Key Questions to Consider in Stalking Cases

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Stalkers can inflict severe injury upon and have been known to kill their victims. Based on the detailed responses of 1,565 stalking victims, a set of key questions was produced with the aim of increasing the opportunities of police officers to identify potentially dangerous stalkers. Despite marked methodological differences and the inclusion of a large number of variables, regression analyses for significant correlates for physical assault *per se* and for severe violence largely reflected the results of earlier works. For severe violence (n = 136), the most important correlate was a high level of victim fear, suggesting that victims are adept at assessing their own risk of stalker violence. The set of 11 questions performed well on preliminary tests and is presented here. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

On an operational level, forensic psychology has much to offer to the policing of stalking cases. Specialist psychologists can provide information on whether an offender is a 'stalker'. This is particularly important considering the variable nature of stalking, and the fact that many stalking behaviors can appear ostensibly routine and harmless. Related to this, psychologists can shed light on whether an index event was a one-off, or whether it followed a harassing course of conduct. Psychologists can also offer advice concerning police interview strategy; for example, a different approach needs to be taken with a sadistically motivated stalker compared with a vengeful ex-partner stalker. Other areas where psychologists can add value to police work include the construction of a media strategy, case linkage, establishing whether a victim is a false victim, recommending best practice related to a specific case, or to day-to-day policing, identifying features of an unknown stalker, and assessing future risk in individual cases. This article provides an overview of the development and utility of a set of key questions designed to help police investigators identify risk in stalking situations.

Criticism leveled at the police in England and Wales following several high-profile cases of stalking that resulted in the death of the victims highlighted a need for stalking-specific tools and training (Horley, 2007). The now robust literature on stalking demonstrates that, although it is related to domestic and other forms of violence, stalking has its own patterns of behavior. Stalking is characterized by persistent unwanted contact and/or communication with a victim, resulting in the victim's fear or distress. Persistent harassment of the victim, such as damaging property, issuing threats, ordering goods on the victim's behalf, malicious complaints against the victim, and spreading damaging gossip about the victim, is also associated with stalking.

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Stalking may include physical violence against the victim, although, as we discuss below, this occurs in a significant minority of cases. As well as former partners, stalking victims also include would-be partners, neighbors, strangers, acquaintances, and professional contacts such as doctors, therapists and nurses (McEwan, Mullen, Mackenzie & Ogloff, 2009; Mullen, Pathé & Purcell, 2000; Thomas, Purcell, Pathé & Mullen, 2008).

Stalking is highly prevalent, with official statistics – employing varying definitions – revealing that, in Australia, 15% of women are stalked (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996); in England and Wales 16% of women and 7% of men are stalked (Budd & Mattinson, 2000); and in the USA 8% of women and 2% of men are stalked (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). As stated earlier, stalking behavior is associated with violent behavior, with Spitzberg's (2007) meta-analysis of 22 studies revealing an overall violence rate of 32% and a sexual violence rate of 12%. This categorization covered assault, injury, suicide and attempted suicide, rape and attempted rape, murder and attempted murder, use of a weapon and vandalism. It has been noted by some (e.g., Rosenfeld, 2004) that much of the violence perpetrated by stalkers is relatively minor, but it is undeniable that stalkers do attack, and sometimes kill, their victims.

The main aims of the risk questions reported in this article are to help reduce the incidence of violence in stalking cases, to assist with decisions concerning case prioritization, to improve the consistency and transparency of decisions and therefore increase professional accountability, to aid in understanding the offender, and to focus the thinking of the police investigator. As such, the instrument does not constitute a violence risk assessment in itself. Rather, it is a guide that aims to focus decision-making and enhance the collection of useful evidence in stalking cases. It is based on correlates of serious stalker violence, and so it is pertinent to briefly examine correlates produced by earlier studies. Some well-established correlates of violence identified by empirical psychological work include: a prior intimate relationship between the victim and stalker, the presence of explicit threats, a history of substance abuse, and the absence of psychosis in the perpetrator [see Rosenfeld's (2004) meta-analysis of 10 studies examining risk factors for stalking violence]. It has been noted that research on predicting stalker violence is problematic, beset as it is by small samples, weak and varying study methodologies (Rosenfeld & Lewis, 2005), specific sampling (e.g., arrestees, the mentally ill), varied definitions of violence, and reliance upon reviews of police and other files where data were collected for purposes other than the identification and prediction of violence risk (McEwan et al., 2009). In their review of studies that had sought to identify indicators of stalker violence, McEwan, Mullen, and Purcell (2007) noted that: ''The above findings are all based on samples of stalkers, and it is likely that victims are a far more reliable source of information about threats and violence.'' (p. 4). Thomas and colleagues (2008), using a self-report survey, identified victims of stalking who suffered a violent attack from their stalker. The factors they found to be associated with violence were similar to those found in studies using other methodologies. The experience of threats, being an ex-intimate, and being younger at the time of the stalking differentiated attack victims from those who were not attacked.

Several previous works have recognized that stalker violence is not a homogeneous entity and distinguished between more and less serious forms. For Rosenfeld and Harmon (2002) 'serious violence incidents' were those where actual or attempted harm

perpetrated by the stalker was significant. Within their sample of 204 court-ordered stalkers, just 12 (6%) had inflicted a significant or potentially life-threatening bodily injury. Other work has employed different definitions. Brewster (2002) created a separate category of 'victim injury' where injury included small cuts and bruises. James and Farnham (2003) compared 85 British stalkers referred to a forensic service. The dependent variable was stalker violence and had two levels: serious violence, as defined by serious assault or murder (n = 27), and non-serious or an absence of violence. Serious violence was associated with a lack of prior criminal convictions, employed status (unemployed), male stalkers, prior intimacy between stalker and victim, written or verbal threats, earlier violence within the stalking episode towards people or property, and visiting the victim's home. The three most important predictors of serious violence revealed by logistic regression analysis were visiting the victim's home, short duration of stalking and the absence of a criminal record.

McEwan and colleagues (2009) argued that within much of the existing work on predictors of stalking violence, ''the dominance of violence by ex-intimate stalkers means that violence committed by other types of stalkers [e.g., acquaintances, strangers, work-colleagues] is overwhelmed in statistical analyses'' (p. 1470), serving to obscure the effects of other factors potentially associated with violence risk. These authors make the point that there is a need to identify risk factors associated with high and low risk of violence for different types of stalker–victim relationship. McEwan and colleagues (2009) attempted to redress some of these problems by explicitly identifying prior relationship characteristics between the stalker and victim using the typology of stalker–victim relationships suggested by Mullen et al. (2000). In addition they distinguished between violence – physical contact with the intent to coerce or harm – and serious violence, where the violent behavior was potentially life-threatening and/or included attempted or actual penetrative sexual assault. They found that violence perpetrated by rejected ex-intimate stalkers was predicted best by a history of previous violence, making threats and being employed. For other types of stalker–victim relationship the best predictors of violence were age of under 30 years, substance use at the time of stalking and prior violence. Approach behaviors and psychosis were found to be less useful in predicting violence (McEwan et al., 2009).

Much of the previous work on the design of risk tools for stalking violence is likely to be of limited use to police investigators. For example, McEwan and colleagues (2009) obtained demographic, behavioral and diagnostic information from a sample of stalkers referred to a community forensic mental health service. But it is unlikely that police investigators would be privy to such detailed information about stalkers when assessing risk, especially if the stalker was not well known to the victim. Diagnostic information would be impossible for the police to obtain unless they knew the identity of the stalker, the stalker was or had previously been the subject of a forensic psychiatric assessment, and the police had access to these results. As such, police attempts at risk assessment are likely to be hampered by a lack of information. Hence, whilst certain tools may be useful in a clinical setting where the assessor has access to the stalker, they are probably of limited use in other contexts such as policing where access to the stalker and his/her records may be restricted. We argue, therefore, that stalking risk tools need to be designed with sensitivity to the context in which they will be used, and in the case of policing, risk tools perhaps need to be focused on readily observable behavioral and demographic characteristics rather than on the psychological characteristics of stalkers.

The current work presents a set of questions to be considered by frontline police officers and examines a greater number of variables that may be related to serious stalker violence than in previous works. It is based on the detailed responses of 1,565 self-defined victims of stalking. In addition we explore the pre-existing relationship between the stalker and their victim and distinguish between less serious physical assault and serious violence. Given that the present study is based on detailed responses from victims of stalking, variables include the course of the stalking, victims' reactions and the conduct of the stalker, rather than focusing mainly on what is known about the stalker's diagnoses and misdemeanors. As other authors (Rosenfeld, 2004) have noted, cases of violent stalking are not always prosecuted as such, in that index charges of rape or murder may be brought instead. Thus, one positive aspect of using victim surveys is that a broader range of cases may be analyzed, and these are likely to reside at both ends of the severity continuum. Furthermore, Gondolf and Heckert's work (see Gondolf & Heckert, 2003; Heckert & Gondolf, 2004), based on large samples of female domestic assault victims, has demonstrated that battered women's perceptions of risk are a strong predictor of reassault by their batterers, equal to the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment and superior to the Kingston Screening Instrument for Domestic Violence Offenders. Given the strong links between stalking and domestic violence (Baldry, 2002), it appears that the victims of stalking are equally adept at assessing their own risk.

METHOD

Design

Construction of the questions was based on data provided by 1,766 victims of stalking. All these self-defined victims completed an anonymous questionnaire relating to their victimization experience. Following an international press release, the first author (L.S.) participated in more than 50 television, radio and newspaper interviews. News media directed stalking victims to a website where they could complete an online version of the questionnaire, or request a paper copy. Links to this website were also placed on the web pages of a number of anti-stalking charities and information forums based in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia. Of 1,766 responses, 201 were excluded from further analysis because of missing data (more than 10%), because the stalking period was under four weeks and/or constituted less than 10 occasions [as per Pathé, Mullen & Purcell's (2000) criteria for persistence and repetition], and due to suspicion that respondents were delusional, were themselves stalkers, or were simply not describing an episode of stalking as described by the prior literature. For instance, six respondents were judged to have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, and in 43 cases the harassment was not deemed serious enough to be labeled as 'stalking'. Thus the final sample size was 1,565 responses.

Participants

Mean victim age when the stalking commenced was 32.95 years (SD = 10.34, range 10–71). In line with previous victim studies [see Spitzberg's (2002) meta-analysis], the majority of respondents were female (87.4%). Most described their ethnic origin as

white (93.1%) and the largest proportions resided in the UK (51.4%) and the USA (36.8%). Almost all (96.3%) said they were aware from the outset, or had since become aware, of their stalker's identity.

Questionnaire

The eight-section questionnaire covered 29 pages and consisted of 349 closed- and 59 open-ended questions. It sought to be broader than previous surveys and to collect data on a wider range of variables that may be associated with stalker violence. The first two sections obtained comparable demographic characteristics for both victim and stalker, and the third section recorded the stalking process, including factors such as perceived motivations and triggers, individual stalking behaviors, frequency of harassment, how the stalking ended, whether third parties took the victim seriously, degree of victim fear, whether any others aided the stalker, wittingly or unwittingly, whether the stalker's campaign continued despite incarceration, if relevant, and whether the stalker attempted to obtain victim-related information. Section four focused on the responses of others, both official and non-official, the impact of various responses, and the victim's appraisal of said responses. Section four also asked how far individual cases had journeyed through the criminal justice system. The fifth and sixth sections asked participants to provide best-practice recommendations for the management of stalking cases and the creation of support services. In section seven, victims were asked about their own responses, both direct and indirect, to their stalker's activities. The impact of stalking – physical, emotional, social and financial – on victims and third parties was explored in section eight.

RESULTS

Stalker violence

Almost a third of victims (29.3%, n = 459) reported that their stalker had physically assaulted them. Of these, 29.6% (n = 136) had stalker-inflicted injuries treated at a hospital or emergency room. These injuries and their consequences ranged from cuts requiring stitching through fractures, burns, sterility as a result of rape, permanent incapacity (four victims were confined to wheelchairs for life following attacks by their stalker), and disfigurement. Those victims who presented to a medical professional but were not treated as an emergency case were excluded from this group. The 136 injured and treated victims were considered to have been subjected to 'serious stalker violence' whilst the group who had been physically targeted but not injured were considered to have been subjected to 'physical assault'. The incidence of threats of physical violence in the sample was 37.8% overall (r = 0.30, $p < 0.001$) and 65.4% (r = 0.45, $p < 0.001$) for those who had suffered serious physical violence.

Regressions

Two binary logistic regression analyses were conducted in order to assess those variables that best predicted physical assault and serious stalker violence. In the first, victims' yes/no responses as to whether or not they had been physically assaulted by

Table 1. Seven variables that predicted physical assault

	B	Wald	df	p
Loitered outside victim's home/workplace, etc.	7.01	19.81	1	< 0.001
Threatened physical assault	4.85	17.61	1	< 0.001
Stalker was an abusive ex-partner	1.58	12.02	1	< 0.001
Victim was 'very frightened'	7.34	6.11	1	< 0.01
Vandalized victim's home/destroyed property	3.90	7.31	1	< 0.01
Stalker did not obtain victim-related information from third parties	9.14	5.35	1	< 0.02
Stalker sent letters to victim	2.62	5.13	1	< 0.03

their stalker formed the dependent variable. Logistic regression using the forward likelihood ratio method indicated that physical assault by the stalker was predicted significantly [χ^2 (11) $= 241.02$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.40$, p < 0.001) by seven variables. These predictor variables are detailed in Table 1.

It may be seen that earlier abusive acts were significant predictors of physical assault, as were threats of violence, property crime and high levels of victim fear. In partial agreement with previous findings, prior stalker–victim relationship (but only where the stalker had been a violent partner) was a significant predictor, as were visits to the victim's home, but stalker age (over or under 30 years), sex, and socioeconomic status (inferred by student status or permanent employment in, for example, professional, administrative and clerical, skilled or healthcare fields vs. unemployment, or, for example, unskilled or service industry employment) were not.

A second binary logistic regression was conducted, and this time the dependent variable was serious stalker violence. In this analysis 13 of the variables formed a significant predictive model (χ^2 (9) $= 76.74$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.38$, p < 0.001). These are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates that victim and stalker gender, and stalker age and socio-economic status (SES) remained non-significant. Perhaps more importantly, prior stalker–victim relationship did not significantly predict serious stalker violence. The current and the previous logistic regression analyses did share four significant predictor variables, i.e.

Table 2. Thirteen variables that predicted serious stalker violence

	B	Wald	df	p
Victim was 'very frightened'	1.96	12.50	1	< 0.001
Stalker sexually assaulted victim[a]	1.65	11.11	1	< 0.002
Loitered outside victim's home/workplace, etc.	1.03	7.98	1	< 0.006
Vandalized victim's home/destroyed property	1.09	7.05	1	< 0.009
History of harassment	2.11	6.88	1	< 0.01
Threatened physical assault	0.97	6.38	1	< 0.01
Stalker persuaded other people to help him/her	1.25	5.35	1	< 0.02
Stalker abused drugs and/or alcohol	0.90	5.12	1	< 0.03
Stalker harassed third parties associated with victim	1.24	4.92	1	< 0.03
Stalker visited victim > three times per week	1.11	4.22	1	< 0.04
Stalker has history of violence	2.02	3.96	1	< 0.04
Victim responded to stalker[b]	1.57	3.69	1	< 0.05
Stalker acted out violently towards people during current stalking episode	1.65	3.58	1	< 0.05

[a]Examination of the scripts that victims completed revealed that in all cases, this variable co-occurred with physical violence. As such, it may not be thought of as predictive and was not included in the set of 11 key questions. [b]Although this variable may offer theoretical interest, it was too vague for inclusion in the question set.

threats, loitering, high levels of victim fear, and vandalism. Strong predictors of serious stalker violence also include the harassment of third parties, the stalker being assisted by third parties, and a history of violence.

In these two analyses, the yes/no values of the dependent variables were correctly predicted in 80.2 and 77.7% of cases, respectively. The predictor variables were not highly inter-correlated, with mean r-values of 0.09. This would suggest that the regressions are stable. Of those variables that did not add any significant predictive abilities to the model, some were surprising. All are summarized below:

- Degree of intimacy of former relationship;
- Victim gender, age, ethnicity, marital, and socioeconomic status;
- Stalker gender, age, ethnicity, marital, and socioeconomic status;
- Frequency of stalker contact ($<$ or $>$ three times per week);
- Duration of the stalking ($<$ or $>$ six weeks);
- Various stalker behaviors (following, spying, e-mailing, telephoning, text messaging, threatening and abusing victim's pets, threatening people close to the victim, spreading lies, sending gifts);
- Whether the victim reported to the police or other agency (22 variables);
- Whether the victim was taken seriously (six variables);
- Whether (non-official) others responded to the stalker on the victim's behalf (10 variables).

The questions

The resultant 11 key questions were derived directly from the regression analysis concerning the correlates of serious stalker violence. Although the analysis produced 13 items, two of the significant predictors were removed due to their redundancy in making predictions. Examination of the scripts supplied by individual victims revealed that sexual violence co-occurred with serious physical violence, and therefore could not serve as a predictor. Whether or not the victim responded to the stalker was also significant, but was deemed to be too broad to have any predictive value. The remaining 11 significant variables were judged to be sufficiently succinct and were identified as tending to occur before, rather than during or following, a serious physical assault. The 11 items are listed below, along with evidence-based explanatory notes.

Q1. Is the offender believed to have engaged in harassment on previous occasions(s) (this victim and/or other victims)?

One of the best predictors of future behavior is past behavior, and stalkers are no exception to this general rule. Those who stalk strangers and public figures are particularly prone to serial stalking (Dietz et al., 1991a,b; Sheridan, 2001). Even though the victim may not know the stalker very well, he or she may be aware of a local reputation the stalker has for this type of behavior. Stalkers may also seem to stop stalking their victim, usually for reasons unclear to anyone but the stalker, only to suddenly resume the harassment at a later date.

Q2. Has the offender ever destroyed or vandalized the victim's property?

Various studies have identified that a sizeable proportion of stalkers (up to two-thirds) will damage their victim's property (Blaauw, Winkel, Sheridan, Malsch & Arensman, 2002) and this includes stalking engaged in by adolescents (McCann, 2000). Property damage may be associated with rage or frustration (perhaps because the offender is unable to attack the victim directly), revenge, a desire to harm something the victim cares about (e.g., destroying her wedding photographs), a wish to undermine her belief in a safe environment (e.g., by cutting brake cables), as a form of threat, or it may involve breaking and entering the victim's property or spying on the victim. Property damage has been identified by researchers as preceding or co-occurring with physical attacks on the victim (Harmon, Rosner & Owens, 1995, 1998).

Q3. Has the offender persuaded other people to help him/her (wittingly or unwittingly)?

The abilities of a stalker to pose as someone else and/or to draw information out of third parties should never be underestimated. Many stalkers will devote hours each day to their stalking campaign, and are capable of stalking their victims for many years (Meloy, 1996). New technologies can facilitate harassment, enabling stalkers to impersonate other people online; to send or post hostile material, misinformation and false messages (e.g., to usenet groups); and to trick other internet users into harassing or threatening a victim (e.g., by posting the victim's personal details on a bulletin board along with a controversial invitation or message) (Sheridan & Grant, 2007).

Q4. Has the offender harassed any third party since the harassment began (e.g., friends, family, children, colleagues, partners or neighbors of the victim)?

In the majority of stalking cases, secondary victims will be identified. Although stalkers may stalk more than one person at a time, this item relates to associates of a primary victim. Stalkers will involve third parties for several reasons, principally to upset the victim (e.g., by harassing her children), to obtain information on the victim (e.g., by hounding her friends), to remove perceived obstacles between the stalker and victim (e.g., by harassing the victim's partner), and to punish those perceived as helping or shielding the victim (e.g., work colleagues who state that the victim is not available). Individual stalkers have been known to harass hundreds of third parties whom they perceive as connected with the primary victim (see research by Mohandie, Meloy, Green-McGowan & Williams, 2006; Mullen, Pathé, Purcell & Stuart, 1999).

Q5. Has the offender acted out violently towards people within the current stalking episode?

As noted in the previous section, secondary victims will be identified in a majority of stalking cases, and these can be a valuable source of evidential information. Research suggests that third parties will be physically attacked by the stalker in between 6 and 17% of cases (Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen et al., 1999; Sheridan & Davies, 2001).

Stalkers who attack those associated with the victim are more likely to attack the primary victim as well. People perceived as preventing access to the victim or protecting the victim are at particular risk.

Q6. Has the offender made any threats of physical or sexual violence in the current harassment episode?

Stalkers frequently threaten their victims, either directly or indirectly. Examples of indirect threats include sending funeral bouquets or violent images to the victim (often anonymously). Stalkers will often make specific written or verbal threats, however, and research demonstrates that these should be taken particularly seriously. Stalkers have been known to threaten violence months or even years into the future, and have indeed followed through on their threats. As noted above, Rosenfeld's (2004) review revealed that the strongest predictors of stalker violence were threats to the victim, and threats have been found to be even stronger predictors in cases of severe violence (James & Farnham, 2003).

Q7. Has the offender loitered around the victim's home, workplace etc?

As noted in relation to Question 4, most stalkers will be seen by their victims. The positive aspect of this is that evidence can be collected, particularly if the victim keeps a log of stalker sightings and behavior. Stalkers who loiter in places frequented by the victim tend to be those who are most likely to attack their victim. Such stalkers may be compiling victim-related information or tracking the victim's habits. Alternatively, an attack may be prompted by the stalker's frustration at not achieving his or her aims, such as a relationship with the victim, despite devoting a great many hours to the harassment. Stalkers are a varied group and some will attempt to loiter secretly, even camping out on or inside the victim's property, whilst others will make no attempt at concealment. Whether secretive or overt, whether mentally disordered or not, most stalkers will believe that their behavior is an appropriate response to circumstances.

Q8. Is the victim very frightened of what the suspect might do to them or someone else?

Research shows that the victim is frequently the best assessor of the risk posed to them (Bell, Cattaneo, Goodman, & Dutton, 2008; Heckert & Gondolf, 2004). Stalking often consists of behaviors that, when taken at face value, may appear to be quite ordinary (e.g., walking past the victim's house, asking the victim to go out on dates). With repetition, however, these behaviors can become menacing, and the victim can feel unsafe and threatened. In all cases, even those where no direct threat has been made or where the victim does not yet have a great deal of evidence, it is important that the extent of the victim's fear is recorded. Research indicates that victims are often reluctant to be labeled as 'stalking victims', despite being very frightened, feeling that no one will take their fears seriously (Sheridan & Blaauw, 2002).

Q9. Is the offender known to be abusing drugs and/or alcohol?

Substance abuse by the stalker has been found to be associated with physical assault on the victim in a significant number of cases [see Rosenfeld's (2004) review of 13 relevant

studies]. The abuse of various substances by stalkers can contribute both to the basis from which the stalking occurs and to individual violent episodes. Binge-drinking or drug-taking may directly precede an attack, fueling obsessional, yearning or angry thought patterns, or by lending the stalker the confidence to approach or attack the victim. It is well known that substance abuse compounds the violence risk among those who are already mentally ill (Steadman, Mulvey, Monahan, Robbins, Appelbaum, & Grisso, 1998), although non-mentally ill stalkers may also abuse alcohol and drugs.

Q10. Does the offender visit the victim at work, home, etc., more than three times per week?

Stalking rarely takes place entirely at a distance. Research tells us that nearly all stalking cases will ultimately involve face-to-face contact between victim and stalker (Mullen et al., 2000). Some stalkers may appear or approach their victims regularly (e.g., on the victim's daily route to work). Others, particularly stalkers with an obvious mental illness, will appear in diverse places at unpredictable times (Sheridan & Boon, 2002). The research shows that those stalkers who visit the victim's home, workplace, or other places frequented by the victim more than three times a week are those who are most likely to attack. It should be borne in mind, however, that some stalkers will have no regular pattern of harassment and in such cases an average of stalker visits could be estimated.

Q11. Is the offender known to have been violent in the past (by intelligence or reported)?

As noted earlier, one of the best predictors of future behavior is past behavior. Generally speaking, stalkers who have been violent before – whether as part of a stalking campaign or in relation to separate offenses – are more likely to be violent again (McEwan et al., 2009). It should be noted, however, that some of the most seriously violent stalkers identified in the past had no criminal history (James & Farnham, 2003).

Testing the Questions

This work aimed to produce a set of key questions to aid identification of risk factors for stalking violence. In order for the set of questions to be useful to the police, it is important that it has good reliability (i.e., the extent to which the question set performs consistently in judgments about different levels of risk) and good validity (i.e., the ability of the questions to capture the core features of what we understand to be 'stalking' and their ability to differentiate between high- and low-risk cases of stalking). In order to do this, we examined police files containing details of stalking offences in which the outcome was known, which involved different levels of violence, from none through to serious violence.

Forty-three harassment cases from the files of Cheshire Constabulary, one of the 43 police forces of England and Wales, were examined. In the majority of cases, the following information was available: victim basic demographics, offender basic demographics, relevant previous convictions/cautions, background to and details of the current offence(s), and outcome. Given the difficulties inherent in file completion (Schneider, 1981), this was a positive finding. For each case, answers to the 11

questions were provided, and a clinical risk assessment was completed by a police-accredited behavioral investigative advisor ('offender profiler'). A clinical judgment was provided in order to give a rough-and-ready comparison of the form – which is designed to be completed by virtually anyone – against a fuller, behaviorally based specialist assessment.

The main findings are presented in Table 3, which contains the authors' clinically based judgments of risk and the overall total of 'yes' responses revealed by completing a draft risk assessment form for each case.

The results demonstrated that the total sum of 'yes' responses produced by the 11 key questions matched well with the fuller clinical risk assessment in terms of differentiating between low-, medium- and high-risk cases ($r = 0.85$, $p < 0.001$). Note that the overarching aim of the question set is not to produce a score, but to encourage the completer to ask and think about relevant issues and risk factors. The question set

Table 3. The relationship between the authors' clinically based judgments and the scores produced by the form

Authors' risk assessment	Raw score produced by the draft form
Very high risk	10
Very high risk	9
High risk	10
High risk	10
High risk	10
High risk	10
High risk	10
High risk	9
High risk	9
High risk	6
Medium to high risk	9
Medium to high risk	8
Medium to high risk	8
Medium risk	10
Medium risk	9
Medium risk	8
Medium risk	7
Medium risk	6
Medium risk	6
Medium risk	6
Medium risk	5
Medium risk	4
Medium risk	4
Medium risk	2
Medium risk	2
Low risk	4
Low risk (primary victim), medium risk (victim's new partner)	4
Low risk	3
Low risk	3
Low risk	3
Low risk	2
Low risk	2
Low risk	1
Low risk	1
Low risk	1
Low risk	1
Low risk	1
Very low risk	2.5

should allow completers to reach an informed judgment as to the priority of an individual case without the need for simplistic cut-off scores.

Several issues were raised and resolved. A particularly interesting issue involved the fact that sometimes, the most 'mindlessly' violent offenders will not threaten or loiter. They will simply turn up, often following drug/drink binges, with the intention of serious violence. Similarly, another form of dangerous offender who carefully plans a serious, and often fatal, attack will not reveal his intentions via loitering or threatening. This means that risk level indicators for these offenders will be artificially low, since they will not have been awarded a 'yes' for loitering or threatening. It was found, however, that this was not a significant problem as these individuals do pick up 'yes' reports elsewhere.

Although the range of cases covered by this stage of testing was reasonably broad, no cases that resulted in murder or very serious assault were examined. As such, eight cases from the files of the London Metropolitan Police were tested, following the same method as used for the Cheshire Constabulary cases. The key difference is that these cases all involved actual or attempted murder (so the index crime was not harassment, but harassment was known to precede the index event). Similarly encouraging results were obtained as with the Cheshire cases ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.01$; see Table 4).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to produce and provide preliminary tests of an instrument designed to aid stalking investigators' data collection and case prioritization. A set of 11 key questions was produced and indicators of their reliability and validity were positive. The questions now form part of the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence (DASH 2009) Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model that is being used by most police forces and a large number of partner agencies across England and Wales.

Almost a third of our 1,565 victims said their stalker had acted out violently towards them [a little lower than the violence rate of 38.7% reported in Rosenfeld's (2004) meta-analysis]. Less than 9% of the total sample described what was categorized as serious violence, roughly commensurate with Rosenfeld and Harmon's (2002) figures. Other similarities were seen between this and other works despite marked

Table 4. Assessments for cases of extreme harm

Risk assessment	Raw score provided by the draft form
Very high (attempted murder)	10
Very high (attempted murder)	10
Very high (murder)	8
Very high (murder)	9
Very high (murder)	10
Very high (attempted murder)	11
High (harassment)[a]	10
High (harassment)[a]	9

[a]Cases assessed by clinical risk assessment.

methodological and sampling differences. In terms of predicting more serious violence, the current work supported the findings of James and Farnham (2003), who found visiting the victim's home to be an important predictor. Like McEwan et al. (2009), we also identified threats and a history of violence as significant, and found various approach behaviors to be non-significant. Rosenfeld's (2004) meta-analysis and Thomas et al.'s (2008) self-report victim survey also found threats to be important, and Rosenfeld further identified a history of substance abuse as a predictor of stalker violence.

The literature has reliably demonstrated that ex-partner stalkers are more likely to act out violently than are acquaintance or stranger stalkers (see, e.g., Sheridan & Davies, 2001, for a review). In the current work, however, whilst ex-partner status predicted 'physical assault' (resulting in no or minor injuries), prior intimacy failed to predict serious stalker violence. Furthermore, only an abusive prior relationship predicted physical assault, not simply a prior relationship *per se*. We failed to confirm Farnham, James and Cantrell's (2000) conclusions based on 50 pre-trial stalkers that ''the greatest danger of serious violence from stalkers in the UK is not from strangers or from people with psychotic illness, but from non-psychotic ex-partners'' (p. 199) and would suggest instead that severely violent stalkers are not predominantly ex-partners, nor are they principally male or aged < 30 years (cf. Thomas et al., 2008; McEwan et al., 2009).

The lack of an association between abusive relationships and serious violence may reflect several factors. It may be that victims who were previously involved in an abusive relationship are more aware of the risks posed by their former partner than other stalking victims and may take greater steps to limit the opportunities that the stalker may have to seriously assault them. This may have the effect of limiting the opportunity for serious violence. It is also possible that many of those stalkers who were abusive during a relationship may have confined their abuse to minor assaults of the type classified as physical assault in this study. As such, these individuals, when acting violently, may be unlikely to inflict, or incapable of inflicting, serious violence upon their victim. This is, of course, pure speculation. Sheridan and Boon (2002) had previously suggested that high levels of collusion are most frequently observed in ex-intimate cases. In relation to severe violence, the current work suggests a broader effect across all prior relationship categories, as three of the 11 key questions concerned third parties (the stalker persuading others to help him or her, either wittingly or unwittingly; the stalker harassing third parties close to the victim; and the stalker attacking said third parties). These items have been discussed briefly earlier in the article and, in conjunction with qualitative evidence supplied by our victim sample, would suggest that they indicate an increasing desperation on the part of the stalker, who may be feeling mental anguish because the target is not yielding to their demands for a relationship, and is thus, in turn, feeling controlled by the victim, in that they perceive the victim as having the power to end this anguish by acquiescing. In some individuals, suicide and/or murder of the target may be viewed as the only way of stopping this anguish. This motivational pattern is known as the 'catathymic process', where emotional conflict causes extreme psychological pain which can only be resolved through an intensely violent act (Meloy, 1992; Schlesinger, 2002). Other explanations are possible, including, in a likely minority of cases, a history of attack and counter-attack by those associated with stalker and victim.

Previous reports have been criticized for not including demographic data. None of the victim and stalker demographic variables that we included, namely various

breakdowns according to gender, age, and socioeconomic status, predicted either physical assault or serious violence. In terms of gender, it may be that the anonymous, primarily internet-based nature of the study attracted more male victims who have been physically attacked than is the norm. When comparing present findings with those from earlier investigations, it must be noted that the current work employed more variables than did most others, but also excluded a number of variables that had been previously identified as important, such as details of a stalker's psychiatric history. These were excluded from the current work as they were unlikely to be accessible to the end users of our key questions and because our victim sample was not likely to possess reliable information concerning such factors. In terms of theoretical implications, it is not known which variables are the most important: these more traditionally employed variables or the more behavioral variables identified as significant by the present study.

The current work is based on the responses and narratives of self-defined stalking victims. As such, the findings are not generalizable to all victims of this form of harassment and it is difficult to compare the findings with those from previous works. Also, although the authors were conservative when assessing which cases should be taken forward for further analysis, no checks were made as to the veracity of the accounts. Victims' memories and knowledge bases may have been imperfect, and assumptions may have been made, although most victims appeared to be happy to provide 'don't know' responses on occasion. On the positive side, the sample constitutes a large number of victims, who provided information on a broad cross-section of stalking cases. Not all victims reported the stalkers to the police (54.3% reported to the police, with an overall conviction rate of 23%), and not all stalkers had been assessed by mental health professionals. The authors were careful to examine individual victims' responses following the regressions to check whether the statistically significant items tended to pre-date, co-occur with, or follow stalking violence. Sexual assault was accordingly excluded from the set of 11 questions as it co-occurred with serious violence, rather than pre-dating it.

The ethics of basing a risk instrument to be used by frontline police officers on a regression that revealed correlates of serious violence, rather than simply violence *per se*, deserve a comment. Of the five strongest correlates for physical violence *per se*, four were also seen in the regression for serious violence, and therefore formed part of the question set. Furthermore, we were tasked with creating key questions relating to more serious violence, following practical calls for action after several high-profile stalking-related murders in the UK. On a final methodological note, for virtually all the variables described in the 'Method' section, no significant differences were seen when responses from those based in the UK were compared with those based in the USA, despite differences in legal approaches and definitions both within and between the two countries. It is essential to note that whilst data from this study support consideration of our 11 investigative questions, every case is unique. As such, we encourage law enforcement professionals to examine all the facts in each case and every stalking situation. Our hope is that the questions are used to guide investigations, rather than being viewed as 'definitive' or conclusive.

In conclusion, the current work provides police officers and other investigators with an easy-to-use tool that highlights correlates of serious stalker violence. Despite marked methodological differences, and the fact that we included a large number of variables, most of these reflect correlates produced by earlier works. Our study was based on the detailed accounts of more than 1,500 stalking victims who appeared to be well able to

predict their own risk of both lesser and more serious stalker violence. In the regression for the latter, a high level of fear in the victim was the most important variable that pre-dated a serious attack by a stalker. It is well known that stalking victims often feel that no one takes them seriously, and the current evidence strongly suggests that we should listen carefully to these victims and act swiftly and accordingly.

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