deserve them (Sheridan et al., 2003; Lerner & Simmons, 1966).

The findings of the present study hold particular significance in light of previous reports, such as that from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2017), which highlighted that law enforcement often overlook the salience of prior histories and contexts of stalking resulting in inadequate support for victims with prior relationships with the perpetrator. Prioritising further research and educational initiatives aimed at addressing misperceptions, stalking myths, and biases surrounding stalking is imperative to ensure that victims receive appropriate recognition and protection.

Implications

This study offers insights that may inform practice regarding the influence of stalking myth endorsement on attributions of victim responsibility and blame. Gender differences were observed in attributions of blame and perceptions of stalking severity, suggesting avenues for targeted interventions. Further research could examine the underlying mechanisms driving male participants' endorsement of stalking myths and victim blaming attitudes, potentially informing psychosocial interventions and public education efforts aimed at reducing the adverse impact on stalking victims, through a gendered approach.

The absence of significant differences in attributions of victim responsibility across relationship breakdown conditions underscores the need for further exploration in this area. This is important considering the significant finding in the present study, that such contextual information did influence judgements of victim agency (the victim being viewed as more able to resolve the situation when breakdown was due to victim infidelity as opposed to perpetrator physical violence). Similarly, the non-significant findings regarding the impact of prior stalking victimisation on perceptions highlight implications for the criminal justice system. Despite extensive reporting of misperceptions regarding the relationship of the victim and perpetrator, particularly in cases of intimate partner violence (Duff & Scott, 2013; Scott et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2010; Sheridan et al., 2003; Scott & Sheridan,

2011), this study did not reflect significant differences in attribution of responsibility, in scenarios of physically violent ex-partners and relationships ending due to infidelity. This is concerning as figures demonstrate that stalking has been recognised as a precursor behaviour to intimate partner homicide. 89% of femicide victims had been physically assaulted and stalked in the twelve months before their murder (McFarlane et al., 1999). Given these findings, this underscores the importance of educating legal authorities and the public on the unique nature of stalking and the value of contextual information in decision-making processes, such as juries. Collaborative efforts among victim support organisations, law enforcement, and legal systems could enhance awareness and provide tools (i.e. Risk Identification Checklist for Use in Stalking and Harassment Cases, S-DASH, 2009) for recognising concerning behaviours, dispelling stalking myths, and reducing victim blaming tendencies. Moreover, enhancing cooperation between victim support services and legal entities, could mitigate the risk of overlooked interpersonal violence and improve outcomes for stalking victims.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. Data collection relied solely on online surveys, potentially introducing biases such as socially desirable responses, or underreporting of beliefs regarding stalking myths and victim blaming. Although the online format aimed to mitigate these biases through anonymity, their influence cannot be disregarded (Egan et al., 2015).

While participants were prompted to disclose experiences of stalking victimization, no significant differences emerged between those reporting victimization and those who did not regarding perceptions of victim responsibility and stalking severity. The type of victimisation experienced was associated with endorsement of stalking myths. Participants who experienced stalking indirectly, endorsed stalking myths more than those that experienced stalking directly. However, a significant relationship emerged, between stalking victimization and perception of victim ability to resolve the situation. This prompts consideration of potential reporting errors and categorization challenges in recalling and identifying own stalking experiences, indicating a need for further exploration in this area. The literature has established that stalking victims may hold uncertainty about whether their experiences constitute stalking, and struggle to identify behaviours

that are outside of the legal realm, or the continuum of courtship behaviours (Boehnlein et al., 2020; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014; Sinclair & Frieze, 2002).

The study did not find a significant relationship between contextual information about relationship breakdown and attributions of responsibility in stalking scenarios. Gender dynamics between victims and perpetrators may influence blame attribution and perceived severity, although existing literature offers conflicting insights (Dunlap et al., 2015; Ahlgrim & Terrance, 2018; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012; Gavin & Scott, 2016). Notably, female participants in the current study were significantly less likely to attribute blame to victims, suggesting a potential gender-based difference in perceptions of responsibility. Given the predominantly female participant pool of the current study, and as such the level of blame from male participants may be stronger than what has been found in the current study. Future research should explore the interplay between gender, endorsement of stalking myths, victimization experiences, and victim blame.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to the expanding research on perceptions of stalking, dispositional factors, and attributions of victim responsibility. Although no significant effects were found regarding perceptions of victim responsibility based on the contextual details of the hypothetical stalking scenario, there were notable significant associations between endorsement of stalking myths and several outcomes. These included higher levels of victim blame, lower recognition of stalking behaviours, reduced perceptions of severity, diminished judgements of a victim's harm and distress, and a decreased expectation of physical assault or fear of violence in stalking situations. The current study demonstrated that participants who endorsed more stalking myths tended to assign greater blame to the victim and hold beliefs suggesting the victim's ability to resolve the situation is greater. Furthermore, gender differences were significant, with women less likely to attribute responsibility to the victim, endorse stalking myths, and perceive greater severity and risk to the victim in stalking scenarios compared to men. Interestingly, prior experience of stalking victimisation did not influence attributions of responsibility or perceptions of severity, although those with prior victimisation experience perceived that the victim was less able to resolve the situation compared to participants who did not identify as experiencing stalking

victimisation. Despite recent efforts to expand support for stalking victims, a considerable number remain unsupported, given the large prevalence of stalking victims and low conviction rates. Addressing perceptions held by the public is crucial to mitigate its adverse effects and ensure victims receive adequate support. Further implications relate to the importance of understanding how victims perceive public attitudes towards stalking, and how it impacts on their willingness to seek support or report incidents.

Chapter Four: A Psychometric Critique of the Stalking Myths Scale (Sinclair, 2012)

Abstract

The Stalking Myths Scale (SMS), developed by Sinclair (2012), serves to capture attitudes and beliefs pertinent to stalking. This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the SMS, examining its psychometric properties and summarising findings from empirical studies using this measure. While the scale exhibits a good level of internal consistency and promising evidence of convergent and face validity across samples, the absence of test-retest reliability data poses a notable gap in its validation process. This includes the endorsement of stalking myths and attitudes indicative of interpersonal violence, as well as self-reported engagement in prior stalking behaviour. Until now, no exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the measure had been conducted. The present chapter addresses this gap, by presenting an EFA, which indicated a unidimensional factor structure. Limitations of the measure relate to its development and use, this being mainly across homogenous populations. Recommendations for future research include further validation across diverse populations and exploration of the scales' utility in assessing efficacy of interventions among individuals who engage in stalking behaviour.

Introduction

The purpose of this introduction is to provide an understanding of the relationship between stalking and interpersonal violence; the attitudes which permit and minimise interpersonal violence and the associated with subsequent victimisation. The introduction will conclude with exploring the influence of cultural scripts within interpersonal violence, namely stalking behaviour. Cultural scripts have been associated with attitudes which influence perceptions of victim blame, through shaping individuals understanding of societal norms of behaviour. As mentioned in the previous chapters of this thesis, stalking behaviours have been understood along a continuum of reasonable and unreasonable behaviour, which holds implications for victims of stalking, for example identifying behaviours that are not courtship behaviours and constitute stalking (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014; Mullen et al., 2001). This also then has consequences for recidivism, as those victims then may choose not to report victimisation if they perceive stalking as a form of courtship. This thesis proposes that cultural scripts, which influenced the development of the Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012), are salient to understand beliefs held about stalking.

In the literature, stalking is recognized as a form of interpersonal violence or victimization (Ameral et al., 2020; White et al., 2000). However, it is often overlooked in this context, which can minimize the impact of stalking victimization and lead to victim blaming, with the harmful effects on victims going unacknowledged (Myers et al., 2016). Research has also shown that various forms of interpersonal violence, including psychological, sexual, physical abuse, and stalking, frequently occur together (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). This appears to be supported by the statistics, with at least ten people dying every week in the UK due to interpersonal violence, with stalking behaviours being recognised in the events leading up to their deaths (Monckton-Smith et al., 2017; Miller, 2006). Thus, suggesting a relationship between stalking, interpersonal violence, and homicide. Results from a meta-analysis of the literature place importance on recognising the role of the relationship between the stalker and the victim, as a risk factor. The relationship could be distorted, presumed, desired or real, and is essential to understanding stalking scenarios and managing risk (Spitzberg &

Cupach, 2007). James and Farnham (2003) noted salient differences between the motivations and behaviours of stalkers that use high and sometimes fatal violence, and those that use lower levels. However, research completed with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust (a charity which aims to reduce the prevalence of violence, with a specific focus on stalking and harassment, through education, campaigning, and support) stated that the severity of the stalking actions, should not be used solely to inform risk, as many actions could be covert and unknown to an observer (Monckton-Smith et al., 2017). Research completed by Campbell et al., (2003) acknowledged stalking-related behaviours, of following and utilising surveillance methods, as the most common prior to a spousal or partner homicide being committed.

Taking into consideration the link between attitudes that permit, minimise, and blame victims within various forms of interpersonal violence, including stalking, and subsequent victimisation (Lippman, 2018), understanding the prevalence of such views and attitudes are of interest for researchers. Research has recognised a relationship between people who go on to stalk and the acceptance of interpersonal violence including stalking, such as endorsing attitudes of hostility towards others (Dunlap et al., 2015; Nabors et al., 2006). These perceptions and beliefs have also been shown to justify the perpetrator's behaviour (Fox et al., 2011) and place blame on victims in various ways, for instance, by viewing them as overreacting or overly sensitive to the stalking (Lambert et al., 2013), or as somehow provoking the perpetrator or encouraging the persistent behavior (McKeon et al., 2015). Such attitudes also highlight the risk of recidivism, underscoring important considerations for the effective treatment of stalkers.

Another significant consideration involves exploring the potential influence of cultural scripts on stalking behaviours. Cultural scripts refer to the guides that individuals use, that shape their understanding of societal norms of behaviour, influencing how relationships and experiences are interpreted and navigated through. Research has established a connection between holding certain cultural scripts, that are then perceived as a normal part of relationship development and courtship (McKeon et al., 2015; De Fazio et al., 2015). Examples of these from research conducted by McKeon et al (2015) provided some evidence of gender differences in relation to perceptions and attributions of blame of stalking. McKeon

et al (2015) reported that male participants viewed stalking behaviours as being a romantic gesture, expressed that victims are accountable for the persistence of stalking and would minimise the severity of stalking actions; these views were not held by female participants. The same group of researchers proposed that some behaviours used whilst stalking, are a reasonable part of courtship and as such intrusive and persistent behaviours have been normalised to some extent. Similar research relating to perceptions of stalking, identified that gender stereotypes can also negatively impact judgements and the support provided by law enforcement, with perceptions of victim blaming being reported (Pathé et al., 2004).

Aims of critique

A review of the SMS has not been completed at the time of writing this critique. An evaluation of this psychometric has merit owing to the initial implications that the empirical literature has identified, relating to the impact of holding attributions of victim blaming, minimising perpetrator culpability and support accessed or provided to victims of stalking by the legal and healthcare systems (Lippman, 2018; Sinclair, 2012; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). The aim of this chapter is to examine the SMS, paying particular attention to clinical and research uses, available scientific properties, and will aim to consider the use of this measure across forensic settings.

Development of the SMS

The Stalking Myths Scale (SMS) was developed by Sinclair (2012) to evaluate beliefs and attitudes regarding the effects of stalking and the perceived common traits associated with both victims and perpetrators of stalking; advancing beyond prior measures that primarily centred on how perpetrators rationalised or minimised stalking behaviour. This measure was specifically aimed at assessing a non-perpetrator samples' attitudes and perceptions.

Sinclair (2012) identified a gap within the literature pertaining to understanding how individuals make attributions, perceive, and interpret incidences of stalking. Sinclair developed a scale aimed at assessing respondents' attitudes and beliefs regarding prevalent myths about stalking, stalking victims, and perpetrators. Sinclair applied the premise of Attribution Theory (Kelley, 1973), which has been used when determining perceptions of victims and offenders of other types of

interpersonal aggression. In line with Attribution Theory, Sinclair observed that external factors are often placed on perpetrators, and less negative internal attributions placed on victims, especially when individuals identify with the role. For instance, when making judgements, an increase in the causality assigned to one source can diminish the blame assigned to another source, such as victims' actions and external stressors (Main et al., 2007).

Stalking myths, as conceptualised within the SMS, are acquired through exposure to media representations of stalking (Lippman, 2018), peer influences (Fox et al., 2011) and societal gender role stereotypes (Dunlap et al., 2015). Furthermore, the additional empirical evidence suggests a correlation between these attitudes, and the prevalence of interpersonal violence and victimisation, including instances of domestic violence (Henning et al., 2005), sexual assault/rape (Wegner et al., 2015) and subsequent perpetration of acts of interpersonal violence. Given the limited literature and psychometric measures addressing stalking, the SMS drew upon the robust knowledge base concerning attitudes towards rape and sexual violence, notably using the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Burt, 1980) to gauge adherence to rape myths. Described as a cognitive schema, rape myths facilitate negative attributions about the crime of rape and those involved (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Such findings emphasise the implication of attitudes in the perpetration of violence against women. As such, they are a focal point for interventions aimed at prevention. These attitudes, whether viewed individually or as reflections of broader social norms and structures linked to violence against women, serve as critical indicators of progress in addressing this societal issue (Powell & Webster, 2018).

The SMS used the examples within the rape myth literature, with the aim of providing an initial scale to assess the stereotypes held by individuals about stalking. Within the development process, the initial SMS was correlated with five measures of intimate violence, and then further analysed to examine the extent to which the SMS was a predictor of case severity, sentencing, victim blaming and perpetrator responsibility in stalking offences. The SMS was included as a measure within a hypothetical stalking scenario study, in which the gender of the perpetrator and the victim was manipulated, alongside the victim-perpetrator relationship (intimate or stranger). This initial study found that stalking myth

endorsement was significantly correlated with case severity, victim blaming, perpetrator responsibility and sentencing. As such the SMS assists as a beneficial tool in recognising the prevalence of such attitudes, in a quantifiable manner. In summary, various factors have been recognised to influence development of stalking myths, such as cultural scripts, media, gender roles, and hostility towards women, along with the established rape myth literature, the SMS was developed to understand how such influences and in turn beliefs, influence perceptions of stalking (Pylarinou, 2020; Dunlap et al., 2012; De Fazio et al., 2015).

Overview of the SMS

The SMS is a 21-item self-report questionnaire that consists of stalking myths, the development of which has been detailed above, such as 'Many alleged stalking victims are actually people who played hard to get and "changed their minds" afterwards', 'Stalkers often suffer from serious mental illness'. The myths recognised popular beliefs about the impact of stalking, and the attributes of 'typical' victims and stalkers (Pylarinou, 2020). Participants respond using a 6-point Likert-type scale from 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 6 ('Strongly Agree'). Six items are reverse coded, so that higher total scores indicate higher endorsement of stalking myths. The SMS is scored by summing the total scores on all items. The SMS, unlike other psychometrics that measure perceptions of stalking, or stalking myth endorsement, which will be discussed further within this critique, does not have any subscales to measure other possible facets relating to stalking myths.

Psychometric Properties

In order to examine the quality of the SMS, the reliability, validity and suitability of normative data will be discussed.

Level of Measurement

The SMS uses a six-point Likert-type scale, consequently each individual item on the SMS is at an ordinal level of measurement. Olsson (1979) recognised that some research handles the data from Likert-type scales as continuous data, as if it had been measured on an interval scale, however concluded that the data is in

fact ordinal. Likert-type scales have been reported to offer insight into the personal behaviours, and subjective experiences of people, such as perceptions and attitudes (Hartley & MacLean, 2006). Through a systematic review on Likert-type scales, Lozano et al. (2008) advised that to increase the reliability of a measurement, Likert-type scales should use between four and seven steps, with data indicating that scales with more than seven steps have minimal psychometric advantages, in terms of optimal reliability. Using the recommendation of Lozano et al. (2008), the SMS has a good number of steps in relation to reliability. Respondents have also been reported to prefer scales with a larger number of responses, to express their viewpoint (Muñiz et al., 2005). Social desirability can have an impact on Likert-type scales, in that participants tend to select middle or extremes of the scale, which should be acknowledged, and attention paid to during data analysis (Larson, 2019).

Reliability

Internal Consistency

Internal consistency describes the extent to which test items within the SMS, that measure the same attribute are related with each other. Cronbach's alpha is one of the most frequently used models to measure internal consistency of reliability (Dimitrov, 2002). It is advised that Cronbach's alpha coefficient is required to be 0.7 or above for it to be deemed acceptable for a construct all scales (Taber, 2018). However, Classical Test Theory suggests that alpha tends to overestimate or underestimate reliability and proposes the use of the Omega index (McDonald, 1999) as a more sensible indicator of internal consistency (Dunn et al., 2013). As such Omega was calculated by the author in addition to Cronbach's alpha.

The Cronbach's alpha for the total SMS scale has been reported as ranging from .76 - .84 (Sinclair, 2012; Lippman, 2018), which indicates a good level of reliability. Within Chapter Three of the current thesis, Cronbach's alpha for the SMS was reported as .8, which offers further support for the SMS holding a reliable factor structure. The Omega of the SMS was reported as ω =.828, which demonstrates good internal consistency (Feißt et al., 2019). The omega of the SMS met the threshold .7 suitable for research purposes but failed to meet the

higher standard of .9 suggested for clinical purposes (Feißt et al., 2019). Both reliability indicators provided confidence in the level of reliability estimated for the SMS for its use in research.

It is worthwhile to note that the SMS has mainly been used with populations of university students when measuring attributions relating to stalking, which is equivalent to the sample on which it was derived and validated. This could have implications in relation to the reliability of the measure, the SMS was not designed to solely measure stalking myth endorsement in university students, and research has suggested that the reliability score would increase due to inclusion of the heterogeneity of a wider sample (Polit, 2014). Further reliability implications for the SMS could be obtained from replicating the SMS across different populations, including community samples which other psychometrics that measure attitudes towards stalking have done (De Fazio et al., 2015; Kamphuis et al., 2005). This is also the case for translation, the SMS was developed in a university based in the southeastern region of the United States of America, with american university students. The SMS has not been translated or used in other languages other than American/English, or in other non-westernised countries. This could suggest that there could be idiosyncrasies within the scale, such as wording that is native to America, which may not have been accurately interpreted if used outside this sample. Evaluating this would provide a further opportunity to consider the consistency of the SMS across diverse populations.

Test-Retest Reliability

Test-retest reliability refers to the consistency of test results over repeated administrations of the test, when using the same participant group. It has been recommended that when completing a correlation analysis to determine test-retest reliability, the resulting intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) should range between 0.70 and 0.90 (Popham, 2000). An ICC between this range would indicate good test-retest reliability. Within the initial paper discussing the development of the SMS, the ICC was not calculated and therefore it is not possible to conclude whether the SMS has good test-retest reliability.

At the point of writing this critique, to the author's knowledge and extensive scoping, there does not appear to be any published research that has measured the test-retest reliability of the SMS. The author of the SMS was contacted to

ascertain information about the psychometric properties of the SMS, however further information could not be provided. This suggests that there is no evidence that the SMS has good test-retest reliability, which leaves inferences about the stability of the SMS over time, as inconclusive, at present.

Validity

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity describes the degree of theoretical synthesis amongst items or concepts within a scale. In the context of the SMS, convergent validity has been demonstrated through establishing correlations between the endorsement of stalking myths and acceptance of interpersonal violence, and self-reported engagement in stalking behaviour (Sinclair, 2006). Stalking literature acknowledges the predominantly unwanted nature of the behaviour, often motivated by attempts to re-establish past romantic relationships (Cupach & Spitzberg 2004). Certain behaviours may appear benign when considered in isolation but can have a significant impact on the victim or target (Pathé et al., 2004).

Efforts have been undertaken to assess stalking knowledge structures to understand the association between endorsement of stalking myths and the perpetration of stalking. The Stalking-Related Attitudes Questionnaire (SRAQ; McKeon et al., 2015) akin to the SMS, uses Likert-type responses, to assess agreement with stalking myths or stereotypes. Higher scores indicate greater adherence to such myths. The SRAQ demonstrates good internal validity and revealed a latent three-factor structure through factor analysis, capturing attitudes which minimise the seriousness of stalking, particularly when the victim and stalker know each other (Stalking isn't serious); romanticise stalking behaviour (Stalking is romantic) and attribute responsibility to victims (Victims are to blame) (McKeon et al., 2015). These findings align with research on interpersonal violence, particularly partner violence, with sub-domains of 'minimise', 'blame', and 'deny' being recognised with an association to holding these attitudes and perpetrating violence (Scott & Strauss, 2007; Lippman &

Ward, 2014) as well as replicating findings on rape myth acceptance and perpetration (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

The identification of victim blame within the SRAQ is consistent with the development of the SMS, highlighting the relationship between endorsement of stalking myths and victim blaming (Sinclair, 2012). While the SRAQ has not been directly correlated with the SMS or similar measures, the authors suggest employing the SMS to establish construct validity within the SRAQ for a comprehensive assessment of stalking-related attitudes and beliefs. However, the SRAQ's applicability is limited due to its gendered questions, reflecting preliminary evidence of a gender effect, wherein men tend to endorse stalking myths more strongly than women, for example, 'Victims of stalking are often women wanting revenge on their ex-boyfriends'; 'A man should be allowed to pursue a woman to a certain extent, if it is part of romance', (McKeon et al., 2015). Efforts are underway to revise the SRAQ to ensure gender neutrality in the measure (McKeon et al., 2015). This aligns with existing research indicating that gendered assumptions and stalking myths are intertwined through broader gender role stereotypes that downplay the impact of stalking victimisation (Becker et al., 2021.) Supplementary assessments measuring societal attitudes about victimisation by gender, alongside a measure of stalking-supportive beliefs could be valuable to clarify additional factors which could mediate or be predictive of attitudes which support gendered violence.

Face Validity

Perception studies conducted among student and community samples suggest that stalking incidents perpetrated by strangers or acquaintances are typically perceived as more serious, and impactful on the victim, despite evidence indicating that stalking by ex-partners often involves greater physical violence and threats (Scott, 2019). This pattern is corroborated by research involving law enforcement personnel (Scott et al., 2013). A recurrent theme in this research, pertinently underscores the disconcerting notion that victims are often perceived as somehow complicit in encouraging stalking behaviour, when the perpetrator is an ex-partner rather than a stranger (Scott et al., 2014; Scott & Sheridan, 2011). Whilst the SMS captures some aspects of this reality and demonstrates face validity in measuring the construct of interest, it appears to underrepresent

statements assessing the prevalence and seriousness of stalking by ex-partners versus strangers. Such as the finding that women are more likely to be murdered when they are being stalked, more so in cases where the perpetrator is a previous or current partner (McFarlane et al., 2002); including statements of: 'Stalking doesn't really occur within a committed relationship e.g. 'a marital relationship or committed homosexual couple'; 'An individual in a committed relationship has the right to keep tabs on his/her partner in whatever way s/he wants' versus 'Real stalking is when the stalker is a stranger'; 'Victims of stalking are primarily public figures (e.g. celebrities, politicians)'; 'A stalker is usually someone the victim knows well'.

Notably, to the author's knowledge, the SMS has not been applied to populations at risk of perpetrating interpersonal violence, such as domestic violence, despite the documented link between stalking and domestic violence detailed earlier in the chapter. Certain statements within the SMS, such as 'An individual in a committed relationship has the right to keep tabs on his/her partner in whatever way s/he wants'; 'Sometimes people will go overboard when they think they are in love, but that shouldn't be labelled "stalking."'; 'An individual who is willing to go to the extremes of stalking must really feel passionately for his/her love interest' may inadvertently reflect views that minimise behaviours indicative of coercive control, including themes of maintaining control through any means necessary, repetitive and consistent behaviour and overwhelming expressions of love (love bombing), which have all been strongly linked to coercive control/domestic violence (Duron et al., 2021). Thus, the SMS may offer a measure, which captures some nuances of stalking dynamics, particularly within the context of domestic violence, therefore demonstrating evidence of face validity.

Construct Validity

Construct validity refers to the degree to which a scale achieves its stated objectives and accurately measures the intended constructs. An exploratory factor analysis is a recommended route for assessing the construct validity of a scale and has yet to take place for the SMS. Existing research using the SMS suggests that higher scores on the scale are associated with increased endorsement of stalking myths, including negative internal attributions towards fictional stalking victims

and external attributions towards fictional perpetrators (Sinclair, 2012). These findings have been consistent across various populations, including student samples and community groups, as evidenced by studies employing mock-juror paradigms and vignette methodologies (Pandey et al., 2023), indicating that the SMS effectively measures attitudes towards stalking myths as intended.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the SMS was designed to be a comprehensive measure of stalking myths without specific consideration for multidimensionality. Given the intricate nature of the stalking construct, previous factor analysis conducted on other attitudinal measures, such as the SRAQ, have revealed a three-factor structure. Therefore, further investigation through factor analysis is warranted to clarify the underlying structure of the SMS and enhance its construct validity. This method allows for identification of the number and nature of the constructs within the scale. Factor analysis of the SMS was conducted using the dataset from Chapter Three of this thesis. Normality tests indicated that the data were not normally distributed, however Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) advise that the analysis performs best when the variables are normally distributed. While deviations from normality can reduce its effectiveness, the approach often still produces meaningful and useful results. Prior to the analysis, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was confirmed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy. The KMO was .92, which exceeded the minimum recommendation of .60 (Kaiser, 1960) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(208) = 1889.85$, $p < .001$), which indicated that the inter-item correlations were sufficient for the analysis to proceed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The data were then analysed by means of a principal component analysis, with direct oblimin rotation.

Factorability refers to likelihood that the variables measured are influenced by some underlying constructs, such as shared patterns or factors that explain how they relate to each other (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Factorability is commonly assessed using KMO values. In the current analysis, the item 'Stalkers often suffer from serious mental illness' yielded a KMO value below .5, suggesting inadequate shared variance, and would warrant exclusion, as recommended by Kaiser (1974). Catell's (1966) scree plot and a matrix were produced to observe the number of main factors present in the items. Initial eigenvalues showed that five components

had values greater than 1, meeting Kaiser's (1960) criterion for factor retention. The components and the variables that load on them are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

The components and loadings found by principal component analysis, and the variables that load on them

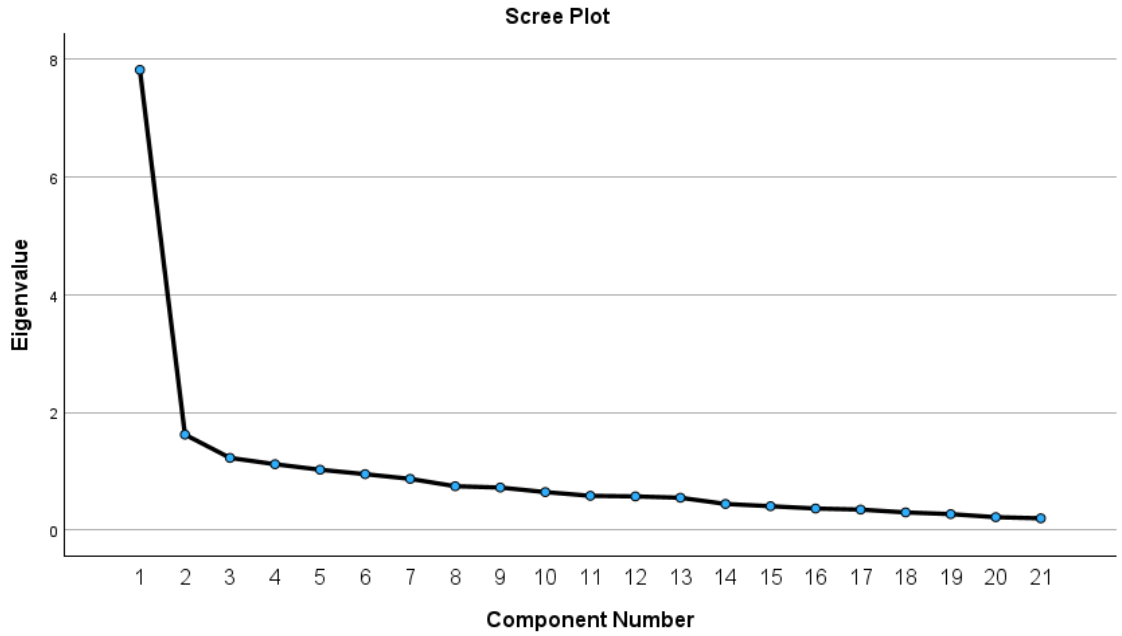
Component 1		**Component 2**		**Component 3**		**Component 4**		**Component 5**	
Many instances of stalking by would-be-lovers could be avoided if the alleged victim would have just told his/her stalker clearly that s/he was definitely not interested in a romantic relationship.	.57	A person never enjoys being followed or watched by another person	.55	Being in love is not justification for stalking someone.	.59	People don't usually intend to harass or stalk others, but sometimes they get too carried away.	-.76	Stalkers often suffer from serious mental illness.	.94
Stalking isn't really violence until the stalker has tried to commit a physical assault.	.54	People rarely lie about having been stalked.	.78	An individual who is willing to go to the extremes of stalking must really feel passionately for his/her love interest.	.61	No matter how a person acts, it should not be assumed that s/he led someone on to stalk him/her.	.49		
People tend to exaggerate how much stalking affects them.	.69	A stalker is usually someone the victim knows well.	.51			Being stalked has a serious, lasting impact on the victim.	.41		
Many alleged stalking victims are actually people who played hard to get and "changed their minds" afterwards.	.76								
An individual in a committed relationship has the right to keep tabs on his/her partner in whatever way s/he wants.	.79								
It is just part of human nature for people to pursue love interests who aren't receptive to	.64								

them, after all we always want what we cannot have.					
Real stalking is when the stalker is a stranger.	.90				
Even though someone may call it stalking, s/he probably felt flattered by all the attention.	.82				
In any case where stalking is alleged, one would have to ask whether the victim was too flirtatious or sent "mixed messages."	.81				
Victims of stalking are primarily public figures (e.g. celebrities, politicians).	.67				
Stalking doesn't really occur within a committed relationship (e.g. a marital relationship or committed homosexual couple).	.71				
Sometimes people will go overboard when they think they are in love, but that shouldn't be labelled "stalking."	.59				

However, Kaiser's criterion (1960) has been criticised due to its tendency to overestimate the numbers of components (Velicer et al., 2000). To address this, further criteria were considered. A visual inspection of the scree plot confirmed a clear inflection point after the first component, consistent with the 'elbow' criterion and supporting the retention of a single factor (Cattell, 1966), as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Scree plot of factor eigenvalues



Furthermore, initial eigenvalues demonstrated that only one component had an eigenvalue higher than its rotated sums of squared loading (Kline, 2014), accounting for 37.24% of the total variance. All subsequent components had eigenvalues which explained the minimal variance individually (each < 10%). This suggests that the additional components do not represent meaningful underlying constructs (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). As demonstrated in Table 10, most variables loaded onto the first component, with high internal consistency among the items, which suggests a unidimensional interpretation of the SMS. This could reflect a single underlying construct, namely endorsement of stalking-related myths and justifies the use of a single combined score in further analyses, which appears to be consistent with the current use of the scale.

Normative and Population Data

Normative data, or norms, refers to information from a population that determines a baseline distribution of results for that particular population or measure. The research literature has suggested that a sample size of at least 500 is recommended in order to reduce standard errors (Kline, 2000).

As mentioned above, the author of the SMS was contacted to ascertain the first dataset that was used when developing the SMS, however this was not provided. The first published data on the SMS was with 258 university students based in the USA, which is not in line with the recommended sample size suggestion as advised by Kline (2000). To the author's knowledge and from the published literature, the SMS has mainly been administered with university student populations in the United States. It is therefore difficult to generalise directly to other groups, such as professionals, diverse and clinical populations.

Table 11

Demographic information from research utilising the SMS

Author(s)	*Sample (location)*	*N*	*Age*	*Gender*
Lippman (2018)	Undergraduate Students (Midwestern USA)	426	*M* = 19.45, *SD* = 1.65	100% Female
Sinclair (2012)	Undergraduate Students (Southern USA)	258	*M* = 18.52, *SD* = 1.23	65.9% Female; 34.1% Male
Ratajack (2011)	Undergraduate students (Southeastern USA, 440), Facebook (22); the Social Psychology Network (6); Not reported (8)	476	*M* = 18.86, *SD* = 1.61	73.3% Female; 26.68% Male

Clinical Utility

Clinical utility refers to the practical usefulness and effectiveness of a measure within clinical environments. Specifically, evaluating the extent to which the measure provides valuable information that can inform clinical decision-making and outcomes. The SMS has not been used outside of the research environment, and as such the clinical utility of the SMS can only be suggested through the literature and current directions.

The SMS potentially holds clinical utility for supporting practitioners to evaluate interventions with individuals that perpetrate stalking behaviours. Considering the profound impact of victim blaming attitudes and offence-related cognitive distortions in the context of stalking (Mullen et al., 2001), it could be implied that such attitudes might lead perpetrators to minimise the negative ramifications of their actions on victims, influenced by their views (Youngs et al., 2013), which could possibly link to prevalent stalking myths and beliefs. Integration of tools such as the SMS into evaluating interventions could assist practitioners in targeting cognitive distortions or attributions, with the aim of developing a clearer understanding of risk. This tool could complement existing measures like the stalking risk profile (SRP, MacKenzie et al., 2009), a structured professional judgement tool evaluating risk domains including harm to others and psychosocial harm to the stalker resulting from their behaviours. Additionally, the SMS could provide valuable insights into the interventions that address cognitions that potentially underpin the psychopathology of individuals that engage in this behaviour. This is recommended by stalking organisations, such as The Suzy Lamplugh Trust to ascertain as quickly as possible to manage the fixation (Monckton-Smith et al., 2017).

Currently, research using the SMS predominantly comprises of community and student cohorts. These studies have yielded insights into victim blaming tendencies, perceptions surrounding stalking behaviours and the impact such behaviours could have (Pandey et al., 2023; Ratajack, 2011; Lippman, 2018). Nevertheless, it is essential to determine whether individuals perpetrating stalking behaviour hold attitudes similar to those identified in these study samples, and whether common myths operate within established stalker typologies (Mullen et al., 2000). This understanding could strengthen the evidence base and assist practitioners in helping perpetrators distinguish what they view as reasonable behaviour from patterns that may indicate issues such as coercive control (Duron et al., 2021). Additionally, it raises the question of whether the beliefs these individuals hold simply permit them to pursue their goals, such as forming relationships (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014).

Furthermore, the SMS has identified victim blaming attitudes and perspectives which minimise the impact stalking has on victims. Extant literature recognises

victim blaming and harm minimisation as salient facets of the victim experience when accessing law enforcement and health professionals (Jackson et al., 2001; Dunlap et al., 2015), with negative experiences with the criminal justice system culminating in secondary victimisation (Lashley, 2016), prompting feelings of devaluation, dehumanisation, and disbelief among victims (Campbell & Moore, 2011). The SMS could prove instrumental with both identifying and supporting professionals harbouring such beliefs who may benefit from further education in supporting victims and perpetrators of stalking. Research suggests that law enforcement personnel who have had specialist training and exposure to stalking-related investigations demonstrate decreased susceptibility to endorsing stalking attitudes or myths compared to professional counterparts that have not (Scott et al., 2013).

Discussion and Conclusion

This review critically examined the Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012); focusing on its psychometric properties and utilisation thus far. The SMS offers a unique perspective on attitudes related to stalking, specifically regarding beliefs supportive of stalking behaviours. As discussed within the review, the SMS holds potential as a valuable tool for research use with educating professionals working with stalkers, supporting victims, and understanding attitudes towards violence, particularly against women who are disproportionately affected by stalking incidents (Spitzberg et al., 2010). Endorsement of stalking myths, has been linked to victim blaming and minimising the severity of the perpetrator's actions, including the level of fear and distress experienced by the victim, within both community and law enforcement contexts (Sheridan et al., 2016; Dunlap et al., 2015). Perceptions of stalking are further complicated by individual beliefs, influencing recognition and interpretation of stalking behaviours, identifying themselves as a victim, and access to support systems or reporting mechanisms (Scott, 2019; Monckton-Smith et al., 2017).

Research indicates that greater endorsement of stalking-supportive attitudes serves as a risk factor for victimisation and fosters cognitive patterns which enable and perpetrate such behaviours (Dunlap et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2022). Given the impact of misperceptions on victim-decision making, legal professionals, and community attitudes (Scott et al., 2015), the SMS has emerged as a valuable tool

for clarifying beliefs and attitudes towards both victims and perpetrators of stalking.

The SMS was developed in 2012, where Federal Stalking Laws have been in place since 1996 and updated to reflect increased knowledge of stalking in 2000, 2006 and 2013. A such, some of the statements included within the SMS may predate some of the more recent developments in stalking knowledge and in turn legislation. Taking into consideration the evolving understanding of stalking, advancements in both policy frameworks and legislative changes, revisiting and updating the SMS to reflect contemporary knowledge and societal changes may be warranted. Since the SMS' creation, technology and access to media has advanced, for example the role of social media in decision-making. Research has acknowledged that role of the media in beliefs about gendered aggression, such as sexual harassment and stalking (Schultz et al., 2014). Furthermore, access to technology can also facilitate cyberstalking, and other technology-facilitated violence (Henry et al., 2020) which may not be represented in the SMS. The SMS has not been used outside of perception research and as such it is difficult to measure the potential impact the measure has had, since its development, on stalking legislation and its clinical and political implications. Furthermore, expanding the SMS' application to diverse populations, beyond student samples, and incorporating it alongside other validated measures would enhance its generalisability and utility (Fox et al., 2011).

The EFA of the SMS was conducted to identify underlying factors of the measure and assess its construct validity. The results appeared to reveal a unidimensional structure, with one component accounting for a substantial proportion of the total variance. These findings indicate that the SMS depicts a singular construct relating to the endorsement of stalking-supportive myths and could have implications of both research and applied practice. This concept adds to the literature which posits that stalking can be understood behaviourally, alongside cultural and social narratives (Scott et al., 2015). If stalking myths can be understood to represent a unidimensional construct, attitudes which justify, minimise or normalise stalking, can be conceptualised as a framework, or a lens to understand cognitive factors which contribute to stalking. On the contrary, a multidimensional structure would indicate more distinct domains, with each domain potentially being linked to other

psychological processes or intervention focuses. This is particularly relevant given existing literature has observed correlations between myth endorsement and propensity to perpetrate other forms of interpersonal violence (Powell & Webster, 2018). Given that attitudes may reflect broader societal norms and values, understanding such beliefs may be helpful when assessing risk, and developing targeted treatment components, in addition to understanding public and professional responses to both victims and perpetrators of stalking.

The SMS presents a novel method for measuring beliefs and myths supportive of stalking across individuals, professional groups, and communities, compared to other measures. While the internal reliability of the scale has consistently shown to be of good standard, further investigation is required including diverse cultural and demographic contexts to ascertain its generalisability. Notably, the SMS' gender-neutral item formulation enhances its applicability by reducing potential biases inherent in gendered statements, thereby mitigating the risk of reinforcing gender role stereotypes. Despite its promising reliability, the SMS currently lacks test-retest reliability data, which if available, would improve its utility for longitudinal assessment of attitudes towards stalking. Nevertheless, existing evidence demonstrates the SMS possesses acceptable content validity, construct validity, has established predictive validity in relation to other attitudinal constructs, and exhibits relatedness with similar concepts. To maximise the scale's utility and increase our understanding of stalking-supportive beliefs, broader utilisation across diverse populations is imperative. This will not only facilitate the exploration of contextual factors influencing such beliefs but also contribute to the knowledge base delineating the mechanisms under which such attitudes occur. Continued efforts in this direction will undoubtedly enhance the SMS' relevance and utility in both research and clinical settings.

Chapter Five: Perceptions of Blame and Responsibility in an Offender who engages in stalking behaviour: A Case Study

Abstract

This case study explored the assessment, formulation and part-completed intervention of an individual who had been convicted of stalking involving fear of violence and breach of a restraining order, who was residing in a Category B local HM Prison. The individual had been referred to receive support from the Mental Health Inreach Team (MHIRT) within the prison, and as such this intervention was conducted as part of the individual's pathway within the Stepped Care Model used in the service. The assessment, which included a clinical interview and psychometrics, and subsequent formulation highlighted the individual's risk in relation to his offending resulted from multiple factors. This included the inability to verbalise his emotions, maladaptive safety behaviours and low self-esteem. Due to Client J2 being released from the establishment earlier than anticipated, the proposed complete intervention could not take place, however the case study provides recommendations for this. The discussion reflected upon the intervention, which utilised a Dialectical Behavioural Therapy informed framework, understanding stalking behaviour through the perceptions of an offender who engages in this behaviour, recognising the role of victim blame, attachment and emotion regulation. Limitations and future directions for research are discussed. The client will be referred to as 'Client J2' or 'J2' for the purposes of confidentiality.

Introduction

The following Chapter will firstly discuss the aims of the case study, method and assessments undertaken, including context and referral details for J2, the

formulation will then be presented followed by relevant information in relation to stalking, approaches adopted, and theories used to inform the formulation and subsequent intervention. The Chapter will be concluded with intervention, outcome, and discussion sections.

The Role of Perpetrator Perception in Stalking Narratives

This case study contributes to the overall thesis by providing insight into the perceptions and cognitive distortions of an individual who has engaged in stalking behaviour. The thesis is concerned with how stalking is perceived by victims, the public, and professionals and how these perceptions shape attribution of blame, recognition of harm, and reporting through criminal justice mechanisms. Understanding the perspective of perpetrators is important, as their denial or minimisation of harm can influence not only the effectiveness of interventions but also how victims recognise and interpret their experiences as stalking (Wheatley & Underwood, 2023; Jerath et al., 2023; Scott, 2020).

Victim self-identification is a critical step in help-seeking and engagement with criminal justice mechanisms. However, it is often undermined by the same misperceptions held by members of the public, perpetrators and professionals (Jerath et al., 2023). Scott (2020) highlights that public perceptions of stalking diverge from legal and behavioural definitions. These discrepancies matter because they influence whether victims recognise and report their experiences. This makes perpetrator narratives particularly relevant; as when offenders fail to acknowledge harm, victims may similarly struggle to name their experience and seek help, especially when such narratives are reinforced by peers and professionals. Specifically, some stalkers did not identify with the label of 'stalker', often perceiving their actions as a miscommunication and externalising blame (Wheatley & Underwood, 2023; Wheatley et al., 2020). The Multi-Agency Stalking Intervention Programme (MASIP) explored offence-focused interventions and reinforced that recognising stalking behaviour is a therapeutic goal. Denial and minimisation are significant barriers to effective intervention and risk management (Jerath et al., 2023).

The present case study contributes to the broader aim of the thesis by considering how perpetrator narratives intersect with public perception and victim

identification. Public and legal responses to stalking have been found to mirror the cognitive distortions or stalking myths held by offenders, such as victim blaming, romanticisation and minimisation of harm (Scott et al., 2022; McKeon et al., 2015). If the perpetrator views the behaviour as benign, and cultural scripts are accepted by the victim, such as those normalising ex-partner stalking behaviour, the result can often be a reduction of victim reporting, support interventions, and internalising blame (Duff & Scott, 2013; Kamphuis et al., 2003).

Use of a Single Case Study

The current case study intended to consider factors influencing perceptions of stalking from a perpetrator of this behaviour, about themselves and their victim, in addition to considering the role of emotion regulation and attachment style in risk and recidivism. Unfortunately, due to the individual being released, the intervention could not be completed as anticipated. Therefore, this case study will describe the assessment and formulation and then move to discuss the part-completed intervention and outcomes and finally evaluate this piece of work.

Some research has begun to demonstrate the efficacy of group interventions for those that engage in stalking behaviour, which has shown success in reducing recidivism, whilst acknowledging shared psychological traits and vulnerabilities (Mackenzie & James, 2011). However, group-based interventions reduce emphasis on acknowledging change at an individual and statistical level, Andrews and Bonta (2010) emphasised that improved outcomes can be achieved when the focus is on specific risk factors, accounting for the offenders' dispositional variables and weaknesses (Purcell & McEwan, 2018; Mackenzie & James, 2011). Applying a case study methodology encourages an individualised approach to treatment planning and implementation. This approach can allow for personality variables, motivation, risk, and individual differences to be considered alongside treatment targets and possible barriers to engagement, using pre and post psychometric testing.

Method and Assessment

Context and Referral

J2 was a 20-year-old Caucasian male who had been convicted of stalking, involving fear of violence, and burglary, both of which occurred concurrently whilst

breaching a restraining order that his ex-partner (the victim) had against him. The day prior to J2's arrest, he had entered his ex-partner's home through a window and stole a bracelet which he had given to her when they were in a relationship. This was J2's second stalking offence, the first offence was perpetrated against the same victim, in which J2 was convicted of stalking involving serious alarm and distress, for which he received a restraining order for and a suspended sentence. J2 was residing in a Category B local HM Prison at the time of assessment and intervention. J2 had no previous forensic history nor had received any offence-focused, or mental health focused psychological interventions regarding his index offence. J2 received a combined sentence of 16 months for the most recent offences that he was convicted of. J2 reported that he had been assessed by mental health services when he was 12. However, this had not been followed up with any further assessment or intervention. J2 was in a new relationship when he began his sentence, was living at home with his parents and two siblings and was not employed.

J2 was referred to the Mental Health Inreach Team (MHIRT) by a prison officer who had observed evidence of self-harm (cutting) on J2's arms. The referral also noted concerns around J2's vulnerability due to his age (under 21) and his lack of engagement with others on the wing. An initial assessment was completed by the MHIRT, and as per standard procedure, the case was discussed at the team's weekly referral meeting, which the author attended as part of their clinical placement within the prison.

During this meeting, the author noted that elements of J2's presentation aligned with the thematic focus of their academic thesis (perceptions of stalking). The author expressed a professional interest in working with J2, and this interest was transparently discussed with both the MHIRT Team Lead and the author's placement Clinical Supervisor. However, it is important to emphasise that this interest did not drive the allocation. The decision for the author to proceed with intervention was based on clinical need, supervisory oversight, and the appropriateness of the author's caseload. J2 would have received an intervention from the MHIRT as part of treatment-as-usual, regardless of the author's academic focus or involvement.

The intervention delivered was consistent with the service's stepped care model and adhered to routine MHIRT practice. The academic relevance of the case provided an opportunity for reflective learning within the parameters of the doctoral thesis, without influencing the clinical delivery or compromising ethical standards. Given the author's intention to include anonymised details from the intervention in their thesis, additional informed consent was obtained from J2 using the University of Nottingham's ethics-approved consent form (Appendix R). This step was guided by discussions with the MHIRT Team Lead and the author's academic and clinical supervisors to ensure full compliance with relevant ethical procedures, including clear communication about voluntary participation, confidentiality and withdrawal rights.

Consent was treated as an ongoing process throughout the intervention. The author maintained regular discussions with J2 about his willingness to continue, and these updates were shared with both clinical and academic supervisors. At the final session, during which psychometric measures were administered, J2 reaffirmed his consent. The academic use of the case study was explicitly framed as voluntary, with clear assurances that participation would not impact J2's sentence or access to treatment. Table 12 provides a timeline of the referral, consent, and intervention process with J2.

Table 12
Timeline of Referral, Consent, and Intervention with J2

Referral Initiated	*Event:* J2 referred by prison officer to MHIRT. *Reason:* Self-harm observed; concerns around age and isolation.
Initial Assessment	*Event:* Brief mental health assessment completed by MHIRT. *Outcome:* Referral logged; suitability for intervention noted.
Team Discussion	*Event:* Case discussed in MHIRT weekly referral meeting. *Note:* Author attends as part of clinical placement.
Academic Relevance Identified	*Event:* Author identifies potential relevance to thesis topic. *Note:* Internal reflection—no contact with J2 at this point.
Consultation with Senior MHIRT Staff	*Event:* Author shared interest of working with J2 transparently.

	Outcome: Clinical suitability and caseload reviewed.
Approval Granted	*Event:* Supervisor authorizes author to proceed with treatment-as-usual intervention. *Note:* Decision based on stepped-care service model and caseload.
Consent Planning	*Event:* Ethical concerns discussed with academic/ clinical supervisors. *Focus:* Ensure no coercion, voluntary participation and withdrawal rights known.
Additional Consent Obtained	*Event:* J2 signs University consent form. *Purpose:* Permission for anonymised inclusion in thesis.
Intervention Begins	*Event:* Author begins delivering intervention according to MHIRT service standard procedures.
Ongoing Consent Discussions	*Event:* Author regularly checks consent with J2. *Outcome*: Feedback shared with clinical/ academic supervisors.
Final Session and Re-consent	*Event:* Psychometrics administered; confirmation of consent. *Outcome:* J2 reaffirms willingness to be included in case study.

Stalking is understood as a repeated, unwanted, and obsessive contact, usually between one person, to another. This behaviour is accepted to induce significant fear and distress to the victim and can be viewed as potentially presenting a risk to the victim (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000). It is worthwhile to note, that initial definition of stalking tended to focus mainly on the behaviour of the perpetrator, however it now includes the impact on the victim, which has encouraged stalking to be understood as a wider pattern of behaviour and can be understood as an aspect of interpersonal violence (Mullen et al., 2009).

Assessment

J2's assessment comprised of a mental health triage assessment, further clinical interviews, additional psychometrics, and self-report information. Specific information relating to J2's interactions prior to the current offence, with the prison and probation service were not available at the time of the intervention. J2 completed eight psychometric measures, chosen in part due to the required

psychometrics that are required at a service level, and based on factors found to be relevant to stalking, and themes recognised in J2's clinical interviews (Purcell & McEwan, 2018; Davis et al., 2003; Roberts, 2002; Sheridan et al., 2003). Limitations and support of these measures are acknowledged, notably the use of self-report measures with individuals that have offended (Holden et al., 1992) as well as those experiencing mental health difficulties (Sandvik et al., 2009).

Whilst completing the clinical assessment, several areas were discussed and explored which included understanding caregiving relationships, offending behaviour, mental health history and developmental history, information relevant to the formulation was presented below. Further information gained from the assessment was interpreted into the formulation within the Chapter. This was also used as an opportunity to understand the level of insight J2 had into his index offence and mental health. As standard practice within the MHIRT, the individual is encouraged to identify three goals prior to their intervention. The MHIRT do not complete offence-based interventions, and as such it is not expected that the goals chosen are linked to their offending. However, through the assessment and formulation process, the goals can be used to recognise difficulties, in which maladaptive behaviours, and risk are more intrinsically linked. J2 identified where he would place himself at present in relation to his goal. Table 13 demonstrates J2's goals and scalings. J2 explained the relevance of each goal, demonstrating a level of insight, and the relationship between his mental health, lowering his risk and moving away from the criminal justice system.

Table 13
J2's comparative pre- goal self-reported outcomes

Goal	**Pre-therapeutic intervention (Scores from 0-10; with 10 signifying goal achievement)**
Understand what has happened to me (my life story) and how it has impacted on the decisions I have made	3
Learn to manage my anxiety better and not feel as hopeless	6
Begin building self-esteem	0

Relationship History

During the assessment, J2's relationship history was reviewed, J2 reported that he had, had relationships with females, of approximately the same age as him,

since he was 10 years old. He had been in his current relationship for four months. Prior to his current relationship, J2 had been with his ex-partner, the victim of the two stalking offences, for three years. J2 explained that before his ex-partner, he had very short, yet intense relationships, and they broke down after a couple of months. J2 said that the reason for this is that he would be told that he was too 'needy' as he would want to spend lots of time with the person, resulting in J2 missing a lot of education to spend time with his partners, or incurring large mobile phone bills as he would be constantly messaging or calling them; or that his partner would cheat on him with a friend, resulting in J2 losing previous friends and partners. J2 explained that the relationship with his ex-partner felt 'unstable', and his ex-partner would end the relationship, or threaten to end the relationship throughout. J2 said that he would struggle with this, and would often engage in self-harm, through cutting his arms and legs, drinking bleach, and burning his arms with a lighter to cope with the difficult emotions he felt. J2 said that this relationship ended as his ex-partner had been flirting with one of his friends, and when confronted by J2, his ex-partner ended their relationship.

J2 said that he tried to repair the relationship on a number of occasions, through turning up at his ex-girlfriend's house and college, speaking to his ex-partner's mother to arrange meetings and informing his ex-girlfriend that he was going to end his life due to the breakdown of the relationship. From reading the information available on NOMIS (Prison Computer System), J2 had also sent graphic images of self-harm to his ex-partner and had been observed by his ex-partner's neighbour to be watching her new boyfriend's (J2's previous friend) house. The report indicated that J2's ex-partner then reported J2 to the police.

J2 initially said that his ex-girlfriend would contact him, despite the restraining order being in place, and tell him that she was going to hurt herself or end her life, and on the day that J2 was arrested, J2 had accompanied her to a medical appointment to get support for her mental health. J2 added that on occasion she had been physically violent towards him when he had tried to end the relationship. Following these disclosures, the author challenged J2, owing to information that J2 had shared towards the end of the assessment process. J2 explained that he would often call his partner and tell her that he was engaging in self-harm, or was about to end his life (J2 recounted a minimum of twelve times in which he had

phoned his ex-partner from sitting on a bridge, and told her that he was going to jump from it, or in his bedroom with medication which he had told her he was going to overdose with) and would tell his ex-partner that he would stop these actions if she restarted the relationship, or came to his location.

The author adopted a stance of curiosity, as conceptualised by Bateman et al. (2014), to challenge incongruous aspects within J2's narrative. For instance, when questioned about behaviours that appeared persistent and intrusive, despite his claims of benign intent, J2 became defensive and minimised the impact of his actions, stating, "I was just trying to get closure." He also attempted to shift blame, suggesting that his ex-girlfriend had "led him on," and at times positioned himself as the true victim. At one point, J2 encouraged the author to ensure the information gathered was accurate, implying that he was being misrepresented. This assertion of misremembering acted as a subtle deflection and reinforced his belief that he was being unfairly portrayed. When asked about his general relationship patterns, J2 reflected, "Why do I cut people out?", a comment which prompted the author to note the apparent contradiction between this self-description and his stalking behaviour. J2 responded by suggesting that this contradiction proved he had been wrongly convicted, further framing himself as a victim. These interactions reflect patterns of denial and externalisation which are recognised among individuals who engage in stalking (Wheatley et al., 2020), and illustrate the need for a curious yet non-confrontational approach.

Establishing a therapeutic alliance is a critical component in supporting behavioural change with this population (Wheatley, 2019). Burton and Revell (2018) advocate that practitioners must "develop trust while simultaneously exercising mistrust", a dynamic that requires ongoing critical reflection. Professional curiosity enables practitioners to manage this tension by encouraging exploration of inconsistencies in narratives and cognitive distortions, while maintaining engagement (Warner & Keenan, 2022). The current study used curiosity as both a questioning technique and a relational stance that balanced empathy with scrutiny. It facilitated deeper dialogue with J2, allowing exploration of his minimisation, his self-perceived victimhood, and ultimately his justifications for behaviour that may otherwise have gone unchallenged.

As Phillips et al. (2021) note, curiosity can create space for individuals to consider alternative perspectives and reflect on their actions. In engaging J2, curiosity aided discussions about accountability and risk. Furthermore, this use of curiosity reflects best practice as outlined in stalking intervention literature (Wheatley, 2019) and highlights its dual role in both relational engagement and risk assessment.

The separation or breakdown of the relationship appeared to be the trigger of stalking behaviours (McEwan et al., 2017) and potentially acted as a strategy to reduce the distress of accepting the end of the relationship. J2 explained and this will be discussed during the chapter, that his motivation for this behaviour, was reconciliation with his former partner. The dialogue within the assessment, when J2 was challenged by the author, and this appeared to be an example of J2 wanting to repair his self-esteem, whilst damaging his ex-partner's reputation and possibly changing the roles they initially had. Senkans et al., (2021) explained that stalking can also prolong previous behaviour that could be labelled as coercive control that had occurred within the relationship. This behaviour tends to continue for longer periods of time, and has high reoffending rates, which appears to have occurred in the case of J2.

Early Childhood Experiences

J2 indicated that he was impacted by trauma, life stress and acute stress, and said that these factors had contributed to his poor mental health and could relate these factors to his offending behaviour. His early experiences of witnessing domestic violence between his parents and feeling overlooked as a middle child may have led to J2 feeling powerless, helpless, and generally unprotected as a child. This may have led to the creation of negative schemas and core beliefs towards other people, and feeling unsafe around others and himself (Platts et al., 2002). J2 appeared to manage his difficulties by isolating himself, or using self-harm or suicide attempts to elicit support from others and services. J2 explained that he recognised that when he had harmed himself, that this usually resulted in his parents not fighting, as they were concerned about him. Additionally, J2 said that he would also then share a bed with his mother and reported feeling 'safe' when asleep with her next to him. J2 appeared to use maladaptive coping methods to manage life stressors, due to his inability to verbalise his emotions and thoughts

(Levesque et al., 2010). Through isolating himself from others, this also magnified the feelings of low self-esteem and confidence that J2 reportedly struggled with throughout his life.

Psychometric Measures

J2 completed eight psychometric measures, chosen in part due to the required psychometrics that are required at a service level, and based on factors found to be relevant to stalking, and themes recognised in J2's clinical interviews. J2 completed the Stalking Related Attitudes Questionnaire (SRAQ; McKeon et al., 2015) which was chosen to gain an understanding of the types of offence-related beliefs and attitudes that J2 may hold towards his victim and the offence of stalking. The aim of collecting this data was to support further sessions with J2, to explore potential stalking-related cognitions which could be useful treatment targets to communicate with his community probation officer. When administering the SRAQ, J2 asked if the results of this would be shared with his prison probation officer, and raised issue with some of the gender specific responses (fifteen items within the SRAQ are specific to a male perpetrator and a female victim, e.g. 'A man should be allowed to pursue a woman to a certain extent, if it is part of romance'), when this was explored, J2 said that he felt he was being 'set-up' and that J2's experience of the relationship with his ex-partner, and the abuse he shared, to him, meant that he had been victim within the relationship and that the author had ignored this. J2 completed the SRAQ, and upon clinical review, J2 scored more highly on statements that depicted attitudes which tended to minimise the seriousness of stalking, and more so in the statements in which the victim and stalker are known to each other or had a previous relationship. J2 also scored at the extreme ends of the Likert-type scale e.g., 1 or 7 on the statements which related to attributing responsibility towards the victim, and those which suggest stalking is part of the forming or stages of the relationship. The responses appeared to be an accurate reflection of J2's view of stalking based upon the responses shared within sessions.

In addition to this J2 completed further psychometric measures which demonstrated at the time of the assessments that J2 had a severe generalised anxiety score (indicated through the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Assessment;

GAD-7; Spitzer et al., 2006) a very severe social anxiety score (indicated through the Social Phobia Inventory; SPIN; Connor et al., 2000) and low-self-esteem score (indicated through the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; RSES; Rosenberg, 1965). Further psychometrics indicated that J2 was severely depressed (indicated through the Patient Health Questionnaire; PHQ-9; Kroenke et al., 2001) and experiencing moderate psychological distress (indicated through the Clinical Outcomes of Routine Evaluation; (CORE-10; Barkham et al., 2013). J2 also generated a high score on the Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004), implying that he had difficulties in engaging in adaptive emotion regulation strategies, felt overwhelmed by his emotions and had a lack of emotional awareness. The results of the Impact of Events Scale (IES-R; Weiss, 2007) indicated a probable diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at the administration of the assessment. J2's high scores indicate distress in response to a stressful life event, and the associated health and wellbeing consequences of this.

Formulation

Forensic Case Formulation is a method in which information is collected during both assessment and intervention with the aim of providing a summary of an individual's problems and guides treatment through supporting the therapist to gain a greater understanding of the client (Dallos et al., 2006).

Keeping with the DBT approach used for the duration of the intervention, a collaborative formulation was created with J2, which aimed to capture internal and external drives and recognising problematic behaviours. This formulation does not consider psychopathology; however, the model is not intended to replace current practice only ensure that survival strategies developed in response to adversity and trauma faced by an individual are acknowledged (Johnstone et al., 2019). The DBT formulation (Brodsky & Stanley, 2013), focuses on the difficulties in regulating, and inability to verbalise emotions, that J2 presents with. The formulation is demonstrated visually in Figure 11.

Developmental Factors

J2 experienced exposure to violence from an early age, he explained that his childhood was unpredictable, marked by witnessing domestic abuse between his

parents. He described that his mother and father would be physically violent towards each other, and he took on the role of moving his siblings out of the room where this was happening. J2 describes that the fighting would go on for hours, and when it ended, his mother would get into his bed and ask him to stroke her hair which he did. J2 said that his mother would 'use him' as her confidant and discuss her worries about the relationship with her father, financial difficulties the family were having, and disagreements she was having with her own mother. J2 said that his mother would ask for his support with tasks such as shopping in the supermarket and making phone calls to debt companies.

J2 began to use self-harm (cutting himself with blades, burning himself) and make attempts on his life (drinking bleach, setting himself on fire) from the age of 10 years old. J2 explained that he had been referred to CAMHS during this period, on multiple occasions, and recalls speaking with a clinician from CAMHS once. However, J2 said that he does not recall being offered any interventions after this or is unsure if his parents disengaged. J2 noticed that after he began to use self-harm, and after a CAMHS referral was made, his parents would pay him more attention than his siblings. He describes how at this time, he felt loved and valued by his parents, as he often felt overlooked by them in comparison to his siblings. J2 recalls many times when his siblings' achievements (academic, sporting, developmental milestones) were celebrated by his parents, and he did not receive the same response.

J2 describes a negative academic experience, in that he recognised that he was very anxious in school settings and struggled academically. J2 describes how he was bullied throughout school, for his appearance, 'the skinny kid', and was singled out when the school assigned a teaching assistant to sit next to him to support with his learning. J2 said that he would often truant, although recognised that he would attend school more frequently if he was in a relationship at the time as he found it uneasy being separated from his then girlfriend at the time. J2 would often truant from school to see his partner if they attended a different school.

These developmental difficulties appear to have led J2 to assume a supportive and caring role to others, allowing him to 'forget' his difficulties and needs, which can be traced back to his feelings of being powerless as child (Zuroff & Fitzpatrick, 1995). However, this has resulted in a fear of not receiving praise and an urge to

protect others at the expense of having his needs met. This indicates that J2 may have learnt that difficult emotional experiences should be suppressed in relationships, maintaining the cycle of low self-esteem, and using self-harm to help manage when these emotions can no longer be supressed.

Cues

Cues maintain and reinforce difficult and usually problematic behaviours for individuals. For example, J2 experienced a cycle of negative intimate relationships, in which his needs were not acknowledged or reciprocated, culminating in feelings of rejection. This has meant that he has felt unable to voice his fear of being rejected in a relationship, and J2 attempts to manage this by cutting others out (safety behaviours) because he cannot communicate how he feels. J2's early life environment did not promote healthy ways of managing emotions, this has led to him to self-harm in the presence of his partners, as a way of attempting to elicit care, which is what this behaviour elicited when he was a child from his parents, and when the relationship has ended this has then reinforced feelings of worthlessness and rejection. These unhelpful patterns precipitated J2 engaging in stalking behaviour of his previous partner; this behaviour being an attempt for him to communicate his thoughts and feelings to her, as his fears and core beliefs of being rejected and abandoned were exacerbated. J2 could engage in this behaviour as he believed that as he is worthless or 'horrible', he had to push his partner away, as to protect them from himself. J2 would then struggle to tolerate the emotions he was left with after doing this. Whilst using and being convicted of stalking behaviour, it could reinforce to J2 that he is unable to maintain healthy relationships, or able to communicate his feelings with others. J2 reported that he experienced cognitions of desperation when his relationships ended, regardless of whether he or his partner ended it. The end of a relationship confirmed J2's core beliefs that he was unlovable and not worthy of connection with another. It appears evident that J2's core beliefs demonstrate a high level of low self-esteem.

Responses

Responses describe the assumptions that individuals have developed and hold about themselves in relation to others and the world around them. It is worthwhile to note that J2 appears to have developed contrasting assumptions about himself

and the partner when in a relationship, which seems to change when reflecting on the relationship.

J2 managed his difficulties by isolating himself, or utilising self-harm or suicide attempts to elicit support from others and services. J2 appeared to use maladaptive coping methods to manage life stressors, due to his inability to verbalise his emotions and thoughts (Levesque et al., 2010). Through isolating himself from others, this also magnified the feelings of low self-esteem and confidence that J2 reportedly struggled with throughout his life.

As J2 was not able to access healthy ways of tolerating difficult emotions, J2 attempted to end his own life on several occasions, some of which he did not receive medical attention for as he hid this from his parents. This, along with self-harm appears to be a way that J2 could communicate to others, especially romantic partners, the intensity of the emotions he was experiencing. Another response J2 would also oscillate between is isolating himself, which reinforces feelings of low self-esteem, and could also provide some relief, as if J2 pushes his partners away, this means that he is not abandoned by them, as being abandoned is a fear for J2. This can then lead to J2 engaging in stalking-type behaviours, in response to this threat of feeling rejected, being unable to tolerate the emotions this induces, and the inability to verbalise or express his emotions/thoughts.

The other response that J2 can display is distancing himself from his offence, and would portray himself as a victim, often stating 'I was the one that was abused, I am the victim' and would share when previous partners had allegedly emotionally manipulated him or physically assaulted him. J2 would often speak of times when he had breached the restraining order to 'check-in' on his ex-partner, support her to access medical interventions, or reply to a message that she had sent him. Viewing himself in this way, can make it difficult for J2 to recognise the events that led up to the offences, and J2 appears comfortable in placing blame on the victim, and distancing himself from his actions. J2 could become unmentalised if he were to view himself as a perpetrator, as this would contrast with the protector role that he holds as central to his image. Within the prison environment, J2 did not leave his cell, only for psychology and physical health appointments.

Critical Incidents

Critical incidents strengthen the use of unhelpful coping responses. J2 is likely to respond with ending a relationship prematurely, resulting in stalking behaviour, or being unable to communicate his emotions in a relationship, resulting in risky behaviours, such as harm to himself, or possible harm to others and stalking behaviour when he feels psychologically unsafe or vulnerable. J2 tends to enter a cycle of negative relationships in which his partner appears to not be able to meet his needs, such as J2 missing schooling in order to spend time with his partner at the time, and struggling to understand why his then partner would not do the same for him. J2 appears to perceive this as that his needs do not matter, and his actions are not reciprocated. This leads to overwhelming feelings of rejection and a fear of this, which leads to uncomfortable emotions not being communicated.

J2 appears to struggle to tolerate and understand emotional vulnerability within interpersonal relationships. For J2, this means that he is more likely to use unhelpful coping responses, which reinforces feelings of shame and rejection, however J2 struggles to tolerate this, and holds fears of not being praised or 'good enough', however the inability to voice this fear then reaches crisis, and J2 will encounter both mental health and criminal justice systems. This cycle suggests that developing resilience, increasing self-esteem through interpersonal effectiveness skills would empower J2 to have strategies to learn and verbalise his needs in a relationship. Additionally, distress tolerance skills will support J2 to understand the emotions he is feeling, and learn techniques to manage this, as opposed to the current methods of harming himself, or ending relationships to avoid feeling overwhelming emotions. J2 could find that the risk of displaying these behaviours reduces if he is able to recognise and communicate his emotions and needs sooner (Chan et al., 2022).

Problem Behaviours

J2 displays an inability to understand and communicate his emotions, and values 'cutting others out'. Through doing this he avoids rejection from others; however, his needs are not met, and he feels helpless and frustrated. Additionally, as J2 felt vulnerable when experiencing unmet needs, he has potentially victimised another individual, resulting in them feeling powerless. Through engaging in stalking behaviour, J2 then exacerbates feelings of shame and guilt, through creating a victim.

Protective Factors

J2 has some strengths which will support him through difficult experiences. J2 has a positive relationship with his sister and expressed that he would like to be a good role model for her. J2 demonstrated motivation and commitment to developing and understanding into his mental health, and the relationship between this and his offending behaviour. J2 attended all sessions that were available to him within the prison setting and requested a referral to talking therapies upon release to continue the therapeutic work.

Formulation Summary

Analysis of the Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS), Generalized Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7) and Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) generated severe scores on both measures. This implies that J2 has difficulties in engaging in adaptive emotion regulation strategies and felt overwhelmed by his emotions. Further interpretation of the DERS on the nonacceptance of emotional responses subscale, indicates that J2 holds a greater tendency to feel shame, guilt or self-blame when experiencing negative emotions. A more severe anxiety score could link back to previous distressing experiences, and using maladaptive coping strategies throughout his life, leading to maintenance of anxiety. These results are of concern and should be factored into risk management strategies, as J2 appears to be using stalking behaviours to express his emotions as he does not appear to verbalise them. Exploring this with J2 could be important as J2 could consider the role that this has played in his offending behaviour and relationships with others.

With using a DBT formulation, it can be highlighted that J2 requires skills of emotion regulation. This will allow him to identify and understand the emotion he is experiencing and recognise the impulses when he becomes unable to tolerate the distress, or difficulties of communicating his emotional experiences to another. In turn, this increases the likelihood of J2 using safety behaviours such as stalking or attempting to end his life, or harm himself in some way as opposed to communicating that he is not feeling valued or secure in the relationship.

J2 also uses stalking behaviour in response to feeling unprotected as a child, and the apparent negative beliefs he holds about himself. As such, J2 will ‘cut people out’ and push individuals away, possibly to protect that person from the negative

beliefs he holds about himself. However, J2 then struggles with feelings of rejection, difficult emotions, and this inability to voice these fears leads J2 to display stalking behaviour. Inadvertently appearing to reinforce the message through committing crime (through stalking) as 'I'm dangerous, stay away from me', which then causes fear and distress in others, resulting in J2 being rejected, through the individual or police involvement, maintaining the negative beliefs and uncomfortable emotions which then perpetuates further stalking behaviour and self-harm.

Figure 11 depicts J2's experiences, of the inability to understand and verbalise complex emotions, which then increases the risk of stalking behaviour, or harming himself, or both. It appears that supporting J2 to develop emotional intelligence and confidence to verbalise his feelings moderately, so that this does not feel risky or threatening to J2. Increasing the psychological safety of J2 through communicating his emotions in a safe way and normalising this through relapse prevention in relationships, could reduce stalking behaviours and using self-harm. Through providing J2 with adaptive methods and healthy cognitions, this may also provide an opportunity to challenge victim blaming attitudes, that appeared to be present within the assessment and reflected in the SRAQ.

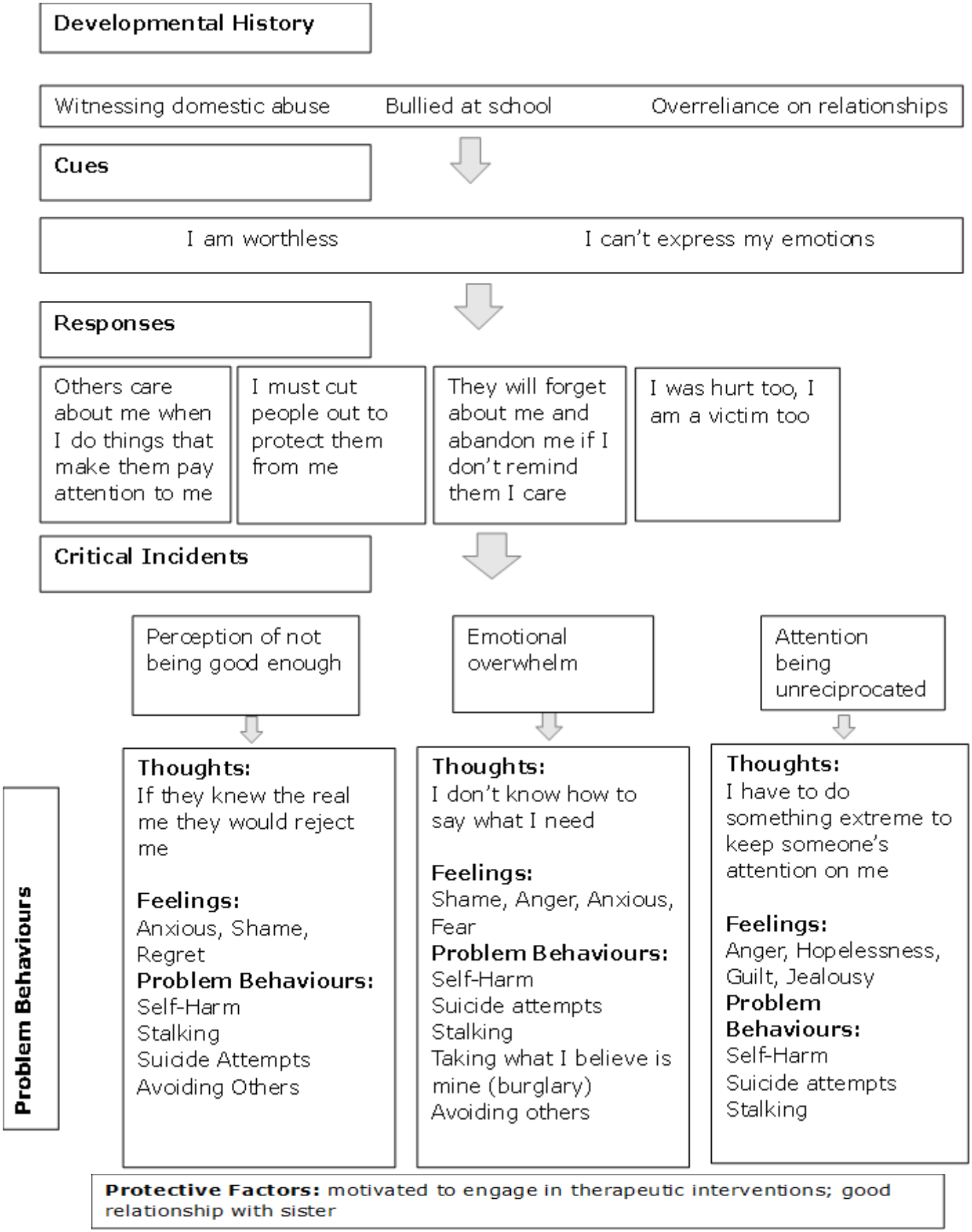
Responsivity issues identified from assessment

During the assessment stage, responsivity issues which could impact the efficacy of the intervention were considered. J2's mental health needs and lack of adaptive coping strategies were considered, as this would impact on initial engagement and increase of risk to self. Historically, J2 has used self-harm and made attempts on his life when he has become distressed, and there is a possibility that discussing his difficulties, without providing coping strategies, could have led to a deterioration of J2's emotional wellbeing and in turn increase the risk of suicide, which is reportedly higher in those that engage in stalking behaviour (McEwan et al., 2020).

It is also important to consider the therapeutic relationship, as notably, those that have engaged in stalking behaviours, have difficulties in building and maintaining relationships (MacKenzie et al., 2009). The same group have also been found to have high levels of shame and defensiveness, and as such reducing the defensiveness and the stereotypes associated with stalking behaviours is an

integral part of building a therapeutic alliance (Mullen et al., 2009). It has been suggested that an intervention that is mainly skills focused may not be effective without building a therapeutic relationship, including elements of compassion and empathy with those that use stalking behaviours (Wheatley et al., 2021). Due to J2's difficulties in building and maintaining relationships, as confirmed by conversations with J2's prison keyworker and probation officer, along with the information provided by J2, it appeared to be important to build rapport with J2 at first, as well as exploring therapeutic goals and any potential barriers to engagement with J2. An empathic and warm approach was taken throughout the assessment and intervention, to create a trusting therapeutic relationship, and to encourage J2 to engage with the intervention and reduce the likelihood of disengagement (Hirakata, 2009).

Figure 11 *DBT Formulation for J2's psychological functioning*



Intervention

Clinical and Theoretical rationale for the intervention

McEwan et al., (2020) suggested that there is an absence of effective treatment interventions for those that engage in stalking behaviours, although acknowledged that an approach using solely legal sanctions, is an ineffective one. Legal sanctions such as protective orders and other measures can intervene with those that are actively stalking and provide some protection for victims of stalking; however, some research has reported that solely relying on legal measures such as imprisonment, without an assessment or intervention process, neglects the motivations and ideations behind episodes of stalking and has been found to intensify episodes, resulting in increased recidivism rates (Birch et al., 2018). Sources place approximate reoffending rates for stalking between 25-55% (McEwan et al., 2017; Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 2018).

Research suggests that including elements of case formulation and treatment planning in an intervention, such as understanding any stalking cognitions, narrative of events including method of stalking and motivations, mental health and intellectual disabilities is considered to provide a more effective intervention (Leigh & Davies, 2022; Civilotti et al., 2020; Nidjam-Jones et al., 2018; Wheatley et al., 2020). In reference to the aforementioned information relating to attachment styles and relationships, Lewis et al., (2001) suggested that individuals who stalk are predisposed to difficulties in building and maintaining healthy relationships, and as such the presentation of this behaviour can differ in terms of the method of stalking e.g. violence and victim e.g. ex-partner, and any treatment or intervention will be impacted by these factors (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 2000).

This chapter will provide a brief overview of the psychological model that was used and adapted in the current case study, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993). The DBT Model imparts a variety of coping strategies to participants, relating to building and maintaining healthy relationships, understanding, and tolerating difficult emotions through different skills, in both group and individual settings. DBT has been used in several criminal justice settings, with varying forensic populations (Nee & Farman, 2008; Shelton et al., 2009) and incorporates elements of the Good Lives Model (GLM; Ward & Brown,

2004), balancing managing risk with improving the quality of life of the individual. Purcell and McEwan (2018) emphasised the role of targeting stalking related cognitions, and related emotions, in best practice guidance for interventions. Jerath et al., (2022) supported this, explaining that individuals that have engaged in stalking behaviour, have done so in response to being unable to communicate and manage their emotions appropriately, indicating the utility of DBT as an intervention for J2. Rosenfeld et al. (2007) evaluated the efficacy of a six-month DBT intervention in a group of 29 male stalkers, those that completed the programme had low recidivism rates, although this study demonstrated a high attrition rate of participants, and as such the small sample size should be considered when utilising these findings. A further study (Rosenfeld et al., 2019) conducted was a randomised control study of stalking offenders (105 males and 4 females), allocated to either a DBT intervention or a CBT anger management focused intervention. This study did not find any significant difference between both treatment conditions, however positively, both conditions reported low recidivism rates compared with those that had not received treatment.

The research suggests that supporting individuals who engage in stalking behaviours, to recognise and formulate their motivations, thoughts, and attitudes, whilst increasing their ability in emotion regulation strategies can result in individuals feeling empowered to take accountability of risk management and monitoring (Larsen et al., 2020). Further research of stalking interventions is required including the analysis of both participant and practitioner, alongside long-term follow-ups, with Tompson et al., (2020) suggesting this period be between three-five years. Owing to the scope of stalking behaviours, typologies and psychopathology, a multidisciplinary approach of the treatment and intervention of stalking has been consistently advocated for within the literature (MacKenzie & James, 2011; Warren et al., 2005), which could benefit from involving legal input, victim-safety considerations, psychological and psychiatric assessment, and intervention phases (Graham-Kevan & Wigman, 2012).

A theory of stalking which has been noted and utilised by clinicians is attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), mainly due to its ability to lend itself to understanding interpersonal relationships and behaviours. Some researchers have recognised stalking as a maladaptive coping mechanism of attachment and

relating to others (Meloy et al., 2008). For example, attachment theory recognises the early life and emotional experiences that individuals have with their primary caregivers as being a blueprint for how they will navigate adult relationships. The literature has highlighted that those who experience insecure attachment and inconsistent, or emotionally unavailable caregivers, in contrast to those who form secure attachment, are less likely to have trusting and healthy relationships. This can relate to those that may have an insecure attachment style, tend to rely on others for their sense of self-worth, and in turn, could lead to stalking when that dependency on others could lead to rejection or anticipated rejection, and when the attachment is threatened, this could result in maladaptive coping strategies such as stalking (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Davis et al., 2012).

A criticism of applying attachment theory to stalking, is the question of why an individual would utilise stalking behaviours in one relationship and not in another, or how individuals are able to desist from stalking, if attachment style is applicable regardless of type of relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Attachment theory appears to fit with the proposed DBT intervention, as the insecure attachment has been associated with the individuals' difficulties in building relationships and managing challenging emotions (Brennan et al., 1988). Therefore, when an individual experiences difficulty within their interpersonal relationships, they may struggle to regulate their emotions in a prosocial way, as the blueprint for healthy coping skills was not provided.

Intervention with J2

Due to J2 being released early from the prison establishment, to complete the remainder of his sentence on license in the community, the planned intervention could not be completed. Therefore, the intervention that was part-completed, and proposed further sessions will be discussed. The assessment and formulation demonstrated the intervention targets, which included J2's views towards his relationships, and cognitions towards the victim in relation to attitudes supportive of stalking behaviour, insight into offending behaviour, and ability to regulate emotions in response to feeling vulnerable, through communicating his feelings and thoughts to others, in a prosocial way, mainly intimate partners.

Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993) was implemented due to the iterative approach it utilises, which systematically develops solutions for each

complex problem, usually of emotional and behaviours dysregulation that has arouse for the individual. This therapy aims to identify the coping mechanisms that the individual lacks, and DBT provides a set of standardised skills to teach individuals how to regulate emotions, recognise internal states, remain present, tolerate distress, and develop and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. DBT was developed to be a comprehensive package, of both skills-based training, running alongside individual psychological therapy, between-session telephone coaching and peer consultation for therapist facilitators (Manning, 2007). Emotional and behavioural dysregulation contributed to J2's difficulties in establishing a stable sense of self and forming stable relationships with others. Within the DBT model and supported by the above formulation of J2's difficulties, J2's problematic and avoidant behaviour is a consequence of emotion dysregulation or an effort to re-regulate. The therapy would discuss difficult life events from childhood, noting the role of attachment styles/theory, supporting J2 to understand the biological and environmental factors (referred to as biosocial theory within the DBT approach) and offering a perspective and review of how and what core beliefs developed in relation to early life events. J2 was then empowered to understand his attachment styles in relationships, and link this to his reoffending risk, as this behaviour can be a result of J2 struggling to express his thoughts and feelings to a partner. Through attachment exploration, J2 established himself as having an anxious-preoccupied (or anxious-resistant) attachment style. This exploration helped him to consider what role this may have played in his offending behaviour and relationships with others (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1996). During this session, the role of numbing his emotions and not being able to communicate them to his partners at the same time as feeling empowered whilst offending was discussed using attachment styles to explore. J2 was encouraged to explore 'where his voice goes' in a relationship, and this was traced back to witnessing and being a victim of domestic violence throughout his early childhood. J2 said that he continually feels unworthy of love, and through seeking constant reassurance from his previous partners, this maintains the anxious-preoccupied attachment style. J2 recognised that through offending, he was able to be more in control, and felt less powerless in the relationship.

The schema concept of Beck's cognitive model (Beck et al., 2004) was briefly introduced, relating to the goal of challenging J2's core beliefs, whilst highlighting

that the negative schemas that he holds appear to be underpinned by his attachment experiences with others (Young et al., 2003). This part of the intervention provided J2 with a space to create his own narrative of his experiences, which also encouraged J2 to understand his distress, and accept the impact his distress has on himself, and his victim. This is supported by Rosenfeld et al., (2009) who advise the importance of ensuring stalkers feel psychologically safe with practitioners, when considering their vulnerabilities in treatment.

The intervention included grounding techniques and behavioural skills for J2 to manage his distress and urges to self-harm (Rosenfeld et al., 2007). The aim of this therapy is to increase J2's capacities through behavioural skills training, through teaching the skills of mindfulness, distress tolerance, interpersonal effectiveness, and emotion regulation. Purcell and McEwan (2018) reported that emotional dysregulation is a contributing factor in stalking behaviour, and through the DBT model, which focuses on reducing safety behaviours, such as those that J2 uses, e.g. avoiding others, using self-harm, attempting to end his life, or offending, J2 was able to recognise that offending was a method to manage the distress he felt through numbing his emotions, or to communicate to a partner that he is not feeling valued and safe. Research highlights the role of mental health on stalkers and their victims (Mullen et al., 2009). Nijdam-Jones et al. (2018) reported that over half of those who have come to the attention of the criminal justice system due to stalking offences have a mental health difficulty, and other research identifies that a link between stalkers and higher suicidality (McEwan et al., 2010).

Relapse prevention further utilised the DBT model, focusing on reducing safety behaviours for J2 such as 'cutting people out' or utilising self-harm, attempting suicide, or offending as a method to manage distress or communicate to a partner that he is not feeling valued or safe. DBT encourages the practice both within and outside of the session, of emotional and behavioural regulation techniques, within the interpersonal effectiveness module of the intervention, J2 was supported to roleplay dialogues between himself and a partner, with the aim of increasing J2's feelings of self-esteem and empowerment (Brennan & Bosson, 1998). This would have been revisited had the intervention been able to complete in a review session, which has also been advocated for in terms of supporting offenders to

anticipate potential risky situations in which prior to the intervention, they may have engaged in stalking behaviour to manage (Jerath et al., 2022).

Outcome

J2 attended 10 sessions, attended weekly across consecutive weeks. Prior to J2's early release the psychometrics administered pre-intervention were readministered after the completion of the collaborative formulation, and initial DBT-focused treatment sessions to assess if any change had been facilitated. See Table 14 for a comparison of pre-/end point intervention scores, which includes the Reliable Change Index Value (RCI; Jacobson & Truax, 1991). The RCI provides the statistical significance of the difference between pre and end-point intervention scores, to investigate whether the observed changes are likely due to chance or from the intervention itself. The RCI value is deemed statistically significant if their change score (the post-intervention raw score minus pre-intervention raw score) is larger than the RCI value. The pre and end-point intervention change reached statistical significance across all total scores on the measures used.

J2's scores on the SRAQ had made a small yet statistically significant improvement at the point the intervention ended. In relation to the SRAQ, J2 did not as positively endorse the items that he had at the beginning of the intervention, and had shown the most improvement, through selecting less items which endorsed attitudes placing responsibility towards the victim in cases of stalking.

J2's scores on the DERS had reduced at the point the intervention ended and indicated that he is more able to readily access emotion regulation strategies, has better ability to pay attention and notice his emotional responses, and more likely to have a positive secondary reaction to any difficult feelings or experiences he has. There was also further improvement in the impulse control difficulties subscale, which could suggest that he is more likely to remain in control of his own behaviour when experiencing negative emotions.

J2 expressed in the last session with the author, that he felt he had developed a better understanding of his difficulties, namely emotion regulation, anxiety, and the links to offending behaviour. J2 shared that he felt that he understood how

past experiences have contributed to his difficulties. This was evidenced within the therapy sessions, and one session where J2 and the author identified the thoughts, emotions and behaviours that lead him to feel most vulnerable, and J2 identified fear, mistrust, and abandonment, and then recognised significant life events relating to these affective states. J2 stated that he better understood the steps that led up to his offending and noted the repetition of the emotions and pattern within intimate relationships. He had since shared his crisis plan and initial formulation with his parents, partner, and new probation officer. J2 was pleased with the progress he had made and expressed that he wished to continue further psychology work in the community, which was supported by the mental health team.

Table 14

J2's pre/post-intervention psychometric scores, including RCI

Measure	**Subscale**	**Pre-intervention raw score**	**End point-intervention raw score**	**Difference**	**RCI Value**
Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004)		147	115	-32	-87.912*
	Non-acceptance of emotional responses	26	20	-6	-19.556*
	Difficulty engaging in goal-directed behaviour	17	15	-2	-3.923*
	Impulse control difficulties	23	18	-5	-11.409*
	Lack of emotional awareness	25	18	-7	-24.944*
	Limited emotion regulation strategies	36	27	-9	-25.037*
	Lack of emotional clarity	20	17	-3	-4.823*

Impact of Events Scale – Revised (IES-R; Weiss, 2007)		35	30	-5	-14.030*
	Intrusion	10	7	-3	-7.466*
	Avoidance	14	13	-1	-1.532
	Hyperarousal	11	10	-1	-1.603
Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation-10 (CORE-10; Barkham, Bewick, Mullin, Gilbody, Connell, Cahill, Mellor-Clark, Richards, Unsworth & Evans, 2013)		16	13	+3	-4.969*
Generalized Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7; Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams & Löwe, 2006)		18	15	-3	-6.513*
Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN; Connor et al, 2000)		60	50	-10	-56.603*
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965)		7	14	+7	23.362*
Patient Health Questionnaire – Depression (PHQ-9; Kroenke, 2001)		22	19	-3	-4.693*
Stalking Related Attitudes Questionnaire		179	166	-13	-21.959*

(SRAQ; McKeon, McEwan & Luebbers, 2015)					
	Attitudes which minimise stalking	105	100	-5	-6.944*
	Attitudes which legitimise stalking as a courtship behaviour	36	32	-4	-4.277*
	Attitudes which attribute responsibility on the victim	38	32	-6	-6.052*

* = RCI Value is statistically significant at the 0.05 level

Impact of Early Release on Intervention Outcomes and Progression

Due to J2's early release from custody, the psychological intervention could not be completed as planned. As described earlier in this chapter, the intervention had begun to explore J2's attachment style, the role of stalking behaviour as a means of managing relational distress, and his use of seeking safety through behaviours of avoidance, self-harm, and attempting to regain control through stalking. However, the premature termination of the intervention meant that areas such as relapse prevention, challenging cognitions, and strengthening DBT skills (a focus on emotion regulation and interpersonal effectiveness) could not be completed. Guided by the assessment and formulation, the remaining sessions would have concentrated on consolidating emotion regulation skills, developing relapse prevention strategies specific to stalking behaviours, further exploration of attachment style and practicing interpersonal effectiveness techniques – particularly in the context of romantic relationships. The early ending of the intervention limited both the consolidation of progress and opportunities to practise healthier relational behaviours.

Had J2 remained in custody, the intervention would have included further exploration of his minimisation, externalisation of blame, and self-perception as a victim; patterns that had begun to emerge during completed sessions. This would

have included challenging core beliefs through schema and cognitive approaches (Beck et al., 2004; Young et al., 2003). The DBT model would have been used to inform relapse prevention planning, with a focus on identifying early warning signs, utilising distress tolerance strategies and practice adaptive interpersonal behaviours through roleplay. Further sessions would have allowed time to address the relationship between J2's anxious-preoccupied attachment style and how this has contributed to his offending. The early termination of the intervention emphasises the systemic barriers which can undermine therapeutic engagement in forensic settings and highlights the importance of continuity between custody and community services, for individuals with complex emotional needs (Mullen et al., 2009; MacKenzie & James, 2011). Table 15 outlines the proposed structure and therapeutic aims of the remaining sessions that were planned but not delivered due to J2's early release.

Table 15

Proposed session structure and corresponding therapeutic aims

Session Focus	Goals	Theoretical Basis / Tools
Challenging core beliefs and cognitive restructuring	Identify and challenge maladaptive core beliefs linked to unworthiness, control, and rejection. Reinforce positive cognitions.	Beck's Cognitive Model (Beck et al., 2004); Schema Therapy Model (Young et al., 2003)
Emotion regulation consolidation	Strengthen use of DBT skills (e.g., urge surfing, opposite action) to manage distress.	DBT: Emotion Regulation Module (Linehan, 1993)
Relational patterns and attachment	Revisit anxious-preoccupied attachment and its role on interpersonal functioning/offending.	Attachment Theory: Internal Working Models (Bowlby, 1969)
Interpersonal effectiveness skills	Practice assertiveness, boundary setting, expressing needs and emotions in relationships.	DBT: Interpersonal Effectiveness Module (Linehan, 1993)
Relapse prevention	Identify triggers, warning signs, and utilise personalised crisis plan.	DBT Relapse Prevention Framework (Treatment Strategies and Crisis Management; Linehan, 1993)
Review and transition planning	Consolidate progress and post-release support	Good Lives Model (Ward & Brown, 2004)

	network, prepare for community-based intervention.	

Discussion

This case study explored the assessment, formulation, and initial implementation of a DBT-informed psychological skills-based intervention with an individual convicted of stalking offences. The assessment and formulation suggested J2's offending as deriving from multiple interacting factors, which included offence-level cognitive distortions (victim blame), lack of emotion regulation skills, negative urgency and difficulties with attachment resulting in low interpersonal effectiveness. Inability to understand and verbalise emotions to others has perpetuated the offence cycle. Self-harm behaviours or making attempts to end his life have distracted from his negative emotions, and communicated to others that he would like care or reassurance. The formulation was informed by attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), with reference to understanding the impact of J2's hypothesised insecure attachment style possibly leading to dependency on others, and when the attachment is threatened, J2 could be encouraged to engage in stalking behaviours (Davis et al., 2012). During the assessment, J2 would place blame on the victim, attributing his behaviour as a response to her actions, and within the assessment, and a session, referred to himself as a victim and of being wrongfully convicted. Attachment theory could be utilised to understand J2's attitudes of minimizing stalking and the impact on the victim, as the individual may rely on the relationship to provide regulation through self-worth and the relationship with others, and when this is threatened through rejection, this can result in maladaptive coping behaviours (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014).

Through engaging in stalking behaviour J2 manages cognitions of being rejected in relationships, through reaffirming that he is dangerous, or undeserving of care through legitimate means. Through using the clinical typology of stalkers model (Mullen et al., 2009), J2's offence-level cognitive distortions likely enabled him to minimise the negative impact the actions would have on the victim, owing to viewing the victim's actions as unacceptable (Youngs et al., 2013), this is also in keeping with J2 reporting views which minimise stalking and attribute

responsibility to the victim in the psychometrics completed within the completed case study. J2's engagement in the part-completed intervention is likely to be an indicator for further engagement with treatment, with J2 requesting that he be provided with a letter of referral for community psychological support upon release.

Regarding psychometric change, this case study has demonstrated the preliminary utility of a part-completed intervention with an individual who has been convicted of stalking. At the point of J2's release, 10 sessions of the intervention had been completed and J2's psychometric score change in the desired direction reached both statistical and clinical significance on all measures. With regards to measures focusing on emotion regulation (measured by the DERS) and attitudes which endorse stalking (measured by the SRAQ), the findings suggest that over the course of the intervention, J2 has advanced clinically in his ability to tolerate distress and regulate effectively, making it less likely that he would act impulsively to such emotions in the future, especially in the context of relationships. In terms of the intervention itself, J2 reported that he had gained clarity on the route to his offending, including the role of his early life experiences, on his views of others, usually resulting in feelings of mistrust and shame, and possibly contributing to some of the endorsement captured on the SRAQ, towards victim and stalking seriousness minimisation. Through this awareness, the author was able to engage J2 in discussions around alternative coping techniques to practice around interpersonal dynamics. These represented important skills for J2 to utilise and maintain, particularly as J2 demonstrated previous susceptibility to use maladaptive safety behaviours in relationships. This case study has illustrated achievement of significant change in a part-completed intervention, thus informing treatment targets.

Dialectical informed practices influenced the formulation and part-completed intervention for J2. Dialectical Behavioural Therapy focuses on understanding the biological and environmental factors that impact upon an individual's ability to engage in adaptive emotional and behavioural regulation strategies, whilst placing an emphasis on the therapeutic relationship. During the formulation phase, J2 was supported to understand his attachment styles in relationships, and link this to his reoffending risk, as this behaviour can be a result of J2 struggling to express his

thoughts and feelings to a partner. Research has found that interventions that are solely focused on psychoeducation and implementing skills may not be effective with stalkers, if a therapeutic relationship is not established (Wheatley et al., 2021). These findings support the notion that a dialectical behavioural informed intervention would continue to be an effective treatment in supporting J2 to develop emotion regulation strategies and confidence to verbalise his feelings in relationships, with the aim of reducing safety behaviours of stalking behaviours and self-harm. The proposed intervention was developed based upon J2's formulation and research around interventions with those that stalk.

Limitations

It is worthwhile to note some limitations of this research and intervention. Whilst J2 was referred into the mental health service by a member of HMPPS staff, J2 then agreed to proceed with the referral, and consented to be a participant of the case study, and whilst social desirability was not measured for, the potential for socially desirable responding remains significant. The early termination of the intervention highlights a systemic challenge of therapeutic goals versus the operational demands and resource limitations of the criminal justice system. J2's early release meant that the therapeutic work, designed to continue to address emotional dysregulation, attachment style, and distorted cognitions related to stalking could not be completed. This reflects a broader reality within prison settings, where early release or transfer can disrupt therapeutic engagement and limit the potential benefits of psychological intervention (Evans et al., 2017). Unplanned endings may not only interrupt treatment progress but may also destabilise individuals who already hold maladaptive attachment styles which could then go onto reinforce entrenched relational difficulties, commonly observed in offender populations and those that stalk (Caswell et al., 2012; Nijdam-Jones et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, the conclusions that can be drawn from the present case study are limited and not necessarily generalisable (Taherdoost, 2021). However, J2's early release highlights a broader issue regarding how psychological interventions are prioritised within prison settings, where early release is common. Future approaches may benefit from adopting a transitional model that offers continuity between custody and the community, helping to ensure that therapeutic work is

not lost at a critical stage (Facer-Irwin, 2022; Jerath et al., 2023). The research base offers preliminary support for DBT to be used with individuals have engaged in stalking behaviours (Jerath et al., 2022; Rosenfeld et al., 2019). The consensus appears to be that more research is required into interventions for stalking, as there is no current agreed treatment, or intervention guidelines that enable practitioners to offer a 'gold standard' intervention for this population. Future research focusing on interventions for stalking would benefit from further analysis, longer-term follow-ups, understanding attrition rates and rigorous empirical oversight (Leigh & Davies, 2022).

This case study has demonstrated an assessment, formulation and part-completed intervention with an individual who has been convicted of stalking offences and was residing within the HMPPS estate. This has shown the possibility of using a single case study methodology to inform formulation and intervention, and to target relevant factors in the offending process. The study would have been strengthened by the intervention being carried out to full completion, to test whether the reported effects of the intervention on psychometric test score change remained at completion and over a longer follow-up period; unfortunately, this was not feasible due to the individual's early release. There is a salient need for interventions to be empirically evaluated within this offending population, so this population may be more accurately treated.

Chapter Six: Discussion

General Discussion

Misperceptions surrounding stalking profoundly shape the decision-making processes of victims, legal professionals, and the public (Scott et al., 2015). These misperceptions frequently manifest as victim blaming, where responsibility for criminal offences is wrongly assigned to the victim, with wide-ranging implications for individuals and society (Fox & Cook, 2011). Stalking myths, which arise from attitudes and stereotypes that normalise such behaviours, shift responsibility onto victims and minimise the psychological and social harms caused by stalking (Sinclair, 2012). Furthermore, the nature of stalking itself complicates recognition by both victims and observers, obscures perpetrator motives (Lambert et al., 2013) and interacts with dispositional and contextual factors, such as the victim–perpetrator relationship that often deter reporting (Korkodeilou, 2014). As a result, a significant gap persists between how stalking is conceptualised within the literature and the reality experienced by victims (Scott, 2020).

This doctoral thesis set out to explore perceptions of victim responsibility in stalking, examining how blame is assigned, and relational dynamics are interpreted. Given the intricate social and psychological processes underpinning stalking, a multi-method approach was employed across four chapters: a systematic review, an empirical study, a psychometric critique, and a clinical case study. This design enabled integration of theoretical and applied perspectives, offering a nuanced understanding of how victim-blaming in stalking emerges, is sustained, and might ultimately be addressed. The decision to use this structure reflects the multifaceted nature of stalking itself. As stalking is widely recognised as a behavioural, cognitive, and relational phenomenon (Meloy, 2007; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004), responses to it are inevitably shaped by societal attitudes, professional judgments, and the internal narratives of offenders (McEwan et al., 2020; Scott, 2019). A single method would have provided only a partial explanation; this layered framework therefore sought to build a more comprehensive account of how responsibility is constructed, perpetuated, and challenged.

Summary of Findings

A consistent theme throughout this thesis is how perception and narrative construction shape responses to stalking. Across Chapters Two to Five, the research demonstrates that attributions of victim responsibility are not simply products of individual bias but are embedded within broader psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms. Victims do not only endure stalking behaviours; they also navigate a web of internalised blame and external judgments from society, professionals, and legal systems. This thesis shows how these perceptions critically influence whether stalking is identified, reported, prosecuted, and effectively treated.

Chapter Two provided a systematic review of literature examining factors shaping perceptions of victim responsibility in stalking. It identified a range of influences including prior victimisation, professional expertise, gender dynamics, severity of behaviours and victim responses, the nature of the victim–perpetrator relationship, and endorsement of stalking myths, that together shape judgments of blame. These findings were consistent across the 23 included studies. Victims were often blamed more when the perpetrator was an ex-intimate partner, despite such cases posing the greatest risk (Farnham et al., 2000). Endorsement of stalking myths was linked to minimising harm, blaming victims, and framing stalking as courtship (Phillips et al., 2004; De Fazio et al., 2015). Gender consistently emerged as a moderator, with women generally less likely to endorse myths or blame victims (Yanowitz & Yanowitz, 2012; Sinclair, 2012). These findings anticipated patterns explored empirically in Chapter Three. The review also highlighted that professional training reduced biases, pointing to how systemic responses can be positively shaped, an idea returned to in this thesis's recommendations.

Chapter Three presented an empirical study involving 208 participants, which tested and extended these findings. It identified significant associations between stalking myth endorsement and increased victim blaming, lower recognition of severity, reduced perceptions of harm and distress, and diminished expectations of violence. These findings reflected the patterns identified in the systematic review, strengthening the notion that myths function as cognitive filters shaping perception and decision-making. Gender differences again persisted, with women

less likely to endorse myths or assign blame. Interestingly, prior experiences of stalking victimisation did not consistently alter attributions, reflecting the inconsistencies around this variable noted in Chapter Two. The study's findings aligned with Defensive Attribution Theory and Belief in a Just World Theory, showing how individuals may minimise risk to maintain a sense of personal resilience. Although the study manipulated reasons for relationship breakdown, this did not significantly affect blame attributions contrasting with earlier research (Sheridan et al., 2003; Scott et al., 2019) suggesting other cognitive or emotional mechanisms may override such contextual factors.

Chapter Four offered a psychometric critique of the Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012), conducting the first exploratory factor analysis of this measure. The analysis revealed a unidimensional structure, indicating that stalking myths likely operate as an integrated belief system, a lens through which stalking is interpreted. This has significant implications: it suggests that interventions targeting myth endorsement must address a coherent cognitive framework rather than isolated attitudes. However, the critique also revealed that the SMS lacks test–retest reliability, is primarily validated on Western student samples, and may not adequately capture contemporary phenomena such as cyberstalking (Henry et al., 2020). These limitations have clear implications for research and clinical practice, pointing to the need to improve the assessment and intervention tools, and shaping the case formulation in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five examined these dynamics at an individual level through a single-case study of J2, a male offender convicted of stalking involving fear of violence. The case study demonstrated how offender cognition can mirror societal myths, with consistent minimisation of J2's actions, externalisation of blame, and self-characterisation as a victim, patterns strongly aligned with findings from the systematic review and empirical study. J2's high endorsement of stalking myths, especially in contexts involving former partners, demonstrated the persistence of this pattern. His psychological formulation incorporated Attachment Theory and Mullen et al.'s (2009) clinical typology, showing how anxious-preoccupied attachment, emotional dysregulation, and offence-supportive beliefs perpetuated his offending. The Dialectical Behaviour Therapy-informed intervention indicated meaningful early improvements, but because it ended prematurely due to early

release, it brought to light systemic gaps and stressed the need for interventions that can maintain progress and help prevent offending.

Implications for Clinical Practice and Future Research

This thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of how cognitive, relational, and societal processes interact to shape perceptions of stalking. By integrating Defensive Attribution Theory, Belief in a Just World Theory, Attribution Theory, Relational Goal Pursuit Theory, and Attachment Theory, it highlights the psychological mechanisms that sustain victim blame and minimise perpetrator accountability. This understanding serves not just academic purposes but also directly informs enhancements in assessment, intervention strategies, professional training and broader systemic policy.

Across the thesis, a clear picture emerged. Chapter Two's systematic review revealed that gender, the victim–perpetrator relationship, victimisation history, and myth endorsement collectively shaped attributions of victim responsibility, frequently increasing blame in the contexts (such as ex-partner stalking) that statistics show as most dangerous. This was confirmed empirically in Chapter Three, where individuals endorsing stalking myths were more likely to minimise severity, blame victims, and expect victims to resolve the situation alone. Defensive Attribution and Belief in a Just World Theory appeared to underpin these responses, particularly in distancing participants from the perceived possibility of victimisation. Chapter Four's psychometric critique demonstrated that these attitudes constitute a unified belief system, while Chapter Five illustrated how such societal myths are mirrored and maintained within offender cognition, intertwined with relational fears and poor emotional regulation.

This synthesis carries critical implications. For victims, unchecked myths and blame, whether from others or internalised can obstruct help-seeking, delay reporting, deepen psychological distress, and reinforce maladaptive coping (Bjorklund et al., 2010; Korkodeilou, 2014; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021; Gordon & Dardis, 2023). Public and professional misperceptions are especially harmful in cases involving ex-partners, where underestimation of risk can leave victims unprotected despite evidence of heightened danger (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004). By framing stalking as courtship or romantic persistence, myths not only generate

misplaced sympathy for perpetrators but also mask serious behavioural risks (Gavin & Scott, 2016; Scott et al., 2022).

For clinical practice, this thesis reinforces the need for interventions with offenders that move beyond punitive or purely educational approaches. It shows that stalking-supportive myths are deeply interwoven with defensive and attachment-related cognitive systems. Interventions must therefore incorporate cognitive restructuring to explicitly challenge these myths, alongside developing emotion regulation and healthier relational schemas (McEwan et al., 2020; Birch et al., 2018). The early termination of J2's therapy due to operational priorities highlights the need of throughcare models that bridge prison and community, helping to maintain treatment progress and prevent reoffending (Jerath et al., 2020; Wheatley et al., 2020).

At a systemic level, these findings advocate for embedding psychological theories, such as Defensive Attribution and Just World frameworks into training for police, legal, and healthcare professionals to surface and counteract unconscious biases (Page & Scott, 2021; Scott et al., 2022). Enhanced understanding of stalking typologies, victim experiences, and gender dynamics can better align professional responses with actual risks. Coordinated multi-agency approaches are particularly important for supporting victims, offering integrated risk management and emotional advocacy that helps maintain engagement with the justice system (Jerath et al., 2020).

The rise in cyberstalking and technology-facilitated abuse raises concerns for both victims and professionals. Recent data indicate that virtually all cases reported to the National Stalking Helpline involve an online component (SLT, 2021). This has implications for risk management and intervention as technology has been shown to facilitate coercive control, monitoring and behaviours preceding domestic homicides (Todd et al., 2021; Lopez-Neira, 2019). Alarmingly, police forces often lack the specialised training and technological capacity to investigate cyberstalking effectively (Koziarski & Lee, 2020), which may contribute to victims encountering dismissive or minimising responses from law enforcement (Holt et al., 2019).

Future research should extend these insights by revising tools like the SMS to encompass technology-facilitated stalking, evaluating myth-reduction interventions on jurors and professionals, and exploring cross-cultural differences

in stalking perceptions. It would be particularly valuable to investigate how tailored, gender-informed interventions could disrupt the stronger myth endorsement seen among men. In these ways, this thesis lays groundwork for dismantling cognitive and societal structures that sustain stalking, advancing policies and interventions that more accurately reflect the realities of risk, harm, and recovery.

Limitations

While this thesis provides a comprehensive, multi-method examination of perceptions of victim responsibility in stalking, several important limitations shape its conclusions. The systematic review synthesised 23 studies primarily from Western contexts with heavy reliance on female university samples, limiting generalisability to broader populations (Sheridan et al., 2003; Scott, 2020). Varied terminology (e.g., "stalking," "harassment") may also have influenced perceptions of severity (Scott, Rajakaruna & Sheridan, 2014). Inconsistencies in defining direct versus indirect victimisation, alongside the reliance on self-reports, complicated interpretations, and the absence of offender perspectives left gaps in understanding how responsibility is distributed across stakeholders (Boehnlein, 2020; MacKenzie & James, 2011).

The empirical study in Chapter Three, while extending these insights, shared similar constraints. Its online survey and vignette approach, though reducing some social desirability (Egan et al., 2015), remained vulnerable to underreporting of myth-endorsing attitudes. The vignette did not explicitly depict the victim's fear, which is central to legal definitions (Dietz & Martin, 2007) and always showed the victim ending the relationship, potentially reinforcing subtle narratives of culpability (Scott et al., 2019; Duff & Scott, 2013). The predominantly female sample may have muted levels of victim blame more typical among male respondents (Dunlap et al., 2015), while nuances in personal interpretations of victimisation were not explored. The cross-sectional design prevented causal inference, highlighting a need for longitudinal or experimental work to trace how myth interventions or realistic emotional cues might reshape perceptions (Amacker & Littleton, 2013).

Chapter Four's critique revealed that although the SMS showed robust internal consistency and a unidimensional structure (Powell & Webster, 2018), it was

validated mainly on university samples (Fox et al., 2011) and lacks test–retest data. Its structure may also overlook subtle facets, such as myths tied to romantic pursuit versus victim harm minimisation. Moreover, the SMS may not fully capture contemporary phenomena like cyberstalking or technology-facilitated abuse, with certain beliefs around digital intrusion not explicitly assessed (Henry et al., 2020; Monckton-Smith et al., 2017).

Finally, the case study in Chapter Five illustrated how offence-supportive cognitions, attachment insecurities (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014), and emotional dysregulation can sustain stalking, aligning with clinical models (Mullen et al., 2009; Youngs et al., 2013; Jerath et al., 2022). However, its interpretability was constrained by the early release of J2, limiting relapse prevention and further DBT work, with no opportunity to assess persistence of change (Leigh & Davies, 2022). The absence of a formal social desirability measure, especially present in forensic settings (Evans et al., 2017), and the limits of single-case methodology for generalisation (Taherdoost, 2021) further qualify conclusions. The abrupt ending underlined systemic challenges where operational priorities like early release can disrupt therapy, reinforcing the need for models that bridge custodial and community contexts (Facer-Irwin, 2022; Jerath et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This thesis offers an original, multi-faceted exploration of how perceptions of stalking and specifically attributions of victim responsibility are constructed across public, professional, and offender contexts. By bringing together systematic review, empirical study, psychometric analysis, and clinical case formulation, it demonstrates how cognitive distortions, cultural myths, gendered expectations, and relational vulnerabilities together shape responses to stalking. In doing so, this thesis contributes a more integrated understanding of why stalking is so often minimised or misinterpreted, and how such perceptions perpetuate harm.

By revealing the psychological and social mechanisms that underlie victim-blaming and minimisation of harm, it lays the groundwork for more informed policies, targeted interventions, and systemic changes that can better align responses with the complex realities of stalking dynamics, ultimately aiming to reduce harm and support both victims and those who offend.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table 16 Search Syntax used per Database

Database	Search terms, keyworks, filters
The Cochrane Library	(stalking OR stalked OR stalker OR harass* OR pursuit* OR fixation OR cyberstalk* OR cyberharass* OR "intrusive behavio?r" OR "obsessional relational intrus*" OR "obsessional intrus*" OR "interpersonal violen*" OR "unwanted attention") AND (victim* OR survivor* OR individual* OR "mock juror*" OR "mock jury" OR "mock juries") AND (manag* OR blam* OR understand* OR interpret* OR support* OR experien* OR perception* OR impact* OR perceiv* OR respons* OR judg*)
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	ab((stalk* OR harass* OR pursuit* OR fixat* OR obsess* OR cyberstalk* OR cyberharass* OR "unwanted attention" OR "intrusive behavio?r" OR "obsessional relational intrus*" OR "obsessional intrus*" OR "interpersonal violen*")) AND ab((victim* OR survivor* OR adult* OR person* OR people OR individual* OR "mock juror*" OR "mock jury" OR "mock juries")) AND (manag* OR blam* OR understand* OR interpret* OR support* OR experien* OR perception* OR impact* OR perceiv* OR respons* OR judg*) AND la.exact
Epistemonikos	(title:((stalking OR stalked OR stalker OR harass* OR pursuit* OR fixat* OR obsess* OR cyberstalk* OR cyberharass* OR "unwanted attention" OR "intrusive behavio?r" OR "obsessional relational intrus*" OR "obsessional intrus*" OR "interpersonal violen*") AND (victim* OR survivor* OR adult* OR person* OR people OR individual* OR "mock juror*" OR "mock jury" OR "mock juries") AND (manag* OR blam* OR understand* OR interpret* OR support* OR experien* OR perception* OR impact* OR perceiv* OR respons* OR judg*)) OR abstract:((stalking OR stalked OR stalker OR harass* OR pursuit* OR fixat* OR obsess* OR cyberstalk* OR cyberharass* OR "unwanted attention" OR "intrusive behavio?r" OR "obsessional relational intrus*" OR "obsessional intrus*" OR "interpersonal violen*") AND (victim* OR survivor* OR adult* OR person* OR people OR individual* OR "mock juror*" OR "mock jury" OR "mock juries") AND (manag* OR blam* OR understand* OR interpret* OR support* OR experien* OR perception* OR impact* OR perceiv* OR respons* OR judg*)))
Sociological Abstracts	ab((stalk* OR harass* OR pursuit* OR fixat* OR obsess* OR cyberstalk* OR cyberharass* OR "unwanted attention" OR "intrusive behavio?r" OR "obsessional relational intrus*" OR "obsessional intrus*" OR "interpersonal violen*")) AND ab((victim* OR survivor* OR adult* OR individual* OR "mock juror*" OR "mock jury" OR "mock juries")) AND (manag* OR blam* OR understand* OR interpret* OR support* OR experien* OR perception* OR impact* OR perceiv* OR respons* OR judg*) AND la.exact

OpenGrey	(stalk* OR harass* OR pursuit* OR fixat* OR obsess* OR cyberstalk* OR cyberharass* OR "unwanted attention" OR "intrusive behavio?r" OR "obsessional relational intrus*" OR "obsessional intrus*" OR "interpersonal violen*") AND (victim* OR survivor* OR adult* OR person* OR people OR individual* OR "mock juror*" OR "mock jury" OR "mock juries") AND (manag* OR blam* OR understand* OR interpret* OR support* OR experien* OR perception* OR impact* OR perceiv* OR respons* OR judg*)
OVID Medline	(stalking or stalked or stalker or cyberstalk* or cyberharass* or "unwanted attention" or haras* or "intrusive behavio?r" or "obsessional relational intrus*" or "obsessional intrus*" or (obsessional adj2 intrusi*)).mp. [mp=title, abstract, original title, name of substance word, subject heading word, floating sub-heading word, keyword heading word, organism supplementary concept word, protocol supplementary concept word, rare disease supplementary concept word, unique identifier, synonyms] AND (victim* or survivor*).mp. [mp=title, abstract, original title, name of substance word, subject heading word, floating sub-heading word, keyword heading word, organism supplementary concept word, protocol supplementary concept word, rare disease supplementary concept word, unique identifier, synonyms] AND ("mock jury" or "mock juries" or manag* or blam* or understand* or interpret* or support* or experien* or perception* or impact* or perceiv* or respons* or judg*).mp. [mp=title, abstract, original title, name of substance word, subject heading word, floating sub-heading word, keyword heading word, organism supplementary concept word, protocol supplementary concept word, rare disease supplementary concept word, unique identifier, synonyms]
Ovid Embase	(stalking or stalked or stalker or fixat* or cyberstalk* or cyberharass* or "unwanted attention" or haras* or "intrusive behavio?r" or "obsessional relational intrus*" or "obsessional intrus*" or (obsessional adj2 intrusi*)).mp. AND crime victim/ or (victim* or survivor*).mp. AND ("mock jury" or "mock juries" or manag* or blam* or understand* or interpret* or support* or experien* or perception* or impact* or perceiv* or respons* or judg*).mp.
PsychInfo	Exp stalking/ or (stalking or stalked or stalker or fixat* or cyberstalk* or cyberharass* or "unwanted attention" or haras* or "intrusive behavio?r" or "obsessional relational intrus*" or "obsessional intrus*" or (obsessional adj2 intrusi*)).mp. AND Exp Crime Victims/ or (victim* or survivor*) .mp. AND ("mock jury" or "mock juries" or manag* or blam* or understand* or interpret* or support* or experien* or perception* or impact* or perceiv* or respons* or judg*).mp.

Appendix B

Data Extraction Form

Data extraction		
Study Information:		
Study ID		
Article title		
Author(s)		
Year published		
Citation		
Article type (e.g., journal, doctoral thesis etc.)		
Study design		
Country of origin		
Ethical Approval Obtained		
Study Characteristics:		
Study design (e.g., cross sectional etc)		
Aims of the study		
Study factors	How was Victim Responsibility defined and measured?	Defined:
		Measures used:
		Reliability and Validity:
	What other variables were explored and how were they measured?	Defined:
		Measures used:
		Reliability and Validity:
Location/setting	*(information relating to scenario used (mock juror, own experience/ vignette/ participant as victim or perpetrator) / stalking behaviour described e.g. DV & stalking or stalking alone, harassment?)*	
Participant characteristics:		

Recruitment method employed	
Population group	
Number of participants	
Age of participants	
Gender of participants	
Ethnicity breakdown of participants	
Information provided relating to previous experience of being a victim of stalking, known a victim (s) of stalking or previous experience of being a perpetrator of stalking	
Informed consent obtained	
Withdrawals (if any)	
Study results (only those relevant to the review question noted):	
Statistical methods used	
Statistical Results	
Qualitative Results	
Conclusion/Summary:	
Strengths and Limitations	
Quality assessment score:	
Any other important/relevant information:	

Appendix C

Quality assessment tool

Author (s):
Study title:
Score:

	Question	Score			
		Yes =2	**Partial =1**	**No =0**	**Not clear/ NA**
Research focus					
1	Were the aims of the study clear?				
2	Was the study design appropriate for the aims?				
Sampling					
3	Was the sample size justified? (Was the required sample size reached?)				
4	Was the study population clearly defined? (Is it clear who the research was about?)				
5	Was the recruited sample taken from an appropriate population base so as to be representative of the target population?				
6	Were demographics of the participants clear?				
7	Did the study state the recruitment procedures employed?				
8	Was ethical approval obtained?				
9	Was consent obtained from the sample?				
Methodology					
10	Were the outcome variables measured correctly using instruments/measurements that has been trialled, piloted, or published previously?				
11	Were the outcome variables measured appropriate to the aims of the study?				
12	Does the measure/measures used have good reliability (>0.8)?				
13	Were the methods sufficiently described to enable them to be repeated?				
14	Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question? *				
Analysis/Results					
15	Are the results clearly presented and described?				
16	Were the statistical analyses employed appropriate to the design?				

17	If appropriate, was information about non-responders described?				
18	Were the results presented for all the analyses described in the methods?				
19	Are the findings of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted? (meta-inference) *				
20	Have the authors accounted for confounding factors in the design/ analyses? (Please record any listed)				
Discussion					
21	Were the authors' discussions and conclusions justified by the results?				
22	Were the limitations of the study discussed?				
23	Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed? *				
Other- reverse scored		***Y=0***	***P=1***	***No=2***	***Not clear***
24	Was there any funding sources or conflicts of interest that may affect the authors' interpretation of results?				

* = Question for mixed methods studies

Max score: CS studies = 42, Mixed methods studies = 48

Appendix D

Table 17: Full-text articles excluded from review (Stage 2)

Author(s)	Year	Title	Reason(s) for exclusion
Ace, A.	2005	Stalking victims: Appraisals and coping strategies	Full text not available.
Alexy, E. M., Burgess, A. W., Baker, T., & Smoyak, S. A.	2005	Perceptions of cyberstalking among college students. Brief treatment and crisis intervention.	Excluded as some participants were under 18 and no stand-alone adult data
Ameral, V., Palm Reed, K. M., & Hines, D. A.	2020	An Analysis of Help-Seeking Patterns Among College Student Victims of Sexual Assault, Dating Violence, and Stalking.	No measure of victim responsibility
Baldry, A. C., Cinquegrana, V., Regalia, C., & Crapolicchio, E.	2017	The complex link between forgiveness, PTSD symptoms and well-being in female victims of intimate partner stalking.	No associative data of victim responsibility provided.
Berti, A., Fizzotti, C., Maberino, C., & Zanelli, E.	2006	The impact of stalking on victims: an epidemiological study in the city of Genoa.	Full text in English not available
Boehnlein, T., Kretschmar, J., Regoeczi, W., & Smialek, J.	2020	Responding to stalking victims: Perceptions, barriers, and directions for future research.	Excluded as it was qualitative research
Botzheim, C. C.	2017	Former Relationship Stalking: A Comparison of Public Perceptions toward Same Sex and Heterosexual Stalking.	Excluded as judgements made solely about perpetrator population

Buhi, E. R., Clayton, H., & Surrency, H. H.	2009	Stalking Victimization Among College Women and Subsequent Help-Seeking Behaviours.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Campbell, J., & Moore, R	2011	Self-perceptions of stalking victimization and impacts on victim reporting.	No measure of victim responsibility
Carretta, R. F., & Szymanski, D. M.	2020	Stranger Harassment and PTSD Symptoms: Roles of Self-Blame, Shame, Fear, Feminine Norms, and Feminism.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Cass, A. I.	2007	Individual perceptions of stalking: An examination of the influence of gender and the victim/offender relationship.	Full text not accessible.
Cass, A. I., & Mallicoat, S. L.	2015	College student perceptions of victim action: Will targets of stalking report to police?	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Chan, H. C., & Sheridan, L.	2020	Is this stalking? Perceptions of stalking behavior among young male and female adults in Hong Kong and Mainland China.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Contreras, P.	2011	Identification of stalking and response patterns among a college population.	No measure of victim responsibility.
Costigan, S. M.	2007	Post-relationship stalking and harassment: The "reasonable person" standard of fear.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.

Dennison, S., & Thomson, D.M.	2000	Community perceptions of stalking: What are the fundamental concerns?	Perpetrator population only
Favero, M. & Ferreira, F.	2010	The social acceptance of stalking behaviours in courtship.	Excluded as some participants were under 18 and no stand-alone adult data
Fedina, L., Backes, B. L., Sulley, C., Wood, L., & Busch-Armendariz, N.	2019	Prevalence and sociodemographic factors associated with stalking victimization among college students.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Ferreira, C., & Matos, M.	2013	Post-relationship stalking: The experience of victims with and without history of partner abuse.	No measure of victim responsibility included.
Finnegan, H. A., & Fritz, P. A. T.	2012	Differential effects of gender on perceptions of stalking and harassment behaviour.	No measure of victim responsibility included.
Finnegan, H. A., Timmons Fritz, P. A., & Horrobin, B.	2018	Differential effects of gender on Canadian police officers' perceptions of stalking.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Fissel, E. R.	2018	The Reporting and Help-Seeking Behaviors of Cyberstalking Victims.	No measure of victim responsibility included
Freedman, S. A.	2003	Current research perspectives on stalking.	Study type: review
Freidl, W., Neuberger, I., Schönberger, S., & Raml, R.	2011	Stalking and health – an Austrian prevalence study.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Fremouw, W. J., Westrup, D., & Pennypacker, J.	1997	Stalking on campus: The prevalence and strategies for coping with stalking.	No measure of victim responsibility. Participants were both victims and

			perpetrators and data cannot be seperated.
Galeazzi, G. M., Bučar-Ručman, A., DeFazio, L., & Groenen, A.	2009	Experiences of stalking victims and requests for help in three European countries. A survey.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Gavin, J., & Scott, A. J.	2016	The influence of the sex of and prior relationship between the perpetrator and victim on perceptions of stalking: A qualitative analysis.	Excluded as it was qualitative research
Geistman, J., Smith, B., Lambert, E. G., & Cluse-Tolar, T.	2013	What to do about stalking: A preliminary study of how stalking victims responded to stalking and their perceptions of the effectiveness of these actions.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Grangeia, H., & Matos, M.	2018	Persistent harassment: Targets and perpetrators among young adults.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Gross, B.	2006	Pursuing Therapists: Part 1.	No measure of victim responsibility
Groves, R. M., Salfati, C. G., & Elliot, D.	2004	The influence of prior offender/victim relationship on offender stalking behavior.	No measure of victim responsibility.
Hart, T. C., & Troshynski, E. I.	2016	Perceptions of Stalking Victimization among Behaviorally Defined Victims: Examining Factors that Influence Self-Identification.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.

Hensler-McGinnis, N. F.	2008	Cyberstalking victimization: Impact and coping responses in a national university sample.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Hills, A. M., & Taplin, J. L.	1998	Anticipated responses to stalking: Effect of threat and target-stalker relationship.	No measure of victim responsibility included.
Jagessar, J. D., & Sheridan, L. P.	2004	Stalking perceptions and experiences across two cultures.	
Johnson, M. C., & Kercher, G. A.	2009	Identifying predictors of negative psychological reactions to stalking victimization.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Jordan, C. E., Wilcox, P., & Pritchard, A. J.	2007	Stalking acknowledgement and reporting among college women experiencing intrusive behaviors: Implications for the emergence of a "classic stalking case".	No measure of victim responsibility included.
Jutras, S. E.	2015	Bridging the gap: Female college stalking victims' perceptions of police legitimacy and police reporting behavior.	Excluded as it was qualitative research
Katz, J., & Rich, H.	2015	Partner covictimization and post-breakup stalking, pursuit, and violence: A retrospective study of college women.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.

Kinkade, P., Burns, R., & Fuentes, A. I.	2005	Criminalizing attractions: Perceptions of stalking and the stalker.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Korkodeilou, J.	2014	Dealing with the unknown: Learning from stalking victims' experiences.	Study type: review
Korkodeilou, J.	2016	Stalking victims, victims of sexual violence and criminal justice system responses: is there a difference or just 'business as usual'?.	Excluded as it was qualitative research
Krauss, A., Jouriles, E. N., Yule, K., Grych, J. H., Sargent, K. S., & Banyard, V. L.	2017	Adverse consequences to assisting victims of campus violence: Initial investigations among college students.	No stand-alone victim responsibility measure.
Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J.	2006	An examination of sheltered battered women's perpetration of stalking and other unwanted pursuit behaviors.	No stand alone victim responsibility measures. Excluded as some participants identified as perpetrators and data cannot be seperated.
Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., Palarea, R., Cohen, J., & Rohling, M.	2000	Breaking Up is Hard To Do: Unwanted Pursuit Behaviors Following the Dissolution of a Romantic Relationship.	Perpetrator population only
Lashley, S. D.	2017	Decision-making in a national sample of stalking victims: A quantitative analysis.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Lippman, J. R.	2018	I did it because I never stopped loving you: The effects of media portrayals of	No measure of victim responsibility included.

		persistent pursuit on beliefs about stalking.	
Logan, T. K.	2019	Examining stalking experiences and outcomes for men and women stalked by (ex) partners and non-partners.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Logan, T. K.	2020	Beyond a dichotomy: Threat context factors associated with fear and stalker capability of harm among women stalked by (ex) partners, close acquaintances, and distant acquaintances/strangers.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Logan, T. K., Shannon, L., Cole, J., & Walker, R.	2006	The impact of differential patterns of physical violence and stalking on mental health and help-seeking among women with protective orders.	Excluded as unable to access stand-alone data on participants that have experienced stalking, the study included both domestic violence and stalking victims which could not be separated.
Logan, T. K., & Walker, R.	2010	Toward a deeper understanding of the harms caused by partner stalking.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Logan, T. K., & Walker, R.	2019	The impact of stalking-related fear and gender on personal safety outcomes.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Logan, T. K., & Cole, J.	2007	The impact of partner stalking on mental health and protective order outcomes over time.	Excluded as some participants were under 18 and no stand-alone adult data

Lynch, K. R., & Logan, T. K.	2015	Police officers' attitudes and challenges with charging stalking.	No measure of victim responsibility. Focus on perpetrator population.
Lyndon, A. E.	2004	Conceptions of stalking: Behavior in context.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Magyarics, C. L., Lynch, K. R., Golding, J. M., & Lippert, A.	2015	The impact of frequency of behavior and type of contact on judgments involving a criminal stalking case.	No measure of victim responsibility. No psychometric measures included.
Matos, M., Grangeia, H., Ferreira, C., Azevedo, V., Gonçalves, M., & Sheridan, L.	2019	Stalking victimization in Portugal: Prevalence, characteristics, and impact.	No measure of victim responsibility included
Matos, M., Matias, A., & Gonçalves, M.	2019	Male stalking victimization: prevalence, characteristics and impact.	Excluded as it was qualitative research
Melton, H. C.	2001	Stalking in the Context of Domestic Violence.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Miglietta, A., & Acquadro Maran, D.	2017	Gender, sexism and the social representation of stalking: What makes the difference?	No measure of victim responsibility. Victim responsibility not the focus.
Mleczko, B. M.	2014	Perceptions of Stalking: Assessing Gender, Personal Experience, and Level of Threat on Assignment of Punishment.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Morales, D. P.	2015	Heterosexual and non-heterosexual victims of cyberstalking.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.

Morewitz, S. J.	2001	The Psychosocial Effects of Stalking: A Social Problems Perspective.	Victim responsibility not the focus.
Ngo, F. T.	2014	Toward a comprehensive model on stalking acknowledgment: A test of four models.	No measure of victim responsibility
Ngo, F. T.	2020	Stalking victimization: Examining the impact of police action and inaction on victim-reported outcome.	No measure of victim responsibility
Ngo, F. T.	2019	Stalking: An examination of the correlates of subsequent police responses.	No measure of victim responsibility
Ngo, F. T., & Paternoster, R.	2013	Stalking strain, concurrent negative emotions, and legitimate coping strategies: A preliminary test of gendered strain theory.	No measure of victim responsibility
Ngo, F. T., & Paternoster, R.	2016	Toward an understanding of the emotional and behavioral reactions to stalking: A partial test of general strain theory.	No measure of victim responsibility
Nguyen, L. K., Spitzberg, B. H., & Lee, C. M.	2012	Coping with obsessive relational intrusion and stalking: the role of social support and coping strategies.	No stand-alone victim responsibility measure.
Nichols, A. J.	2019	Advocacy responses to intimate partner stalking:	Excluded as it was qualitative research

		Micro, mezzo, and macro level practices.	
Nikupeteri, A.	2017	Professionals' critical positionings of women as help-seekers: Finnish women's narratives of help-seeking during post-separation stalking.	Excluded as it was qualitative research
Nwachukwu, I., Agyapong, V., Quinlivan, L., Tobin, J., & Malone, K.	2012	Psychiatrists' experiences of stalking in Ireland: prevalence and characteristics.	No measure of victim responsibility
Pathé, M., & Mullen, P. E.	1997	The impact of stalkers on their victims.	No stand-alone victim responsibility measure.
Pereira, F., & Matos, M.	2016	Cyber-Stalking Victimization: What Predicts Fear Among Portuguese Adolescents?	Excluded as participants were under 18.
Pereira, F., Matos, M., Sheridan, L., & Scott, A. J.	2015	Perceptions and personal experiences of unwanted attention among Portuguese male students.	No measure of victim responsibility. Victim responsibility not the focus.
Phillips, L., Quirk, R., Rosenfeld, B., & O'Connor, M.	2004	Is it stalking? Perceptions of stalking among college undergraduates.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Pilkington, C. A.	2004	Female victims of intimate stalking and the development of posttraumatic stress disorder.	Excluded as could not seperate perpetrator and victim data.
Podaná, Z., & Imríšková, R.	2016	Victims' responses to stalking: An examination of fear levels and coping strategies.	No measure of victim responsibility

Purcell, R., Pathé, M., Baksheev, G. N., MacKinnon, A., & Mullen, P.	2012	What mediates psychopathology in stalking victims? The role of individual-vulnerability and stalking-related factors.	No measure of victim responsibility.
Reyns, B. W., & Englebrecht, C. M.	2013	The fear factor: Exploring predictors of fear among stalking victims throughout the stalking encounter.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Reyns, B. W., & Englebrecht, C. M.	2014	Informal and formal help-seeking decisions of stalking victims in the United States.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Reyns, B. W., Fisher, B. S., & Randa, R.	2018	Explaining Cyberstalking Victimization Against College Women Using a Multitheoretical Approach: Self-Control, Opportunity, and Control Balance.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Roberts, K. A.	2005	Associated characteristics of stalking following the termination of romantic relationships.	No measure of victim responsibility
Roberts, K. A.	2005	Women's experience of violence during stalking by former romantic partners: Factors predictive of stalking violence.	No measure of victim responsibility
Scott, A. J., Duff, S. C., Sheridan, L., & Rajakaruna, N.	2019	The influence of contextual information regarding the breakdown of relationships and perpetrator-target sex	No measure of victim responsibility.

		composition on perceptions of relational stalking.	
Scott, A. J., Gavin, J., Sleath, E., & Sheridan, L.	2014	The attribution of responsibility in cases of stalking.	Excluded as it was qualitative research - this paper was study 2 (qualitative) of data that is included within the review (Scott & Sherdian, 2011).
Scott, A. J., Rajakaruna, N., Sheridan, L., & Gavin, J.	2015	International Perceptions of Relational Stalking: The Influence of Prior Relationship, Perpetrator Sex, Target Sex, and Participant Sex.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Shaikh, A.	2015	Perceived dangerousness of cyberstalkers whom victims have known before versus cyberstalkers who are strangers.	No measure of victim responsibility
Sheridan, L., Davies, G., & Boon, J.	2001	The Course and Nature of Stalking: A Victim Perspective.	Excluded as it was qualitative research
Sheridan, L., & Davies, G. M.	2001	Violence and the prior victim-stalker relationship.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Sheridan, L., & Davies, G. M.	2001	What is stalking? The match between legislation and public perception.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Sheridan, L., Davies, G. M., & Boon, J. C.	2001	Stalking: Perceptions and prevalence.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Sheridan, L., Gillett, R., & Davies, G.	2000	'Stalking'–Seeking the victim's perspective.	Victim responsibility not the focus

Sheridan, L., Gillett, R., & Davies, G.	2002	Perceptions and prevalence of stalking in a male sample.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Sheridan, L. P., Scott, A. J., & Campbell, A. M.	2019	Perceptions and Experiences of Intrusive Behavior and Stalking: Comparing LGBTIQ and Heterosexual Groups.	Excluded as it was qualitative research
Sheridan, L. P., North, A. C., & Scott, A. J.	2014	Experiences of Stalking in Same-Sex and Opposite-Sex Contexts.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Short, E., Guppy, A., Hart, J. A., & Barnes, J.	2015	The impact of cyberstalking.	No measure of victim responsibility included.
Short, E., Barnes, A.B.J., Zhraa, M.C., Pitchford, A.M., Conradie, L., Stewart, G., & Dobocan, A.	2016	Cyberharassment and cyberbullying; Individual and institutional perspectives.	No measure of victim responsibility included.
Smoyak, S. A.	2003	Perspectives of mental health clinicians on stalking continue to evolve.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Spence-Diehl, E.	2004	Intensive Case Management for Victims of Stalking: A Pilot Test Evaluation.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility. Evaluation of intervention.
Spence-Diehl, E., & Potocky-Tripodi, M.	2001	Victims of Stalking: A Study of Service Needs as Perceived by Victim Services Practitioners.	Does not include an assessment of victim responsibility.
Spence-Diehl, E. E.	2002	The early development and pilot-testing of a case management intervention with victims of stalking: An evaluation study.	Victim responsibility not the focus. Evaluation of intervention.

Spitzberg, B. H.	2017	Acknowledgment of unwanted pursuit, threats, assault, and stalking in a college population.	Victim responsibility not the focus. Judgements made of perpetrators.
Storey, J. E.	2016	Hurting the healers: Stalking and stalking-related behavior perpetrated against counselors.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Strand, S., & McEwan, T. E.	2011	Same-gender stalking in Sweden and Australia.	Victim responsibility not the focus. Judgements made of perpetrators.
Uhl, C. A., Rhyner, K. J., Terrance, C. A., & Plumm, K. M.	2017	Perceptions of Stalking: The Impact of Threat Level and Victim Response.	No measure of victim responsibility included.
Wigman, S. A.	2009	Male Victims of Former-Intimate Stalking: A Selected Review.	Study type: review
Winkleman, A., & Winstead, B. A.	2011	Student Pursuers: An Investigation of Pursuit and Stalking in the Student-Faculty Relationship.	Victim responsibility not the focus
Wood, M., & Stichman, A.	2018	Stalking on the college campus: The influence of suitable target and guardianship variables on victimization comparing male and female students.	No measure of victim responsibility included.

Appendix E

University of Nottingham Ethical Approval

University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences
Research Ethics Committee
Faculty Hub
Room E41, E Floor, Medical School
Queen's Medical Centre Campus
Nottingham University Hospitals
Nottingham, NG7 2UH
Email: FMHS-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk

13 July 2020

Eryna Tarant
Top-Up Doctorate in Forensic Psychology
c/o Dr Simon Duff
Director of Stage II Forensic Training
Centre for Forensic & Family Psychology
BO5 YANG Fujia Building
Psychiatry and Applied Psychology, School of Medicine
University of Nottingham Jubilee Campus
Wollaton Road, NG8 1BB

Dear Ms Tarant

Ethics Reference No: 287-1904– **please always quote**	
Study Title: Public perceptions of stalking: the relationship between stalking attitudes and the attribution of blame.	
Chief Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Simon Duff, Director Stage II Forensic Training Centre for Forensic & Family Psychology, School of Medicine.	
Lead Investigators/student: Eryna Tarant, Top-up doctorate in Forensic Psychology	
Proposed Start Date: 01/10/2019	**Proposed End Date:** 30/06/2020

Thank you for notifying the committee of amendment no 2: 31.05.2020 as outlined and the following documents were received:

- FMHS REC Notice of Amendment and supporting documents version 2.0: 31.05.2020

These have been reviewed and are satisfactory and the study amendment no 2.0: 31.05.2020 is approved.

A favourable opinion has been given on the understanding that:

1. The protocol agreed is followed and the Committee is informed of any changes using a notice of amendment form (please request a form).
2. The Chair is informed of any serious or unexpected event.
3. An End of Project Progress Report is completed and returned when the study has finished (Please request a form).

Yours sincerely



Dr Bethan E Phillips, Associate Professor
Clinical, Metabolic & Molecular Physiology, Medical Sciences & Graduate Entry Medicine
Acting Chair, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Appendix F

Participant Debrief Information



University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Thank you for taking part in this research – we appreciate your time and contribution to the project. You have reached the end of the survey.

Findings

If you would like a summary of the study findings, they will be published on the same link that you accessed the survey on, when the project has finished.

Debrief

We understand that the experiences and topic of this survey asked you about may have been upsetting or difficult to think about.

If you are feeling anxious or upset, some people find that doing something that you like can improve and even lift your mood. You can also try talking to someone, or if you don't feel able to do this, you could write down how you feel. Some people find these to be helpful when trying to manage difficult feelings.
If you are experiencing difficulties and you think you might want more support, your GP is best placed to help you to access this.

If you are currently experiencing stalking or stalking-related behaviours, these websites have been created to give you advice about keeping yourself safe and accessing support:
https://www.suzylamplugh.org/Pages/Category/national-stalking-helpline
protectionagainststalking.org
paladinservice.co.uk/
survivingstalking.com
victimsupport.org.uk

If you have any further questions, then please contact the researchers using the below email addresses:

Eryna Tarant
Email: Eryna.Tarant@nottingham.ac.uk

Dr Simon Duff
Email: Simon.Duff@nottingham.ac.uk

If you would like to contact the Ethics Committee who oversee any ethical concerns relating to this project, you can do this by contacting the FMHS Research Ethics Committee Administrator, c/o The University of Nottingham, Faculty PVC Office, B Floor, Medical School, Queen's Medical Centre Campus, Nottingham University Hospitals, Nottingham, NG7 2UH (FMHS-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk).

Appendix G

Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form



You are being invited to take part in a research study. The research is being carried out by Eryna Tarant, a Doctoral student at Nottingham University.

The decision to take part in the research is up to you. If you take part in the research, you will not receive anything and if you do not want to take part, you will not lose anything.

Please read through this information before agreeing to participate by ticking the 'yes' box at the bottom of the page. You can ask any questions before deciding by contacting the researchers (details below). Taking part is entirely voluntary.

What is the research about?

The aim of the research is to find out how people think and feel about stalking, and their judgement on a hypothetical stalking case.

We also wanted to look at what might affect people's judgement, and their ability to manage stress or emotional intensity. We would like to understand the prevalence of stalking-related behaviours, there will be some optional questions that will ask if you have ever had any stalking-related experiences. You are under no obligation to share this information with the researchers.

What would you be asked to do?

You will be asked to provide some basic demographic information (i.e. age, gender, education) and to answer some questions about yourself. You will complete four questionnaires which will ask your thoughts about stalking, your judgement on a hypothetical stalking case, and your experience of stalking. This should take no longer than 30 minutes.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is entirely voluntary, which means it is up to you whether you want to take part. You must be over the age of 18 to take part.

You can withdraw at any point during the questionnaire for any reason, before submitting your answers by clicking the Exit button/closing the browser. The data will only be uploaded on completion of the questionnaire by clicking the SUBMIT button on the final page. At this point it will not be possible to withdraw your answers. You will then be presented with a Debrief page giving more information

about the research topic and details of where you can seek support if you have been affected by the issues raised in the scenarios.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

We believe that there are no known risks associated with this research; however, some people might find the questions upsetting. It is possible that you may find the issues raised in the scenarios presented are upsetting or make you feel uncomfortable. Please take time to think carefully about whether it might be an upsetting or sensitive topic for you at the moment. If you are experiencing difficulties or are distressed and would like support as soon as possible, please call NHS 111 for help.

If you find any of the questions upsetting, please see below on some support suggestions:

You can withdraw from the study at any time by closing the survey. You do not have to give reason for withdrawing.

If you are experiencing difficulties or are distressed and would like support as soon as possible, please call NHS 111 for help.

If you are in an emergency, please call 999

If you would like support and would like to speak to someone, please call Samaritans on 116 123. This phone line is free to call, and you can call it 24 hours a day.

What are the advantages of taking part?

Your contribution together with others will help the researchers to understand more about how people think and feel about stalking, and their judgement on a hypothetical stalking case.

Who will know I have taken part in the study?

No one will know you have taken part in this study because we will not ask for your name or any other personal ID during this questionnaire. Your IP address will not be visible to or stored by the research team because an online survey platform is being used which receives and stores an IP address but filters this detail out before it is transferred to the research team. As with any online related activity the risk of breach is possible but this risk is being minimized by using a platform that sits on an encrypted webpage.

What happens to the information I give you?

When you have clicked the submit button at the end of the questionnaire, it will be uploaded into a password protected database with a code number. The research team will not be able to see who it is from and for this reason it will not possible to withdraw the data at this point. Your data (research data) will be stored in a password-protected folder sitting on a restricted access server at the University under the terms of its data protection policy. Data is kept for a minimum of 7 years and then destroyed.

This questionnaire is for a PhD project and the answers received from all participants will be combined in a password protected database ready for analysis. The results will be written up as a dissertation and may be used in academic publications and presentations. The overall anonymised data from this study may be shared for use in future research and teaching (with research ethics approval).

The only personal data we will receive is your e-mail if you contact us to ask further questions or need support. This will be received and handled separately from your completed questionnaire and it will not be possible to link the sets of data. Your e-mail address will only be kept as long as needed to resolve your query. For further information about how the university processes personal data please see: https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy.aspx/

Who will have access to your data?

The University of Nottingham is the data controller (legally responsible for data security) and the Supervisor of this study (named above) is the data custodian (manages access to the data) and as such will determine how your data is used in the study. Your research and personal data will be used for the purposes of the research only. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest.

Responsible members of the University of Nottingham may be given access to data for monitoring and/or audit of the study to ensure it is being carried out correctly.

What should I do if I have questions or concerns about the research?

If you have any questions about this project, you should ask to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions (Eryna Tarant; eryna.tarant@nottingham.ac.uk) or if you have any worries about the project please contact the Research Supervisor, Dr Simon Duff (Simon.duff@nottingham.ac.uk).

If you wish to formally complain, you can do this through the FMHS Research Ethics Committee Administrator, c/o The University of Nottingham, Faculty PVC Office, B Floor, Medical School, Queen's Medical Centre Campus, Nottingham University Hospitals, Nottingham, NG7 2UH (FMHS-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk).

This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the University of Nottingham, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, Ref: 287-1904.

I have read and understood the above information and consent form, I can confirm I am 18 years old or older and by clicking the YES button below to begin the online questionnaire, I am indicating that I am willing to voluntarily participate in the study and therefore give my informed consent.

Do you agree to take part?

YES – I consent to take part **NO- I do not give my consent and wish to leave the study**

Appendix H

Stalking Myths Scale (SMS; Sinclair, 2012)

Please read each item carefully and using the scale provided indicate the degree to

which you agree with the statement. For all items, one (1) means strongly disagree and six (6) means strongly agree.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

1. People don't usually intend to harass or stalk others, but sometimes they get too carried away.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Many instances of stalking by would-be-lovers could be avoided if the alleged victim would have just told his/her stalker clearly that s/he was definitely not interested in a romantic relationship.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Stalking isn't really violence until the stalker has tried to commit a physical assault.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

4. People tend to exaggerate how much stalking affects them.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Stalkers often suffer from serious mental illness.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

6. Many alleged stalking victims are actually people who played hard to get and "changed their minds" afterwards.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

7. No matter how a person acts, it should not be assumed that s/he led someone on to stalk him/her. ®

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

8. An individual in a committed relationship has the right to keep tabs on his/her partner in whatever way s/he wants.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

9. A person never enjoys being followed or watched by another person. ®

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

10. It is just part of human nature for people to pursue love interests who aren't receptive to them, after all we always want what we cannot have.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

11. Real stalking is when the stalker is a stranger.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

12. Even though someone may call it stalking, s/he probably felt flattered by all the attention.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

13. In any case where stalking is alleged, one would have to ask whether the victim was too flirtatious or sent "mixed messages."

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

14. People rarely lie about having been stalked. ®

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

15. A stalker is usually someone the victim knows well. ®

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

16. Being in love is not justification for stalking someone. ®

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

17. Victims of stalking are primarily public figures (e.g. celebrities, politicians).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

18. Stalking doesn't really occur within a committed relationship (e.g. a marital relationship or committed homosexual couple).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

19. An individual who is willing to go to the extremes of stalking must really feel passionately for his/her love interest.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

20. Being stalked has a serious, lasting impact on the victim. ®

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

21. Sometimes people will go overboard when they think they are in love, but that shouldn't be labelled "stalking."

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

Appendix I

Hypothetical Stalking Scenarios and Perceptions of Stalking Questionnaire

Scenario

Please read the scenario below and answer the following questions.

Michael first met Lauren when he started working in the same estate agent's office as her. A romance developed and subsequently they dated for six months. Michael ended the relationship because he had become romantically involved with another person. During the two months that followed, Lauren sent Michael more than 30 text messages asking why he was no longer interested in her. Lauren also approached Michael several times on his way to work and telephoned him at home. Michael asked Lauren not to call him, but she still called frequently. When Michael screened his calls, Lauren left messages expressing her interest in resuming a relationship. Most recently, Lauren approached Michael while he was walking his dog in the local park. Lauren asked Michael to change his mind on the grounds that they could still be good together.

1. To what extent do you consider Lauren's behaviour to constitute stalking?

Definitely not stalking Unsure Definitely stalking

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please use the space provided below to explain why you think Lauren's behaviour does *or* does not constitute stalking.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. How serious do you believe this situation to be?

Not at all serious Unsure Extremely serious

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Do you think Lauren's behaviour will cause Michael alarm or personal distress?

Definitely not Unsure Definitely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Do you think Lauren's behaviour will cause Michael to fear that she will use violence against him?

Definitely not Unsure Definitely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Do you think this situation will lead to Lauren physically assaulting Michael?

Definitely not Unsure Definitely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. To what extent does Lauren's behaviour necessitate police intervention?

Not at all necessary Unsure Extremely necessary

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. To what extent is a criminal conviction necessary for the resolution of this situation?

Not at all necessary Unsure Extremely necessary

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. To what extent is Michael responsible for encouraging Lauren's behaviour?

Not at all responsible Unsure Totally responsible

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Do you think Michael could help resolve the situation?

Definitely not Unsure Definitely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. How long do you believe this situation will continue for?

Not at all long Unsure A very long time

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. How long do you think it will take Michael to recover after the situation is resolved?

Not at all long Unsure A very long time

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. What do you think would be the most appropriate outcome if Lauren was arrested and the case went to trial?

o Case dropped

o Restraining/intervention order

o Criminal conviction

From your choice of outcome, please could you explain in as little or as many words as you like, what reasons or thoughts you had in making this decision?

_____
_____
_____

Are you familiar with the legislation governing unlawful stalking/harassment in your country/state?

O Yes

O No

O Unsure

Appendix J

Stalking-related experiences Questionnaire

1. Has anyone (I.e. stranger, ex-partner, prior acquaintance, friend) on more than one occasion, engaged in repeated, unwanted contact or behaviour with you that impacted on your life or intruded on your sense of privacy. This may have caused you to fear for your own safety or the safety of people close to you, and/or led you to feel distressed?

Yes □

No □

If you answered yes, below are some descriptions of things that may or may not have happened to you during your experience. Please read through the behaviours and indicate if you experienced any of the behaviours described within the group of behaviours listed. We would also ask you to indicate how often this occurred:

	Never	**Once**	**2-3 times**	**4-5 times**	**6-10 times**	**11-25 times**	**>25 times**	**Prefer not to say**
Direct contact – physical assault including threats of harming you; interfering or damaging your property; flirting verbally or nonverbally with you e.g. making sexually suggestive remarks, persistent touching; trying to repair or further the relationship; verbally aggressive or having arguments with you; spreading harmful information; coercion through children or family; sexual assault; getting too close to you physically in public spaces; publicly embarrassing you; kidnapping you or physically trapping you; endangering your life								
Indirect contact – Threats or assaults against those you care about e.g. your partner, your pet, your family or your friends; harming or threatening to harm themselves; breaking into your home, work or vehicle; regularly sending you or leaving you presents; using deceitful means to obtain information about you or access you, your property or belongings; attempting to turn others against you								
Monitoring – contacting or attempting to contact you via letters, emails, text messages, fax, telephone calls, blogs, tagging your photos; internet sites or chatrooms etc; observing or watching you; doing things that indicate an effort to contact or monitor								

you both offline and online; intruding or showing up uninvited in a public or private place where you were; possibly changing their routine to coordinate with yours; using tracking software, social media, cameras or listening devices to monitor you; encouraging others to spy, follow or contact you								
Non-contact intrusion – reading your emails; posting statements, rumours or material about you online or in a public space which suggests an intent to damage your reputation; seeing your friends or family without your approval; asking others about you to elicit information; stealing possessions from you								

2. What was your age at the time of these events?

Younger than 18 years □

18 – 19 □

20 – 24 □

25 – 34 □

35 – 44 □

45 – 54 □

55 – 59 □

60+ □

3. How frightened did your experiences make you feel? (If you selected more than one experience, then please select the experience which made you feel most fearful)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all frightened

The most frightened I have felt

4. Thinking about these experiences:

was this something you experienced directly towards you □

or did you experience this through others e.g. a friend, family member or colleague had this experience and you supported them in some way □

or both □

Appendix K

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?

Female □

Male □

Other (specify) _____

2. Which category below includes your age?

Under 18 □

18-24 □

25-34 □

35-44 □

45-54 □

55-64 □

65 and over □

3. How would you describe yourself?

White – UK heritage □

White – other □

Pakistani □

Bangladeshi □

Indian □

Black – African Heritage □

Black – Caribbean Heritage □

Chinese □

Other □

4. How would you describe your sexual orientation? (Tick one box only)

Heterosexual □

Bisexual □

Gay/Lesbian □

I would prefer not to say □

Other (please specify) _____ □

5. What is your marital status?

Single □

Married □

Living together □

Widowed □

Divorced/ Separated □

6. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? (If you're currently enrolled in education, please indicate the highest degree you have *received.*)

Less than GCSE □

GCSE/O-Level or similar

A-Level □

University degree (e.g. BA/BSc) or similar □

Master's degree (e.g. MA/MSc or similar) □

MBA □

Doctorate (e.g. PhD, DForensPsy) □

Other □

7. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

Employed, working 1-39 hours per week □

Employed, working 40 or more hours per week □

Not employed, looking for work □

Not employed, NOT looking for work □

Retired □

Student □

Unable to work □

Self-employed □

House person □

Appendix L

Table 9: Parametric and non-parametric summary comparison

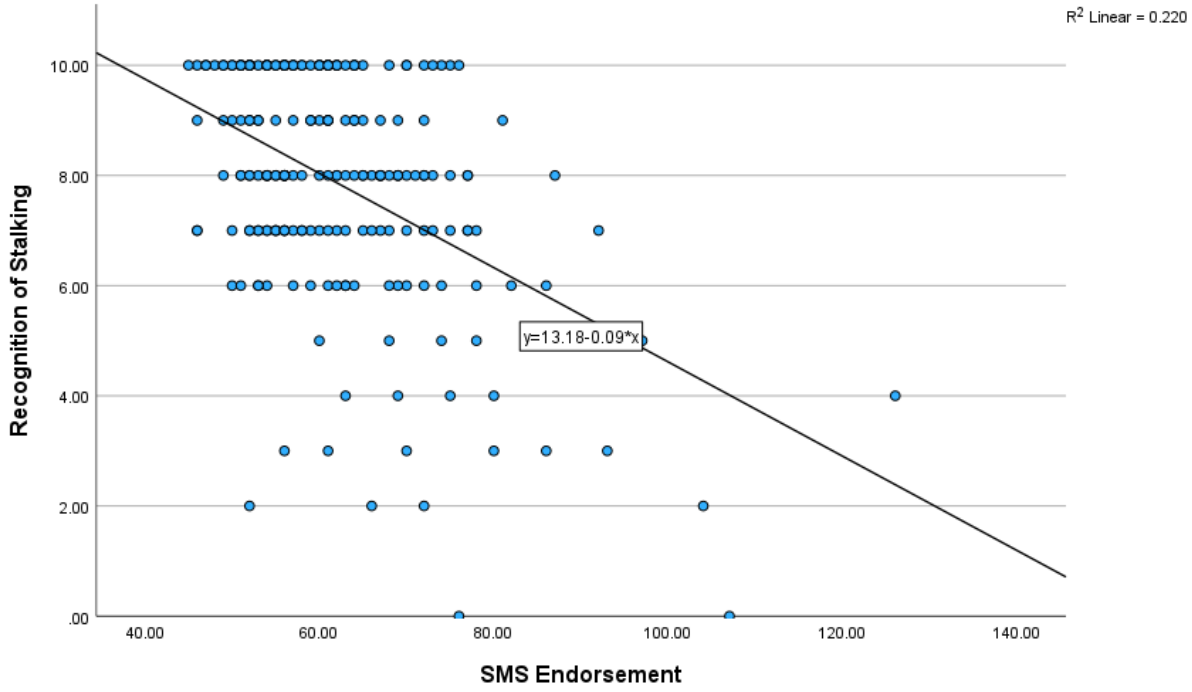
Hypothesis	Parametric Test	Result	Non-parametric Test	Result	Conclusion
H1	Responsibility: Pearson's r = .57, p < .001 Resolve: Pearson's r = .44, p < .001	Sig. Sig.	Responsibility: Spearman's *rho* = .56, p < .001 Resolve: Spearman's *rho* = .44, p < .001	Sig. Sig.	Consistent
H2	Responsibility: Anova F = 1.13, p = .32 Resolve: Anova F = 3.11, p = .047	Not Sig. Sig.	Responsibility: Kruskal-Wallis χ^2 = 1.03, p = .60 Resolve: Kruskal-Wallis χ^2 = 5.91, p = .052	Not Sig. Not Sig.	Partially Consistent
H3	Stalking Recognition: Pearson's r = .47, p < .001 Severity: Pearson's r =.24, p < .001 Victim Distress: Pearson's r =.32, p < .001 Physical Assault: Pearson's r =.20, p = .002 Fear of Violence: Pearson's r =.27, p < .001	Sig. Sig. Sig. Not Sig. Sig.	Stalking Recognition: Spearman's *rho* = .35, p < .001 Severity: Spearman's *rho* =.27, p < .001 Victim Distress: Spearman's *rho* =.39, p < .001 Physical Assault: Spearman's *rho* = .21, p < .001 Fear of Violence: Spearman's *rho* = .27, p < .001	Sig. Sig. Sig. Sig. Sig.	Partially Consistent
H4	Stalking Recognition: T-test t = 1.24, p = .108 Severity:	Not Sig. Not Sig.	Stalking Recognition: Mann-Whitney U = 3817.00, p = .044 Severity:	Not Sig. Not Sig.	Consistent

	T-test t = .36, p = .36 Victim Distress: T-test t = -.04, p = .48 Physical Assault: T-test t = -.50, p = .307 Police Intervention: T-test t = 1.46, p = .073 Criminal Conviction: T-test t = -.59, p = .279 Fear of Violence: T-test t = -.76, p = .224 Case Outcome: Log χ^2= 0.32, p = .851	 Not Sig. Not Sig. Not Sig. Not Sig. Not Sig. Not Sig.	Mann-Whitney U= 4311.50, p = .045 Victim Distress: Mann-Whitney U= 4476.50, p = .74 Physical Assault: Mann-Whitney U= 4382.00, p = .57 Police Intervention: Mann-Whitney U= 3958.50, p = .10 Criminal Conviction: Mann-Whitney U= 4387.00, p = .58 Fear of Violence: Mann-Whitney U= 4366.50, p = .54 Case Outcome: Chi-Square χ^2= 0.32, p = .85	 Not Sig. Not Sig. Not Sig. Not Sig. Not Sig. Not Sig.	
H5	Stalking Myth/Stalking experience: T-test t = -1.45, p = .074 Stalking experience/ Responsibility: T-test t = -1.56, p = .06 Stalking experience/Resolve: T-test t = -2.50, p = .007 Type of experience/Stalking Myth: Anova F = 6.44, p = .003 Stalking Myth/Fear experienced: Pearson's r = -.38, p < .001	Not Sig. Not Sig. Sig. Sig. Sig.	Stalking Myth/Stalking experience: Mann-Whitney U= 3883.00, p = .07 Stalking experience/ Responsibility: Mann-Whitney U= 4055.50, p = .11 Stalking experience/ Resolve: Mann-Whitney U= 3638.50, p = .015 Type of experience/Stalking Myth: Kruskal-Wallis χ^2 = 3.51, p = .17 Stalking Myth/Fear experienced: Spearman's rho = -.32, p = .005	Not Sig. Not Sig. Sig. Not Sig. Sig.	Partially Consistent

H6	Victim recovery time: T-test t = 4.58, p < .001	Sig.	Victim recovery time: Mann-Whitney U= 2502.50, p < .001	Sig.	Partially Consistent
	Victim resolve: T-test t = -5.18, p < .001	Sig.	Victim resolve: Mann-Whitney U= 2363.50, p <.001	Sig.	
	Criminal conviction: T-test t = 2.98, p = .002	Sig.	Criminal conviction: Mann-Whitney U= 3092.00, p = .004	Sig.	
	Police intervention: T-test t = 3.83, p < .001	Sig.	Police intervention: Mann-Whitney U= 2931.00, p < .001	Sig.	
	Stalking Myth: T-test t = -5.03, p < .001	Sig.	Stalking Myth: Mann-Whitney U= 2097.00, p < .001	Sig.	
	Severity: T-test t = 2.40, p = .009	Sig.	Severity: Mann-Whitney U= 3335.50, p = .02	Not Sig.	
	Victim harm: T-test t = 4.51, p < .001	Sig.	Victim harm: Mann-Whitney U= 2521.50, p < .001	Sig.	
	Fear of perpetrator violence: T-test t = 3.09, p = .001	Sig.	Fear of perpetrator violence: Mann-Whitney U= 3127.50, p = .005	Sig.	
	Perpetrator physical assault: T-test t = 2.22, p = .014	Sig.	Perpetrator physical assault: Mann-Whitney U= 3305.0, p = .020	Sig.	
	Victim Responsibility: T-test t = -3.86, p < .001	Sig.	Victim Responsibility: Mann-Whitney U= 2626.50, p < .001	Sig.	

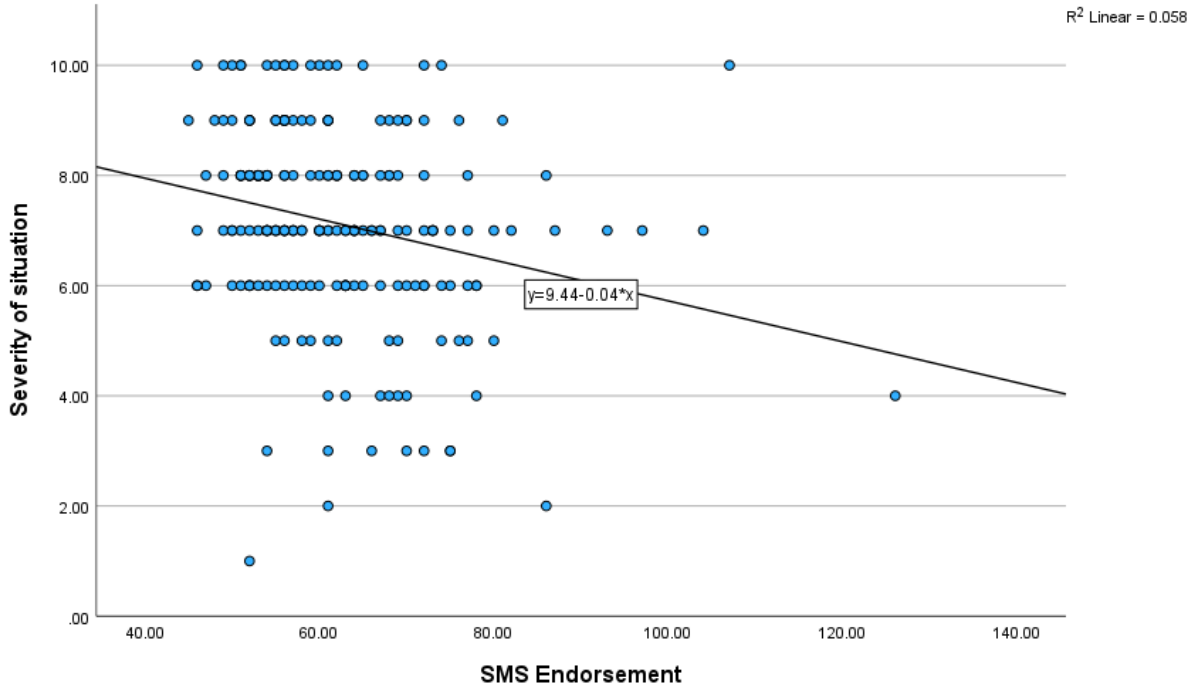
Appendix M

Figure 4: *Scatterplot for the correlation between SMS and recognition of stalking scores.*



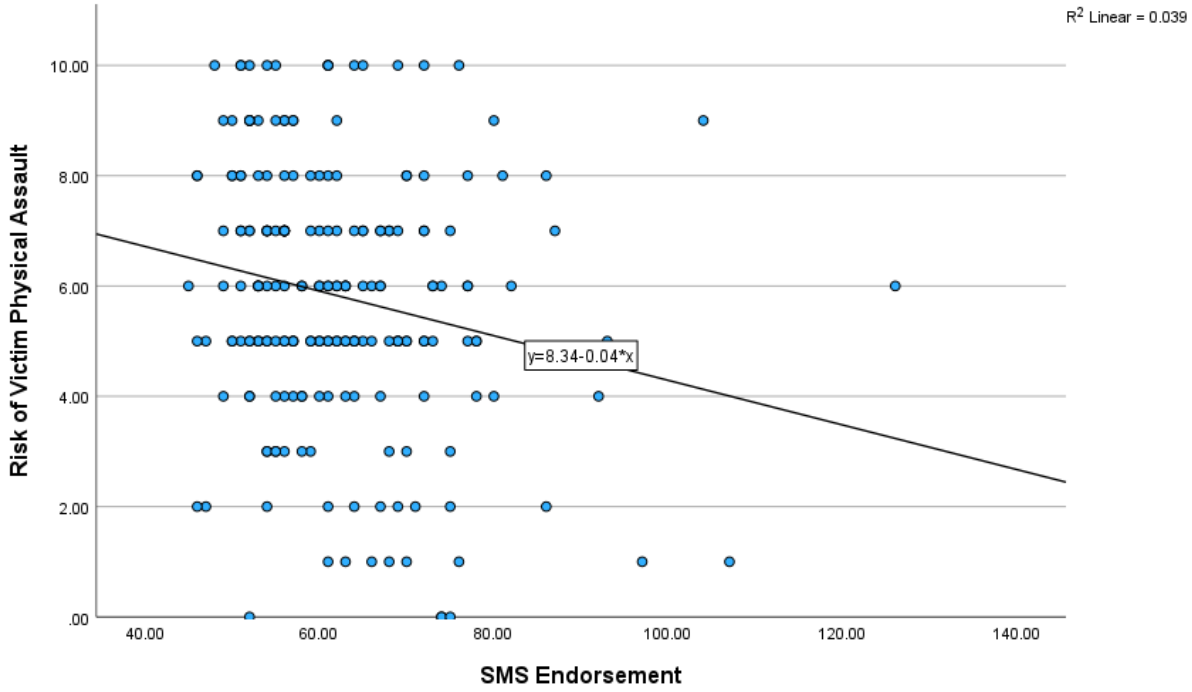
Appendix N

Figure 5: *Scatterplot for the correlation between SMS and severity of the situation scores.*



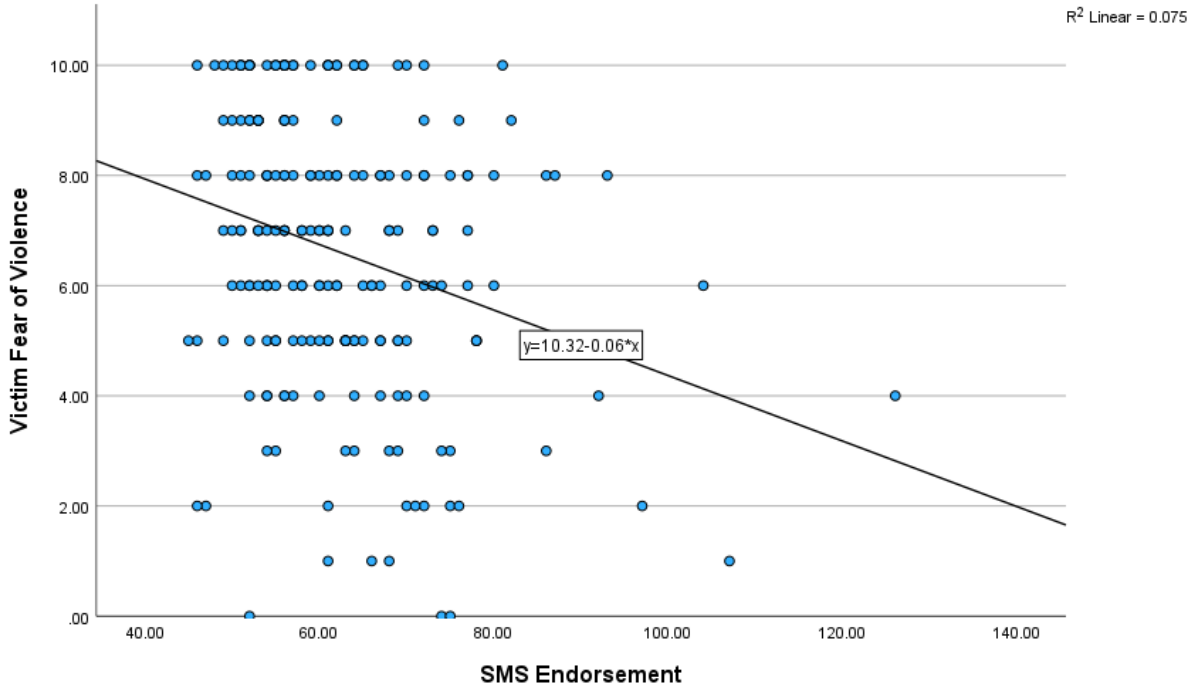
Appendix O

Figure 7: *Scatterplot for the correlation between SMS and perceived risk of physical assault scores.*



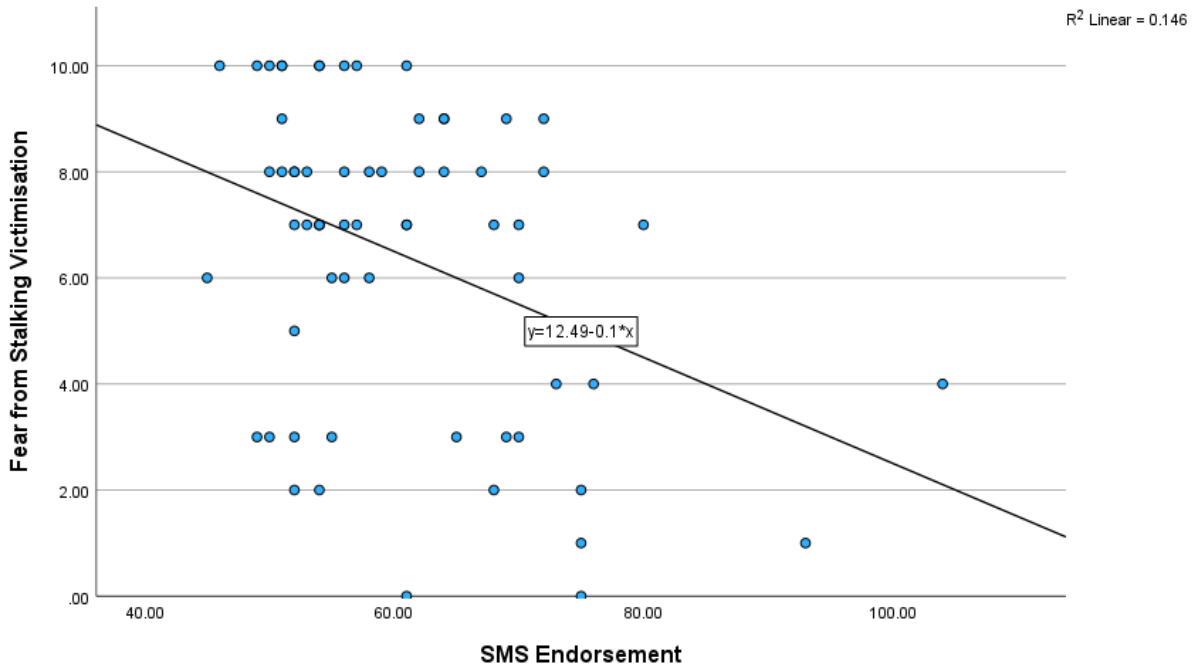
Appendix P

Figure 8: *Scatterplot for the correlation between SMS and perceived victim fear of violence scores.*



Appendix Q

Figure 9: Scatterplot for the correlation between SMS and experienced fear from stalking victimisation



Appendix R

Completed Case Study Consent Form

The University of Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

DOCTORATE IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY (D.FOREN.PSY)

CLIENT CONSENT TO COURSE WORK ASSIGNMENTS

I understand that Eryna Tarant, hereafter referred to as 'the trainee' would like my permission to use information about me to complete a course work assignment (oral case presentation and/or written case report).

I understand that the work will not contain any information that would reveal my personal identity i.e. my name or address; rather I will be referred to via a pseudonym or case number.

The work may be discussed in the trainee's supervision and personal development group or looked at by other trainees to help their learning.

I understand that the work will be checked by the trainee's supervisor and The University of Nottingham to see that my anonymity and confidentiality have been safeguarded.

I understand that course work assignments (and material relating to these) are kept in securely locked premises and are not available for public access.

I understand that I do not have to allow information about me to be used in this way. I can change my mind and refuse my consent at any stage and this will have no effect on the treatment offered to me.

Name of Client: K

Client's signature:

Date: 7.01.2020