

Risk Management in Stalking Victims: A Multi-Agency Approach to Victim Advocacy

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Abstract

A pilot Multi-Agency Stalking Intervention Programme (MASIP) introduced in three police forces in England, provided among a range of interventions, the delivery of safety planning advice and needs-based support for stalking victims, through a bespoke advocacy service. The ultimate aim of MASIP was to equip victims with tools to manage the variety of harms caused by stalking, as well as enable them to access the criminal justice system with adequate support. This study explores the personal needs of stalking victims from the perspectives of stalking victims, advocates and stakeholders involved in the intervention programme, as part of a larger evaluation study conducted by the authors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 10 stalking victims who participated in the MASIP, three advocates who directly interacted with the victims, and 19 MASIP stakeholders involved in the project. Findings revealed that overall, victims believed the advocacy service aided their ability to cope with the realities of stalking. Having a victim advocate as single point of contact: made victims' journey through the justice system easier to navigate, provided them with the emotional support that they required to deal with the harms of stalking and the practical advice offered regarding their personal safety, allowed them to feel in control of their own risk-management. Advocates reported that the multi-agency context helped in risk assessment and ability to design and deliver bespoke support plans, which uniquely improved victims' engagement with the service. Due to the small size and possibly biased sample, our conclusions must be interpreted with caution.

Keywords: Stalking, Victim, Risk-Management, Advocacy, Multi-Agency

Introduction

There has been a vigorous push for action by NGOs and policy-makers to address the needs of stalking victims in the UK in recent decades. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimates that there are over one million self-reported victims of stalking each year (Office of National Statistics, 2017). In contrast, research conducted by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust (2019), a charity that seeks to reduce the risk of stalking violence and aggression, revealed that police forces in England and Wales recorded only 8,364 cases of stalking in 2017. This suggests that a large proportion of stalking incidents are never reported to the

police, indicating the huge discrepancy between self-reported and officially recorded stalking incidents. Despite its prevalence and pernicious impact, its seriousness has been recognized relatively recently (Protection from Harassment Act, 1997; Protection of Freedoms Act, 2012). Despite UK legislation gaining significant momentum with passing and reinforcing anti-stalking laws, there remains a widespread lack of clarity around correctly classifying behavior as stalking (Brady & Nobles, 2015). Key knowledge gaps pertain to addressing the needs of victims when dealing with harms of stalking, the value of victim advocacy and criminal justice initiatives which provide victims with useful risk management tools to safeguard themselves. These themes relate to the research questions this paper seeks to answer.

Stalking behavior has become the focus of contemporary discussions in academic and clinical domains due to the complex nature of its definition, legal recognition and prevalence. Stalking has commonly been characterised as a pattern of repeated and unwanted communications and interactions directed and made from one person to another, with the definition reliant on victims experiencing this behaviour as causing 'fear of violence, alarm and distress' (PHA, 1997; Gowland, 2013; CPS, 2018; Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 2019). However, this description fails to encompass the magnitude of harmful impact that stalking has on victims' lives.

Victim-focused studies have consistently revealed the effects of stalking to be devastating regardless of its nature or duration (Mullen et al., 2006; Korkodeilou, 2016; 2017; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2017). The ability of criminal justice agencies to recognize the seriousness of stalking behavior is important to address the needs of victims and provide relevant support for them to manage the harms associated with their stalking experiences. Many scholars support the development of interventions designed to prevent stalking and provide assistance to victims (Taylor-Dunn et al., 2017; Logan & Walker, 2017; Nichols, 2019; Boehnlein, et al., 2020).

The absence of services available to victims of stalking has been observed by researchers, practitioners and policymakers in the UK and US (Spence-Diehl, 2004; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2018). This deficiency in service provision spearheaded the Multi-Agency Stalking Intervention Program (MASIP), which provided holistic case management for stalking incidents in three sites in England. More specifically, the MASIP brought together criminal justice practitioners, mental health practitioners and victim advocacy professionals to assist victims through the criminal justice process, to provide treatment to perpetrators and to coordinate multi-agency service provision. Victim Advocates were central to the delivery of MASIP support services to victims. In their capacity as the main point of contact between the MASIP and the victim, they offered emotional support, information pertaining to the criminal justice process, and assistance with finding resources and developing safety-planning strategies for vulnerable victims (Belur et al, 2019).

This study was part of a larger research evaluation project conducted with stalking victims and perpetrators who had their criminal cases managed through the MASIP (Tompson et al, 2020). This paper focuses on the experiences of stalking victims whose cases were managed through MASIP. The research presented here is based on interviews with victims and relevant stakeholders involved in the MASIP. We had three overarching research questions: (1) What did victims perceive to be the impact of stalking on their lives? (2) What was the contribution of MASIP Victim Advocates in supporting the stalking victims? (3) How helpful did victims believe MASIP services to be in helping them manage their own safety and well-being?

This paper proceeds as follows: first we review literature on stalking victims' experiences with the criminal justice system (CJS), multi-agency partnerships in the criminal justice sector, and past risk-management strategies employed to assist victims. We then outline the present study before presenting findings on the harms associated with being a stalking victim, support measures provided to victims to manage the harms and risks of stalking through MASIP and victims' feedback of MASIP. We finish by discussing the potential of multi-agency interventions to impact future practice regarding risk management of stalking victims.

Victim Experiences with the Criminal Justice System

A crescendo of voices have argued that criminal justice responses to victims of stalking require improvement. Studies that have explored institutional responses to stalking victims generally conclude that the negative experiences can be linked to police misconceptions about what stalking behaviour entails and inadequate responses (Sheridan, et al., 2001; McKeon et al., 2015; Korkodeilou, 2016). Police treatment of stalking cases and inadequate criminal justice support are common grievances raised by victims (Galeazzi et. al, 2009). Logan and Walker (2009) found that service providers and law enforcement lacked understanding of the harms of stalking to victims. Furthermore, these authors stated that unclear guidelines about how to report stalking and the perception that the police would not take action upon reporting, contributed to low reporting rates. These issues are indicative of a lack of understanding around stalking behaviour and the need for the justice system to empathise with victims who experience repeated intrusive behaviour as distressing.

A primary challenge for victims is convincing the police of the seriousness of behaviour experienced since these are often treated *prima facie* as harassment (Brady & Nobles, 2015; Backes et al., 2020). Sheridan & Scott (2010) explored the situational factors which influence perceptions and judgements of serious stalking behaviour by students and community members in the East Midlands of England. They concluded that the absence of physical abuse, and the presence of a female stalker, led participants to wrongly believe stalking behaviour to be non-serious. Scott and colleagues (2010) also explored how the relationship between the perpetrator and victim affects the decision to judge the seriousness of the

stalking in a given scenario; they found that when the perpetrator was depicted as a stranger rather than an acquaintance or ex-partner there was a strong belief that the behaviour constituted stalking, necessitated police intervention, caused fear or apprehension, and caused harm to the victim. This belief was shared by many non-specialist UK police officers who participated in a replication of the study (Scott et al., 2013) and may follow through to later aspects of the criminal justice process. For example, Sheridan and colleagues (2001) concluded that while stalking by ex-intimate partners was more likely to be perceived by police officers, as more intrusive and aggressive in comparison to that by strangers, the latter group were more likely to be convicted of a stalking related offence. Though these studies made some key assessments around how stalking crimes are judged, they were based on scenario data with ambiguous narrations, leaving participants to imagine the seriousness of the conduct being described (Sheridan, et al., 2010). Since individuals vary in their understandings of seriousness, this could have affected the reliability and validity of the findings.

The police's failure to acknowledge the complex manifestation of stalking and minimizing of complaints due to misinformed notions of stalking, can lead to victims feeling misunderstood and ignored. For example, Korkodeilou (2014; 2017) suggests that the police and courts often focus on tangible harms such as physical violence when determining the seriousness of a case. These findings might seem overstated since they are based on participants' perception of stalking victimisation which may not always meet the legal threshold of stalking and therefore would not match official figures. Taylor-Dunn and colleagues (2018), who studied a sample of victims who had undergone the legal process, confirmed Korkodeilou's (2014) findings and also reported that cyberstalking victims often received victim-blaming responses from police officers and were told to change their own behaviour to avoid the perpetrator. While this study highlighted the negative treatment of victims by the police, it also found that over half of the sample population (54%) reported positive victim experiences with the police, rendering the results as mixed and inconclusive.

Holt et al. (2019) confirmed that dismissive responses to victims could be strongly related to police officers having negative attitudes about cyberstalking – in the sense that they believe that online offences could be avoided and are not serious enough to demand police attention. However, the survey data gathered in this study did not consider the range of constabulary policies (or lack of) around stalking and how they may contribute to police officer understandings and responses to victims. Furthermore, the sample was not fully representative of the population of local constables in England and Wales, which limits the generalisability to a certain extent (Holt, et al., 2019). Negative victim experiences with the police (e.g., see Taylor-Dunn et al., 2018) indicate that specialised training around stalking, risks, and legal options is needed for law enforcement officials to improve understanding of this crime type and consider the broader effects of stalking on victims' lives (Brady & Nobles, 2015; Puronvarsi, & Ruotanen, 2017; Backes, et al., 2020).

Stalking victims have voiced concern over the lack of access to adequate information and support from relevant services (Galeazzi, et al., 2009; Korkodeilou, 2014; 2016). In spite of the existence of multiple helplines in England and Wales, victims may not always be sure of where to seek advice regarding reporting of their case or, if reported, how to get progress updates on its passage through the CJS. Victims are typically burdened with following-up information on their case, sometimes from multiple agencies, which leaves them with the responsibility of their own safeguarding (Pinals, 2007; Murray et al., 2015; Logan & Walker, 2018). For this reason, victims may be left to feel abandoned and lost within a justice system which is supposed to ensure their safety and security. Victims would benefit from knowledge such as how to gather the evidence needed to support a police investigation, how to manage their own safety, legal processes involved, whether they can apply for specific perpetrator restrictions, and perpetrator release dates, to name a few (Taylor-Dunn, et al., 2018; Logan & Walker, 2018; Nichols, 2019). It is imperative to explore options and assistance available to stalking victims as the existing evidence base indicates that contact with criminal justice agencies is not entirely effective in relieving victims of perceived distress or increased safety. This paper looks at the multi-agency service to victims to see if some of these lacunae in the CJS service to victims can be addressed.

Multi-Agency Victim Interventions

Due to the heterogeneous nature of stalking, managing victims' experiences can be a dynamic process, requiring a multidisciplinary approach to tackle the risks. Some claim that multi-agency interventions are the most effective way to manage risk and support victims, as has been seen with tackling domestic abuse (Maxey, 2003; Knoll, 2007; Robinson & Payton 2016). UK multi-agency teams are generally comprised of statutory agencies such as police, health, probation, and other agencies who are able to inform the risk management process. Many multi-agency partnerships are co-located to allow for the exchange of relevant information, ultimately leading to a timely and extensive risk assessment and management plan (Stanley & Humphreys, 2014; Cleaver et al., 2019).

Two prominent anti-stalking programs in the US have employed a multi-agency framework to deliver positive outcomes for stalking victims; Strike Force (implemented in San Diego in 1994) and IMPACT (a pilot intervention carried out in inner city US neighbourhoods between 2000-2001). Both programs appointed victim advocates as the primary coordinators of a multi-agency service delivery for victims of stalking. The delivery process started with a formal assessment of victims' needs and goals, followed by a safety plan which was informed by a frequent exchange of information between the partnering agencies and advocate (Maxey, 2003; Spence-Diehl, 2004). Victims perceived the advocacy service to provide validating and empowering knowledge around stalking, safety planning advice which increased protective behaviours and management of fears, and access to personal support of victim advocates. The multi-agency advocacy services seemed to reduce feelings of isolation and encourage survivors to expand their support network during times of stress

and anxiety (Spence-Diehl, 2004). Strike Force and IMPACT certainly illustrated some successful risk-management techniques for stalking victims however, no such follow-up studies were conducted to support the initial findings of the programmes. Like many criminal justice interventions, long-term funding and evaluation is crucial to measure their effectiveness.

While early interventions for stalking victims seem to be rare in the UK, knowledge on addressing domestic violence victims' needs and risk management may be transferable (e.g., see Cleaver et al., 2019; Robinson & Payton, 2016; Wedlock & Tapley, 2016). In their review of multi-agency approaches to domestic abuse, Cleaver et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of a multi-disciplinary, co-located work set-up between relevant agencies to improve outcomes for victims and reduce risk of victimisation. Stanley and Humphreys (2014) claimed that collaboration between all partner agencies facilitated a fully informed service that was crucial to engaging victims of domestic abuse in the criminal justice process. Wedlock & Tapley (2016) reiterated this, emphasizing the advantages of information sharing for supplying effective support to victims. Lea and Callaghan's (2016) evaluation of a community-based advocacy domestic abuse service, revealed that victims benefitted from a holistic model consisting of legal, practical, mental health related and advocacy components. A multi-agency approach, while bearing its own challenges and limitations, is thought to provide victims with appropriate advocacy to support them to deal with the various consequences of victimisation. This suggests that a risk-management approach which combines victim's knowledge of their perpetrator with criminal justice support, can generate individually tailored safety plans for stalking victims (Goodman & Epstein 2008; Nichols, 2019).

Victim Risk Management and Safety Planning

Evidence on the risk management strategies for victims by criminal justice agencies is scarce (Mullen et al. 2006) as many authorities leave much of the onus on victims to actively manage their own safety (Pinals, 2007; Logan and Walker, 2018; Boehnlein, et al., 2020). Since the cumulative impact that stalking typically has on victims can distort their understanding of the seriousness of their situation, as well as the decision to respond appropriately to a perpetrator, victims may require assistance to make informed decisions about strategies to adopt (Logan & Walker, 2018). There exists a need to educate victims about how to handle stalkers to avoid reinforcement of their criminal behaviours (Storey & Hart, 2011). As every case may be distinct, each victim will have specific needs depending on the severity of the stalking behaviour in question. For example, victims of cyberstalking and online hate crime may require different types of risk management tools from those who are physically harassed or violently attacked by their stalker. Prevention strategies must then be utilized in the context of a well-informed and bespoke assessment of a victim's particular stalking episode and life circumstances (Miller, 2012). The combination of using risk assessments and safety-planning strategies with trained advocates has been encouraged to

aid victims with this difficult task (Campbell 2004; Goodman & Epstein 2008; Logan & Walker 2018).

Many victim support services rely on victim advocacy to address victims' needs and safety concerns (Logan & Walker, 2018). Although advocacy and safety planning are widely recommended for victims of stalking and domestic violence, there has been limited research on the risk management process or effectiveness of interventions (Goodman et al. 2015; Murray et al. 2015; Sullivan 2011). Risk assessments have been supported as a tool to guide police responses to violence in the past, however the link between risk assessments and risk management is unclear. For example, in England and Wales, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) are used to co-ordinate risk assessments for domestic abuse cases, but it is not obvious if and how these are mirrored in a safety-management plan for victims (Stanley & Humphreys, 2014). Several studies have examined advocate safety planning and concluded that although risk assessments were completed in the majority of cases, risk-management and safety planning was less common, even among victims who suffered significant injuries and wanted safety planning (Lane et al. 2004; Weisz et al., 2004). Guidance, training and support to engage in safety planning has been encouraged (Backes et al. 2020; Logan et al. 2006), however more research on the understanding of day-to-day processes of risk-management and successful outcomes for victims is clearly needed.

The available work examining multi-agency partnerships and victim risk-management is thus limited. While the effectiveness of various risk assessment tools and dynamics of underreporting and victim disengagement of services has been documented, less is known about practices of advocates in working with stalking victims, in a multi-agency context. Drawing from interviews with stalking victims, their victim advocates and stakeholders of the MASIP partnership, the current study aims to address this gap by examining the experiences of stalking victims engaged with a multi-agency intervention service and the potential that it offered victims to manage their needs and safety.

Methods

The present study is based upon qualitative research involving semi-structured interviews informed by overarching themes relating to victim experiences of stalking and multi-agency support. These were undertaken within the scope of an evaluation of the MASIP.

Multi-Agency Stalking Intervention Programme (MASIP)

The MASIP aimed to support the detection, treatment and prevention of stalking by providing targeted support and interventions for victims and perpetrators. The premise of MASIP hinged on the partnership between health, social care, criminal justice agencies and the voluntary sector to work collaboratively to manage the risks and harms posed by stalking perpetrators to victims. After a six-month start-up phase, MASIP became operational in September 2018 across three pilot sites: Cheshire, Hampshire and London. Any victim whose case had been classified as stalking by the police in each site was assigned

a victim advocate (VA), whose role was to participate in the MASIP process and provide appropriate support and information to the victim, with regards to their individual case.

The MASIP process consisted of six stages (Belur, Tompson & Jerath, 2019):

1. *Training and consultancy services*; This was delivered by staff members to raise awareness of how to respond appropriately to the seriousness (via correct classification) of the offence and to address victim concerns.
2. *Referrals*; Referrals into MASIP sites were made in various ways (police, stalking helpline, probation, health and other community agencies). Once referred, cases were screened and those deemed to be stalking were discussed at partnership meetings.
3. *Triage*; The triaging process consisted of meetings where each agency shared relevant information about those involved in the case. Discussions at the meetings centred on if each case met the legal threshold of stalking and if the service could add value and expertise to the case management process.
4. *Initial risk assessment*; Each of the partnership sites had their own individual risk assessment forms which were either an adapted version of the SRP (Stalking Risk Profile) tool or the more conventional DASH (The Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence) tool for violence and SASH (Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment) tool for stalking. Once completed (often in the triage meeting), the high-risk cases were discussed in detail to design interventions and safety planning (for victims, and sometimes perpetrators).
5. *Interventions*; The primary focus of interventions was to provide improved case management and treatment for the victim and/or perpetrator. Interventions for victims were provided in the form of direct and consistent contact between the VAs and the victim. The following were deemed as VA responsibilities to the victim: information on legal options, advice on limiting their contact with the perpetrator, safeguarding precautions, contacting social services if there was a risk to children involved, and diversion into other agencies who may assist with their mental health if it had been affected by the stalking perpetrators.
6. *Revisiting cases*; There were significant differences between the three partnership sites with respect to how they followed up on prior cases. Due to the high volume of cases, most were monitored for a period of six months and usually revisited when there was a revictimization or a case involving high-risk of violence.

Sampling

The target sample for this study was victims referred to the MASIP, and victim advocates, who were involved in providing services to stalking victims. Victims shared their experiences with advocates who routinely provided advice, intervention and support during the case management process. All advocates worked directly with victims and generally contributed to safety planning, by connecting them to community resources (such as housing or child

services), and by helping navigate the various legal logistics (such as accompaniment to court, obtaining restraining orders or enhancing workplace awareness of stalking). Since other MASIP stakeholders were involved in setting up risk management plans and had knowledge of every referred stalking case, their perspectives were included to triangulate the findings (Patton, 2014).

The sample included ten victims, three advocates and 16 MASIP stakeholders (police, probation and health professionals). This is a reasonable sample size for a qualitative study examining a phenomenon in-depth (Creswell, 2007). Victim participants were sought through referrals from VAs. To comply with ethical procedures, VAs acted as gatekeepers and invited all victims to participate in face-to-face interviews with a member of the evaluation team. Once verbal consent for contact was given, evaluators were provided with victims' contact details to invite them to interviews. Of the 22 victims contacted, ten responded and participated. This attrition could be attributed to various factors such as disengagement with the service, anxiety, health deterioration, and reliving their trauma. All MASIP advocates and stakeholders participated in interviews as part of the evaluation and were able to provide supplementary information on measures taken to minimise risk of harms to victims.

Data Collection

The study gained ethical approval by the University Research Ethics Committee and the victim interviews were collected between May 2019 - December 2019. Stakeholders were interviewed twice (once at the beginning of the study in September 2018 and a follow-up towards the end in January 2020). The interviews typically lasted 45-90 mins in length, averaging around one hour. Some interviews were carried out on university premises, however many took place elsewhere such as the local police stations, to allow for a comfortable, convenient and private setting. Information sheets and consent forms were distributed to all participants before the interview. These provided them with information about the purpose of the research evaluation, interview process, confidentiality and their rights. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist verbatim. These transcripts were cross-referenced with the audio files by the first author to maintain the accuracy and integrity of the data.

While a preliminary interview schedule was used, the discussion was allowed to flow organically in order to uncover related information that the participants wanted to disclose. The interview schedules examined participants' perceptions of how advocates affected victim decisions to participate in the criminal justice process and manage their own safety. These areas were followed with in-depth probing to explore specific components of advocacy services that affected victims and their management of risk.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of the data was conducted once interviews were recorded and transcribed. Specific themes were inferred prospectively, aimed at deconstructing the experiences of victims after being referred to the MASIP – how they felt about their case management as it passed through each stage of the CJS, their challenges with the programme, as well as support mechanisms in place to address their concerns. The interview data was analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. The data was coded by the first author and checked by the second author and analysed jointly.

The analytical approach was steered by the objectives of the study and involved identifying and focusing on key themes recurrently emerging from interviewees' accounts. The themes specifically relating to research questions included 1) What did victims express as the harms of stalking? 2) What support did MASIP advocates offer victims to address their needs? 3) In what ways did victims believe their involvement with the MASIP advocates contributed to their ability to manage their own safety and well-being?

Findings

The findings unpack the deleterious consequences of stalking on victims, before exploring three key aspects of victims' experiences with MASIP. The first refers to what victims described as specific harms of stalking on their lives and what needs they gave rise to. The second aspect explores the involvement of a VA who is the main point of contact for all victims engaged with the MASIP service. The third theme pertains to victims' emotional needs to feel understood and in control while navigating the criminal justice system, to manage risks by safeguarding themselves from perpetrators and MASIP's ability to meet these needs. It is important to note that there were no apparent case or demographic differences between victims who received a positive response from the advocacy service and those who described less satisfactory experiences. Although the sample size was too small to run statistical analysis, qualitatively the relationship between victim and perpetrator and the gender or ethnicity of the victim did not determine the adequacy of the service they received.

Harms associated with Stalking

While some studies (e.g., see Korkodeilou, 2017; Worsley et.al., 2017; Taylor-Dunn, et al., 2018; James & MacKenzie, 2018) have mentioned the psychological impact that stalking has on victims, this study attempted to drill down into the other multifaceted consequences of stalking. Though not always mutually exclusive, three types of harms were revealed to have a significant impact on victims: physical, financial and psychological. Describing these experiences provides some context to victims' needs and expectations from a criminal justice response, and how these were addressed by the MASIP.

Physical Violence & Restrictive Mobility.

Two issues relating to physical harms emerged from the victims interviewed. The first was physical injuries, which culminated from stalking behaviours, and the other was the physical restrictions caused by changes in victims' routines and activities to avoid the stalker.

Physical threats and attacks can lead to traumatic experiences and detrimental injuries, which are often viewed as tangible evidence for the police to use in investigation. Three of the victims within this study had experienced assaults during their stalking episode and described how it had affected their lives and ability to function. One participant had been stalked and attacked by her ex-partner with weapons which culminated in grievous injuries. As a result of this incident, she spent several hours in surgery, weeks in pain and one of her limbs is completely numb due to the nerve damage. This has affected her pace of work in her administrative position. Two other victims were threatened and assaulted while attempting to escape their stalkers. While they suffered no long-term injuries, they were disturbed and upset by the incidents, enough to make significant mobility adjustments to avoid another violent encounter.

"He had tried to strangle me a couple of times... he had tried put his hands around my throat... it was awful... I was in fear for my safety, I did not know what he would do, especially when he came out." [Victim 6]

A substantial aspect of participants' lives which changed following the stalking, was their quality of life in terms of their physical movement and residence. Often fearful of being victimized or attacked by their stalker, eight victims decided to change their daily routines by moving residences, avoiding certain areas and staying in locations where they felt hidden, safer and under legal surveillance.

"...like in the mornings I'm always with someone and... we've planned on different routes, speaking to people and not parking too close to the car in front just so I can get out of a situation." [Victim 1]

"I wasn't going out on my own. Rather than walking I was going in the car everywhere. Not particularly going to places I would normally go unless I had to. Getting my shopping delivered online instead of having to go out." [Victim 5]

A combination of psychological fears caused by potential physical harm and the distress of facing their stalker again, led most victims to compromise their ability to move freely and conveniently in their own neighbourhoods. As a result, they had to employ further measures such as restricting their mobility and comforts, to safeguard themselves from consequences of stalking.

Financial Costs.

In an attempt to discourage their stalkers, victims described a variety of financial costs that they incurred as a result of their victimization. For example, two victims reported deliberate damage to their vehicle and property by their stalkers:

“He’d damaged my front door, smashed the handle in and smashed the letterbox and scratched it.” [Victim 7]

As a result, victims sometimes installed security measures to protect themselves:

“I moved house. I paid for windows that he smashed. I paid for phones that he broke. I put CCTV cameras in my house, that cost me £1,500. Lots of things really. It had quite a big effect.” [Victim 1]

Three victims reported financial losses because of lost wages, either directly from missed work and on-the-job harassment, or indirectly from lost productivity and performance interference.

“I’m out of work and it’s massively affected my confidence in every area of my life, whether it’s dating, going out for dinner, seeing friends, applying for jobs.” [Victim 3]

Other expenses include legal fees to start civil proceedings or get a restraining order and mental health treatment:

“I need to go (for therapy) at least once a week but I can’t afford it, so I’m going once a fortnight. It is helping but it’s a long process, having therapy.” [Victim 8]

Often, previous relationships with the stalker can open victims up to be financially vulnerable since their stalker may have access to personal and sensitive information, leading to serious financial losses. One victim also reported deliberate damage to finances by the stalker:

“He got a loan in my name and left me in a lot of debt, ruined my credit and stuff. Nearly lost my house and my car and my job last year.” [Victim 2]

Psychological Impact.

Several psychological impacts of stalking on victims that have been mentioned in previous studies (Korkodeilou, 2017; Worsley et al., 2017; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2018; James & MacKenzie, 2018) were corroborated in this research. In addition, this study found that psychological harms experienced by victims stem from not only direct perpetration of stalking behaviour, but also from the treatment of criminal justice agencies.

All victim interviewees expressed a negative impact of stalking on their mental well-being. Interviewees indicated that the fear, anxiety and some degree of paranoia persisted despite the knowledge that the perpetrator posed no immediate threat. Perhaps it was due to the uncertainty about the perpetrator’s future behaviour,

“I’ve not been sleeping well. It’s just I feel that my world has got smaller, it’s quite difficult to... I feel like I’m watching everybody... In work I told people to get out the lift because they were males and they were round about that age.” - [Victim 5]

“I go out and I know that he’s not around rationally and logically, he’s in prison, but I’m looking over my shoulder.” - [Victim 7]

When people change routines or avoid meetings in public or are unwilling to meet in favourite local spots because of fear from their perpetrator, this may not always be received well by friends and family. Victims felt isolated by their experience of stalking but the added frustration of strained relationships and a lack of empathy, further isolated them.

“I think I struggled a lot; my family didn’t get it. So, my mum stopped speaking to me and my sister stopped speaking to me.” - [Victim 2]

It is clear from the victim interviews that fear of revictimization significantly compromised their ability to function normally and exercise their autonomy. Even after their case was reported to the authorities, a constant worry remained with many victims and they struggled to cope after the stalking had ceased.

The motivations of victims to involve the police were primarily to stop the offending behaviour and safeguard themselves from future targeting, as most of them feared that the behaviours would escalate to more extreme forms of violence. Some experiences with the police and courts exacerbated these fears.

Some victims felt that there was not enough information or support provided to them in cases where the stalking was more indirect, involving social media. Two interviewees described their communication with the police service as challenging due to the nature of online stalking, the limited understanding around it and lacking grounds for arrest.

“I would show them all this and then they would say, ‘No, it is just messages, just malicious communications... I realised that the police officer wasn’t into computers. It turns out the guy has no idea what he is doing so it really impacts on what is going on.” - [Victim 9]

The police are not always positioned to legally charge potential offenders when the evidence is weak, but the risk is apparent. Until an actual offence is committed, there are legal parameters which prevent the police from making arrests. This can subsequently heavily frustrate victims and add to their fears and anxieties of being open targets for revictimization.

“My back gate, backs onto a field. He used to sit at my back gate, taking pictures of my house and putting it on Snapchat, on Facebook, but because he wasn’t directly doing it to me there was nothing that they could do... No conditions could have been put in place because he wasn’t arrested.”- [Victim 4]

Another theme identified within the interview data was the reality gap between expectations and experiences that victims had with the courts. Most had hoped that their cases would lead to longer sentences and serious convictions due to the impact that the behaviours had on them. Some were dissatisfied with the court responses, which in turn added to their anxieties around safety.

Other participants had grievances about how administrative errors and lack of important information from the courts had added to their anxieties around the possibility of revictimization. For example, two participants stated that they were not informed when their perpetrator was released from custody. Another victim was terrified after being informed that the police had accidentally provided her offender (who was a stranger) with her personal details on his initial bail conditions. The finding that there is a great degree of dissatisfaction amongst stalking victims with the UK courts service is consistent with those of previous studies (Van der Aa & Groenen, 2011; Korkodeilou, 2017; Villacampa & Salat, 2019). This builds a case for providing an adequate service to support stalking victims through the CJS.

MASIP Victim Advocate (VA) Role

After the triaging stage, every victim was assigned a VA who was a paid professional within the MASIP team. The advocate was responsible for providing support to stalking victims in numerous ways, communicating remedies and functioning as their voice in all multi-agency interactions. This was described by VAs as:

“In terms of the advocacy, that is where we are supposed to be supporting that victim going through that system. That is not just the CJS. That could be the civil court process and it could be helping them to apply for injunctions. It would be helping them to apply if they are eligible for legal aid, and if they are not, what are the other potential avenues they could go to that wouldn't perhaps cost them?” - [Advocate 5]

VAs assisted victims to access legal resources and presented all possible options which could help to deal with the stalking and associated harms.

“I just go to whoever I think, ‘I need that,’ to make sure that whatever is needed for the victims is gotten. I kind of suggested that any consultation that is being done, I should be a part of this, so that the victim's voice is not missed in any communication...that has been quite a good thing, because information is shared straight away and we were able to provide that necessary intervention and appropriate support to the victims, and that safety, if the victim is facilitated as soon as possible.” – [Advocate 3]

Advocates went out of their way to chase up any case information available to them through the multi-agency network and communicated with relevant stakeholders on behalf of the victim. This facilitated prompt, bespoke, victim safety support.

Victim's Needs

The findings outlined thus far suggest that victims required several specific needs to be addressed by the MASIP.

Emotional Support.

The first theme to be recognized as significant, was the need for victims to feel emotionally supported and understood.

“In terms of a function and support for victims, that was envisaged in that role...it is a practical role but there is an emotional arm to that.”- [Advocate 5]

As many victims pointed out, there was a lack of understanding of their situation from not only their immediate social networks, but also from the police and courts at times. This frustration led many victims to feel isolated and cope with their fears on their own. A main aspect of the advocates' role was to provide victims with a voice and understanding that was unavailable to them throughout their ordeal.

“If you'd met me last year, I was half of what I am now. I was an absolute mess. I genuinely couldn't have done what I've done or got where I am without the help of the stalking clinic. Because I've not got that family support on the outside so it was just... I rely on Advocate 1 for all my support... So, it's just nice to have someone to speak to and somebody that gets it and understands.” - [Victim 2]

VAs voiced the importance of providing emotional support to victims and encouraging them to take charge of their fears. One advocate recalled taking a victim shopping just to help her to get out of the house after a long period of social isolation. They continued to discuss how to manage her fears around facing her stalker and his family.

Others believed that building a relationship with victims and nurturing their confidence would allow them to stay engaged with the CJS.

“It is being able to provide the support to those people who normally wouldn't be given anything where there is no service anyway, but we were able to reach those people and build their confidence, because the more victims have confidence with the CJS, they will come back and we can safeguard them appropriately.” - [Advocate 2]

This engagement helped victims to feel empowered to pursue legal resolutions.

Single Point of Contact.

The second aspect which emerged as vital to the MASIP engagement was VAs as the single form of contact between victims and the CJS, meeting the need to approach justice in an accessible manner. Victims expressed that this eased considerable stress as it avoided victims re-living their stories and feeling confused by different agencies and their options.

“Everybody was trying to contact me at one point. It was like victim support and probation and the police...But I didn’t want to keep going through it with everybody and they all had different ideas or different views of how it should go and in the end I said to [Advocate 1], “Can you just deal with them all, please?” because it was too much.” [Victim 4]

One participant explained that the management of her case before MASIP was chaotic due to being referred to a new independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA), multiple times. She believed that if there was one line of clear communication, she could have avoided reliving her trauma, the courts would have been able to consider the full history between her and the offender and consequently, restricted his ability to contact her after his release from prison.

“It was charges of stalking but then when it went to court it got downgraded. The Victim Advocate and I, put a complaint in...I think the only thing that I would say is the IDVA service and the court processes and stuff...what I found the hardest, is people changing all the time. Because it’s so hard to talk about and understand, you don’t want to repeat yourself all the time.” - [Victim 2]

The VA service was constantly highlighted as filling in some crucial gaps that the CJS had failed to address, such as informing the victim about the progress of the case, or even providing supplementary support with regards to housing or child protection services.

“I got a letter from Advocate 3 to bring to housing services. That was good. She sent me a document of the rights of victims, what the police should give me, updates and stuff – [Victim 5]

Victims expressed the need for support and access to resources in practical ways. VAs linked victims to relevant information and eased the criminal justice process by providing sound advice to assist victims.

“They met me at the court and went into the court with me to view it all and to ask questions that I probably hadn’t even thought of and things like that...I think because it’s like a multiagency she can say, ‘Right, I’m going to go off and speak to this person and find out’. So no, it has been really good in terms of what she can come up with to try to either just give you information or calm your fears.” [Victim 10]

The sheer presence and dialogue with advocates seemed to provide victims with enough support and confidence to engage with the criminal justice process.

“They feel stronger, they feel able to know what to do, the process of how to phone the police, they’ve got more knowledge of what’s happening to them, what they’re experiencing, they know there’s somebody specific they can phone and be in contact with.” - [Advocate 1]

Many MASIP stakeholders had recognised the benefits of the multi-agency set-up, which gave them access to swift, relevant information, guiding the advice provided to victims. For example, an advocate recalled occasions where early information shared within the MASIP team about the perpetrator’s release led to the prompt execution of a safety plan for the victim and their family, thus avoiding a lag in communication, possible revictimization and its resulting trauma.

Risk Management & Safety Planning.

Arguably, the most important need for victims of stalking, is the need to feel secure and protected. The consequences of stalking were so damaging to multiple aspects of their lives, that some victims were completely dependent on the VA to piece together all relevant information and develop a safety plan. This was useful while they were dealing with the psychological harms caused by the stalking and prepared them to manage their own risk of revictimization. As the justice system may not have been able to safeguard victims in the way that they wanted, advocates immediately alerted victims of any key developments in their case and encouraged them to take an active role in their own risk-management. This gave them a sense of agency and the perception of being in control to some extent.

The purpose of victim advocacy and relationship to risk-management was summed up by one VA:

“If I go and meet them and their goal is to sort out their housing, then we could work on that goal and that might, without us knowing it, vicariously then reduces the risk in a lot of other areas because their basic needs are being met... So, for me the success would be working on goals that are addressing their needs, that then vicariously reduce the risk.” – [Advocate 1]

A few victims stated that developing safety plans with MASIP advocates and police officers made them consider measures that they needed to take to safeguard themselves. These included logging stalking behaviours and using strategies such as changing routes to work, changing area of residence, applying for restraining orders, installing CCTV and alarms, etc.

“I had the National Monitoring Board come out and they put alarms in and I had a visit from the safeguarding officer at [area] police. He was really nice, so he went through a safety plan with me, which I reviewed with [Advocate 2].” - (Victim 6)

Another element of MASIP's role in safety planning involved providing training and awareness workshops for workplaces. Populations such as Health Care Practitioners, are at a higher risk for stalking victimisation (Clarke et al., 2016; Storey, 2016), and need extra support in the workplace to safeguard them. A handful of victim participants had been targeted at their workplace, and part of their safety plan was for the MASIP professionals to deliver informative workshops and encourage employers to consider their duty of care to victims of stalking.

Discussion

This study contributes to the growing body of work examining the value of stalking victim advocacy (VA) practices as well as safety planning for victims (Boehnlein, et al., 2020; Nichols, 2019; Logan & Walker, 2017; 2018). All victims interviewed in this study expressed various levels of harms resulting from stalking behaviours and subsequent treatment of their case through the legal system. This gave rise to specific needs such as emotional support, single point of contact for legal procedures and advice on risk management. MASIP VAs attempted to meet these needs, which included understanding victims' current mental-well-being, guidance and management of practical procedures and safety planning.

The emotional support and understanding that VAs provided victims with, seemed to build a crucial trust-based relationship. Though MASIP VAs were not trained therapists, their service did serve a therapeutic purpose to victims. As many stalking victims feel isolated and confused following victimization (Logan & Walker, 2018), having access to someone who they believe to be a legitimate source to speak to, may alleviate negative emotions. For the victims in this study, talking through their trauma with an advocate who understood their experiences and was able to offer ample advice, seemed to mitigate their frustration of feeling unheard or misunderstood. Such feelings often originally arose within victim's conventional support networks but could also be exacerbated through their experience with the police and court processes. By having regular contact with MASIP advocates, many victims were able to build rapport over time, which allowed for open communication to address their vulnerabilities. This relationship also revealed specific details to VAs who could use the information to sharpen MASIP's risk assessment process, devise effective risk-management strategies and empower victims to take part in their own safety-planning. We therefore argue that the relationship between victims and their advocates was crucial to the risk-management process.

Advocacy also had the potential to impact on the victim's engagement with the CJS. Due to the psychological impacts of stalking and interactions with criminal justice agencies, several victims voiced the need of support to guide their legal decisions. The value of advocacy as a means for victims to access relevant resources seemed to be appreciated since victims' needs are often practical (Van der Aa & Groenen, 2011; Boehnlein et.al, 2020). For victims who were interacting with the justice system for the first time, having multiple agencies contact them about an incident could feel overwhelming and having a single point of

contact (the MASIP advocate), mitigated this duplication of anxiety. MASIP's multi-agency model aimed to counter past criminal justice deficiencies such as limited information sharing between agencies and time lag in communication to victims. This inclined victims to explore their legal options with their trusted advocates and subsequently support prosecution. Victims may otherwise have disengaged with the criminal justice process, as is extremely common in stalking offences (see Tompson, Belur & Jerath, 2020). This finding is consistent with previous studies that noted victims who experienced respectful treatment by advocates felt less hesitant to participate in the criminal justice process and anticipated a dignified response by law enforcement (Patterson & Campbell, 2010; Patterson & Tringali, 2015). Since stalking victims undergo numerous life changes after reporting a crime, having one point of contact to assist with all of the victims' needs and support the process of change, can make a daunting process manageable.

The risk-management plans advocates used were mainly centred around victims' needs and alleviation of harms. The MASIP worked to identify risks which may have been complex and ones that victims may not have even been aware of. For example, in non-ex-intimate relationships, victims will not always know what information strangers have regarding their lives. Interactions may start online and transfer to real-life and vice-versa, leading the victim to be more vulnerable due to the scale of uncertainty. They may have to check and erase any personal information about them online, block social media and then work towards breaking any stalking patterns that a stalker may have within their physical space. In ex-intimate cases, the offender is usually familiar with the victim's personal information and daily routines. This can make the process of safeguarding difficult to victims as they have to change their day-to-day routines, hoping to disrupt their stalker. While all these displacement measures may break a stalker's pattern of behaviour, they require careful thought and planning.

The findings confirm previous support for survivor-centered practices in advocacy (Goodman & Epstein 2008; Nicols, 2019) and stress the importance of multi-agency collaboration in victim risk management (Nicols, 2019; Cleaver et al., 2019; Robinson & Payton, 2016; Wedlock & Tapley, 2016). This may prove to be challenging given the increasing number of caseloads in England and limited support offered to advocates who are in a demanding position. Good quality advocacy was no accident; however, the findings reveal that advocates developed many different skills to meet the needs of victims, indicating that strong professional support, development and evidence-based practice is essential.

Limitations.

A few limitations preclude the study, and future research in the area of multi-agency work and stalking victims should seek to address these. For example, the qualitative nature and modest sample of victims (10). As a population who had recently been traumatised, we were ethically bound not to approach the victims directly but had to instead depend on the

VAs to judge that the victims were at an appropriate point in their recovery to gain consent for us to contact them. This may have biased the (admittedly small) sample to those who were favourably inclined towards their VA, and consequently overestimate the positive impact of the multi-agency partnerships. Other biases that may be present in this recruitment process were victims who felt confident enough to discuss their experiences, or whom had an agenda to pursue (e.g. progressing their case). Nevertheless, speaking to a hard-to-reach population on a sensitive topic such as victimisation will generally encounter recruitment issues, and we believe that the voices that are represented in these findings are valid for at least some victims.

Though the findings of this study can help to highlight the experiences of those who participated in MASIP, they should not be considered representative of the diverse victim communities across England and Wales who experience stalking. The demographic information of the victim sample reveals that all were White-British and mostly women. This bias may indicate a low representation of victims from minoritized communities, who refrain from reporting or engaging with the CJS due to distrust of the police, or fears around stigmatisation. More research surrounding the long-term impact of such programs on stalking victims (in terms of criminal justice engagement, risk management and revictimization) would strengthen the case for advocacy and multi-agency collaboration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a multi-agency approach to safeguarding stalking victims could be an effective way to improve experiences in relation to managing harms of stalking and dealing with the CJS. Victims of stalking can bear numerous psychological, physical and economic harms as a result of victimization. These harms vary in their manner and degree, and translate to specific individualized victim needs, which is why providing an informed service to offer bespoke advice is imperative for victims to cope with their experiences. Major challenges that stalking victims face are managing their emotional well-being, practicalities around legal decisions they make and physical safeguarding. Overall, findings support advocacy, equipped with all-encompassing knowledge, as a valuable support tool for victims. This avenue seems to provide victims with appropriate emotional and pragmatic support, equip victims with the knowledge and confidence needed to keep them engaged with the justice system, and allow them to realize safety risks and participate in actively managing those risks.

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