Untangling the Web: An Exploration of Cyberstalking Perpetration, Victimisation, Categorisation, and Criminal Justice Responses

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Abstract

This thesis explored the complex and evolving nature of stalking and cyberstalking, providing empirical insights into perpetration, victimisation, categorisation, and criminal justice responses in four empirical chapters. Chapter 2 presented a systematic review of cyberstalking perpetrators and methods, finding that perpetrators often exhibit low self-control, poor social skills, prior victimisation, and high internet use. Motivations commonly include revenge, reconciliation, or control, with methods such as repeated unwanted online contact, GPS tracking, impersonation, account intrusion, and contacting victims' acquaintances. Chapter 3 examined cyberstalking from victim and perpetrator perspectives, revealing a key discrepancy: victims most often reported unwanted contact, while perpetrators most often reported covert monitoring, suggesting cyberstalking can occur without victims' awareness and complicates detection. Chapter 4 attempted to validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology for the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases, finding that most cases can be categorised based on perpetrator motivation. A novel modality-based categorisation was also introduced: mixed cases involving in-person stalking and cyberstalking; online cases involving only cyberstalking; and offline cases involving only in-person stalking. Chapter 5 assessed criminal justice responses in England and Wales, identifying systemic delays and barriers that hinder case progression and victim support. Ultimately, there remains a need for improved measures to prevent recidivism. Chapters 4 and 5 utilised a large sample of detailed and contextualised cases of stalking and cyberstalking including information from victims, stalking advocates, police, and victim support providers adding significant value to the findings. Overall, this thesis considerably advances understanding of stalking and cyberstalking, establishing foundations for consistent definitions, effective categorisation, and enhanced justice responses.

Publications

Research from this thesis has been published in the following articles:

Weekes, C. J., Storey, J. E., & Pina, A. (2025). Cyberstalking Perpetrators and their Methods: a Systematic Literature Review. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse.* https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380251333411

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Weekes, C. J., Storey, J. E., & Pina, A. (manuscript in preparation). Justice in Progress: Exploring Approaches, Barriers, and Delays to Managing Stalking and Cyberstalking within the Criminal Justice System.

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Presentations

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

Stalking and Cyberstalking Definitions

For the purpose of this thesis and the studies presented within it, the following definitions are adopted: Stalking is any unwanted, repeated in-person behaviour that causes a victim to feel alarm, distress, or fear. Cyberstalking is any unwanted, repeated, online behaviour that causes a victim to feel alarm, distress, or fear. These definitions are in line with suggestions by Wilson and colleagues (2022) to clearly operationalise stalking and cyberstalking, and the clarification of these definitions is necessary in light of research of stalking and cyberstalking to date which lacks a universal approach to operationalising these terms. Definitional issues in the literature culminate in two related ways: how stalking and cyberstalking are defined, operationalised, and measured; and whether stalking and cyberstalking are recognised as distinct offences.

Firstly, definitions of stalking and cyberstalking adopted in existing literature differ in the number of times an unwanted behaviour is required; whether victim fear is required; the timeframe in which unwanted behaviours are required to have occurred; and which behaviours are identified as stalking or cyberstalking (Fox et al., 2011; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Wilson et al., 2022). To address these variations, the definitions chosen for this thesis and the empirical studies presented herein dictate that, to be defined as stalking or cyberstalking, unwanted behaviour must occur more than once and cause alarm, distress, or fear. The chosen definitions do not specify a timeframe in which the behaviour must occur, and are intentionally broad with regard to methods, as no particular method of unwanted, repeated behaviour must be present to classify stalking or

cyberstalking according to legislation in England and Wales (Protection from Harassment Act, 1997; Protection of Freedoms Act 2012).

Secondly, researchers differ in their approach to classifying stalking and cyberstalking as the same offence, either recognising cyberstalking is a 'method' of stalking, or recognising each as two distinct offences. When the stalking literature was emerging in the 1990s and early 2000s, the ability of a stalking perpetrator to engage in unwanted online contact was limited in scope to emails, and this method of unwanted contact was considered as part of a stalking course of conduct rather than as a separate offence of cyberstalking (Fisher et al., 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Early research of stalking therefore included both online and in-person methods of pursuit when operationalising the offence through unwanted communication via telephone, email, letters, or gifts, as well as following, loitering, approaching the victim, conducting surveillance, threats, property damage, and assault (e.g., Mullen et al., 1999; Pathe & Mullen, 1997).

As technology use and online communication increased in the mid 2000s, so did the online methods that a perpetrator could adopt to pursue a victim. Researchers began to measure cyberstalking as a distinct offence, examining the perpetration of unwanted online behaviours through the use of emails; text messages; chat-rooms; blogs; dating websites; gaming websites; viruses; and spamming (e.g., McFarlane & Bocij, 2003). With the introduction of social media in the 2010s, research explored how social media was being used to perpetrate cyberstalking (e.g., Lyndon et al., 2011), and research through the 2020s continues to highlight the significant role of social media and dating applications in facilitating cyberstalking perpetration (Brady et al., 2023; Centelles et al., 2021; Dhir et al., 2021). Alongside social media, recent research highlights how new technologies and software allow a cyberstalking perpetrator to covertly monitor a victim's movements or online activity (Shafqat et al., 2023).

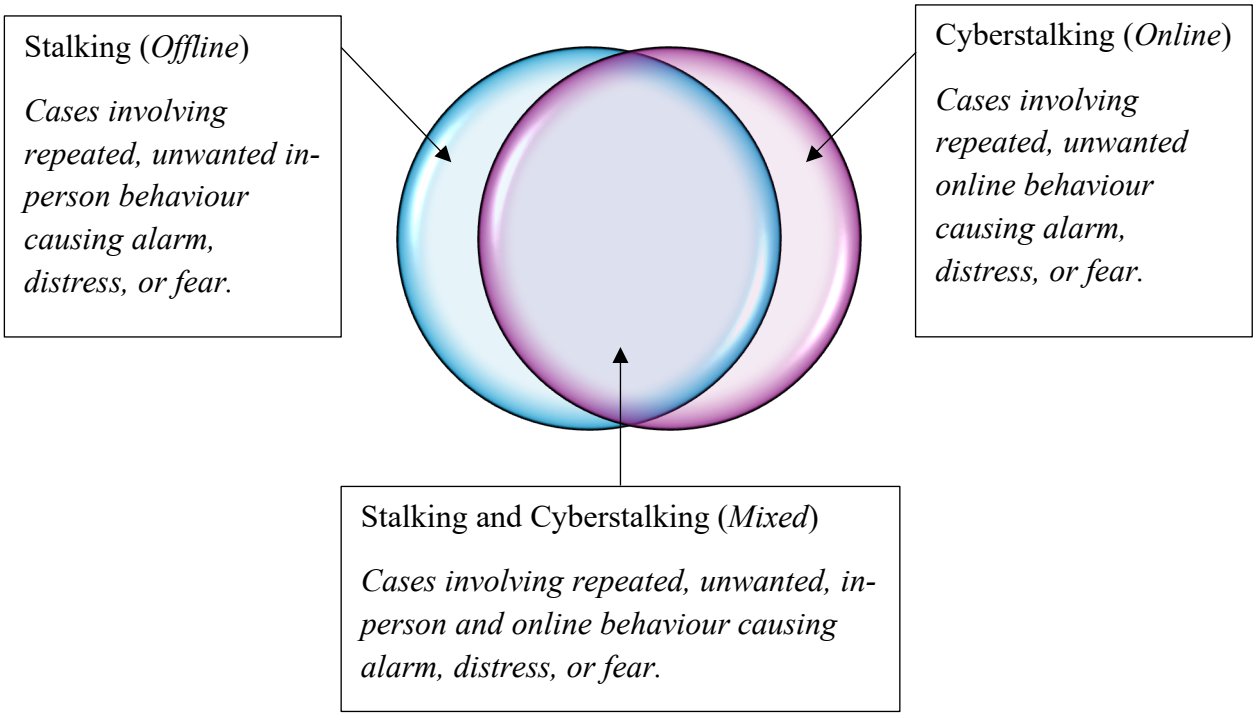
Overall, the exponential increase in the use of technology in our day-to-day lives has been accompanied by a proliferation of cyberstalking research and much literature now examines cyberstalking as a distinct offence to stalking. However, it should be noted that it remains at the discretion of researchers how to define and operationalise stalking and cyberstalking in their own research, and whether to distinguish cyberstalking as a separate offence. Many researchers of stalking continue to include methods of online pursuit when operationalising stalking, without distinguishing cyberstalking as a separate offence. For example, Logan & Walker (2017) proposed a framework for defining and measuring stalking perpetration that includes a variety of both in-person and online methods; Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) operationalised unwanted online contact and online surveillance within categories of stalking behaviours; and Dressing and colleagues (2014) identified the prevalence and impact of stalking by measuring incidents of in-person and online methods of pursuit.

Nonetheless, measuring and operationalising stalking and cyberstalking as distinct offences allows for the identification of similarities and differences beyond modality, such as in relationships; predictors; and victim impacts. For instance, Sheridan and Grant (2007) found that cyberstalking perpetrators were less likely to be an ex-intimate partner of the victim than stalking perpetrators, however this finding is contradicted by a later study by Cavezza and McEwan (2014) within which a higher number of cyberstalking perpetrators were an ex-partner of the victim compared to stalking perpetrators. Predictors of stalking and cyberstalking perpetration differed in a study conducted by Ménard and Pincus (2012), whereby preoccupied attachment predicted cyberstalking but not offline stalking in male perpetrators, and physical victimisation predicted cyberstalking but not offline stalking in female perpetrators. Research has also suggested that cyberstalking victims adopt more self-protective behaviours than offline stalking victims (Nobles

et al., 2014). Given that research to date yields mixed findings regarding differences between stalking and cyberstalking beyond modality, this thesis presents research that aimed to identify further differences between stalking and cyberstalking including whether approaches to categorising cases of stalking can also be utilised to effectively categorise cases of cyberstalking; and whether responses within the Criminal Justice System differ between cases of stalking and cyberstalking. To delineate these differences, this thesis and the enclosed empirical studies define stalking and cyberstalking separately based on a difference in modality (i.e., offline versus online behaviours), conceptualised in Figure 1.1**.**

Figure 1.1

Conceptualising Stalking and Cyberstalking Cases



Stalking Legislation

Legislation introduced over the years to criminalise stalking in England and Wales is summarised in Table 1.1. Prior to the criminalization of stalking in 2012, legislation to prohibit harassment was the only line of defence against repeated, unwanted behaviour for victims in England and Wales. The lines between stalking and harassment are often blurred (James & MacKenzie, 2018), but distinction between the two offences is crucial in research, policy, and practice. Initially, the Protection from Harassment Act was enacted in 1997 to introduce harassment as a criminal offence. Section 2 of this legislation prohibits a person from pursuing a course of conduct which amounts to harassment of another, and which the individual knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of another. An individual is assumed to know that conduct is harassment if "a reasonable person in possession of the same information would think the course of conduct amounted to harassment of the other" (Protection from Harassment Act, 1997; Protection of Freedoms Act, 2012). Harassment is not defined further in the Protection from Harassment Act (1997), but a course of conduct is understood as two or more incidents of unwanted behaviour. Harassment under Section 2 of the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) is a summary offence punishable by a custodial sentence not exceeding six months, and/or a fine. Section 4 of the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) defines a further offence of harassment that causes fear of violence. Section 4 of the legislation prohibits a person from pursuing a course of conduct that causes another to fear, on at least two occasions, that violence will be used against them and that the person knows or ought to know that their course of conduct will cause the other to fear violence. Harassment causing violence under Section 4 of the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) is an either way offence, (i.e., can be heard either in Magistrates' or Crown Courts), punishable by a custodial sentence not exceeding ten years, and/or a fine.

Crucially, Sections 2 and 4 of the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) do not define stalking as a criminal offence or formally proscribe stalking; under this legislation stalking was not specified as a criminal offence in England and Wales. As a result of the insufficiencies of the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) in criminalising stalking, the Protection of Freedoms Act updated this legislation and defined the specific offence of stalking in 2012. Section 2A of this legislation prohibits a course of conduct that amounts to stalking and outlines examples of acts or omissions which are associated with stalking, including following a person; contacting or attempting to contact a person; publishing any statement or material purporting to relate to a person or originate from a person; monitoring a person's use of the internet; loitering; interfering with a person's property; or watching or spying on a person. Stalking under Section 2A of the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) is a summary offence punishable by a custodial sentence not exceeding 51 weeks, and/or a fine.

Section 4A of the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) defines a further offence of stalking which causes fear or serious alarm or distress. Section 4A prohibits a person from pursuing a course of conduct which amounts to stalking and causes another person to fear, on at least two occasions, that violence will be used against them or causes them serious alarm or distress which has an adverse effect on their day-to-day activities. Stalking causing fear of violence or serious alarm or distress under Section 4A of the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) is an either way offence punishable by a custodial sentence not exceeding ten years, and/or a fine. In addition to fines and custodial sentences enacted by Magistrates' or Crown Courts, there are various legal ramifications which can be implemented to prevent further stalking offending and protect victims, such as Restraining Orders. These legal ramifications are examined in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis. The introduction of the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) therefore created a new offence

punishable by a longer custodial sentence and recognising the victim impacts of stalking, thereby taking stalking more seriously and equipping the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales with powers to better protect victims of stalking and cyberstalking.

Table 1.1 overleaf

Table 1.1

Harassment and Stalking Legislation in England and Wales

Legislation	Section	Offence	Definition	Punishment
Protection from Harassment Act (1997)	2	Harassment	A person must not pursue a course of conduct which amounts to harassment of another and which they know or ought to know amounts to harassment.	Summary offence: Up to 6 months' imprisonment and/or a fine.
Protection of Freedoms Act (2012)	2A	Stalking	A person must not pursue a course of conduct that amounts to stalking. Includes behaviours such as following, monitoring, loitering, contacting.	Summary offence: Up to 51 weeks' imprisonment and/or a fine.
Protection from Harassment Act (1997)	4	Harassment (causing fear of violence)	A person must not pursue a course of conduct which causes another to fear violence on at least two occasions, and the perpetrator knows or ought to know this.	Either way offence: Up to 10 years' imprisonment and/or a fine.
Protection of Freedoms Act (2012)	4A	Stalking (causing fear of violence or serious alarm or distress)	A person must not pursue a course of conduct involving stalking which causes the victim to fear violence or feel serious alarm or distress affecting daily life.	Either way offence: Up to 10 years' imprisonment and/or a fine.

It is important to note that, whilst stalking and cyberstalking are defined separately for this thesis and the enclosed empirical studies, cyberstalking is not recognised as a distinct offence to stalking under the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012), as the legislation dictates that stalking can occur in-person or online. That is, a perpetrator of cyberstalking would be committing the criminal offence of stalking under Sections 2A or 4A of the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012). A perpetrator of cyberstalking is therefore subject to the same legal ramifications as a perpetrator of stalking under the legislation; and the management of stalking and cyberstalking within the Criminal Justice System is examined in more detail in Chapter 5.

It is worth noting other relevant legislation for the prevention of unwanted online behaviours, such as the Online Safety Act (2023). This Act modernised elements of the Malicious Communications Act (1988) to better address unwanted online behaviours. The Malicious Communications Act (1988) prohibits communication with the intent to cause distress or anxiety, and was initially updated in 2001 to include electronic communication. This legislation criminalised the sending of a message by any electronic means which is indecent or grossly offensive, a threat, or information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender. The Malicious Communications Act (1988) was further updated with the enactment of the Online Safety Act (2023) which introduced two similar offences. Firstly, the false communications offence, which entails sending or posting false messages intended to cause non-trivial psychological or physical harm. This offence is a summary-only offence punishable by up to 51 weeks' imprisonment and/or a fine. Secondly, the threatening communications offence, which entails sending or posting messages that convey threats of death or serious harm, including serious injury, rape, or significant financial loss. This offence is an either-way offence punishable by up to 5 years' imprisonment and/or a fine.

Whilst the provision of the Online Safety Act (2023) was a vital and significant step in the protection of victims of online harms, it is important that perpetrators of cyberstalking are prosecuted correctly under the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012). Many perpetrators of cyberstalking send false or threatening messages to a victim (e.g., Reyns et al., 2012) but prosecuting a cyberstalking perpetrator under the Online Safety Act (2023) does not account for their course of conduct involving repeated, unwanted online behaviours or the impact that the cyberstalking has on the victim. For instance, a cyberstalking perpetrator charged with a false communications offence under the Online Safety Act (2023) would be subject to a maximum of 51 weeks' imprisonment regardless of the impact on the victim. However, if the perpetrator's behaviour was repeated and caused serious alarm, distress, or fear of violence in the victim, they should be charged with stalking under Section 4A of the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) and thus be subject to a maximum of ten years' imprisonment. Not only does the legislation impact the potential custodial sentence, but also the implementation of other legal ramifications. For example, applying for a Stalking Protection Order (a protective civil order to prevent ongoing stalking behaviours, detailed in Chapter 5) is only possible in a case recognised and pursued as stalking under the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012). Relevant stalking legislation is important to consider for this thesis and the enclosed studies, particularly for the examination of criminal justice responses to stalking and cyberstalking in Chapter 5. Additionally, highlighting the criminalisation of stalking and cyberstalking under the appropriate legislation reiterates the unified operationalisation of the offences as unwanted, repeated behaviour that causes alarm, distress, or fear.

Prevalence and Impact of Stalking and Cyberstalking

General estimates of lifetime stalking victimisation range from 7% to 17.5% for women, and 2% to 7.2% for men (Breiding, 2015; Dressing et al., 2005, 2020; Purcell et al., 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In cyberstalking research, self-reported victimisation rates have varied from 3.4% to 40.8% (Berry & Bainbridge, 2017; DeKeseredy et al., 2019; Dressing et al., 2014; Fissel, 2021; Kraft & Wang, 2010; Lee & O'Sullivan, 2014; Reyns, 2019; Reyns et al., 2012). Some research indicates that, in line with stalking victimisation, victims of cyberstalking are more likely to be female (Kalaitzaki, 2020; Reyns et al., 2012), whereas other studies have found a higher propensity of male cyberstalking victims (March et al., 2020, 2021). Prevalence rates are influenced not only by the aforementioned definitional differences, but also by victims' ability to recognise stalking or cyberstalking behaviours and self-identify as victims. McNamara and Marsil (2012), for instance, compared prevalence rates of stalking victimisation measured using behavioural indicators (e.g., "has someone ever followed you to your school, work, or home without your consent?"), with prevalence rates measured only through victim self-identification (e.g., "have you ever been a victim of stalking?"). In their study, 43% of individuals had experienced stalking victimisation according to the behavioural indicators, yet only 12% of individuals self-identified as stalking victims. In a further study, 50% of cyberstalking victims did not label their experience as such, despite having experienced unwanted and threatening online behaviours (Brady and colleagues, 2023) thus prevalence rates identified in extant literature may underestimate the true rates of stalking and cyberstalking victimisation.

Victims of stalking and cyberstalking experience extensive psychological, physical, and practical impacts. Stalking and cyberstalking victims report experiencing anxiety, panic attacks, depression, intrusive thoughts, and suicidal ideation (Dressing et al., 2005, 2014, 2020; Pathe &

Mullen, 1997; Stieger et al., 2008; Storey et al., 2023; Worsley et al., 2017). Many victims also experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, often linked to violence experienced during their relationship with the perpetrator (Pathe & Mullen, 1997). Stalking and cyberstalking victimisation has significant impacts on a victim's ability to feel safe, with many victims reporting feeling hypervigilant, mistrust towards others; afraid to enter a new relationship; and social withdrawal (Dressing et al., 2014; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Storey et al., 2023; Worsley et al., 2017). Victims of stalking also report issues with sleep, appetite and weight, and headaches (Dressing et al., 2005; Pathe & Mullen, 1997). Stalking and cyberstalking impacts a victim's ability to live their day-to-day life, with many victims reporting that they have to change their lifestyle or routines; take extra safety precautions; take time off from, or stop, school or work; move house or job; and change phone numbers (Amar, 2006; Dressing et al., 2005, 2020; Maple et al., 2011; Pathe & Mullen, 1997). Victims of cyberstalking also report having to change or decrease their online presence, including removing social media accounts and losing contact with family and friends (Worsley et al., 2017). One study also identified that victims of stalking and cyberstalking reported significant impact on others around them including family, children, partners, friends, neighbours, and colleagues (Storey et al., 2023).

Further research has examined predictors of stalking and cyberstalking impact. For instance, stalking severity has been found to predict the psychological and physical impact on victims (Kamphuis et al., 2003). Relatedly, the diversity and number of stalking methods adopted and the duration of stalking have both been found to predict victim impact (Johnson & Kercher, 2009; Storey et al., 2023). Victim impact has also been predicted by victim-perpetrator relationship; victims who had a prior relationship with their perpetrator (ex-intimate partner or acquaintance) experienced greater psychological, physical, and social impacts of stalking

victimisation than victims targeted by a stranger perpetrator (Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012). Conversely, Storey and colleagues (2023) identified that victims targeted by a stranger reported greater impact on others, compared to victims targeted by an ex-intimate partner or acquaintance. Research also suggests that, overall, there are not significant differences in the psychological and physical impacts of stalking on male and female victims (Acquadro Maran & Varetto, 2018; Dressing et al., 2005; Maple et al., 2011).

Aims and Rationale of the Thesis

Evidently, stalking and cyberstalking are varied and complex offences with far-reaching consequences. Ongoing research of cyberstalking perpetration and victimisation, in particular, is essential to keep up with the ever-changing nature of the offence. New technologies through which cyberstalking can be perpetrated covertly are constantly emerging, including new platforms, software, applications, and communication tools. These evolving technologies allow a perpetrator to infiltrate many aspects of the victim's life, especially when used in conjunction. Research to date has also identified differences between stalking and cyberstalking beyond modality and this warrants further exploration. This thesis presents a systematic literature review and three empirical studies which examined the perpetration and victimisation of stalking and cyberstalking. This thesis aims to provide a succinct overview of cyberstalking in context, identifying who is perpetrating cyberstalking and the methods used to instil alarm, distress, or fear in a victim; the relationships present between victims and perpetrators; and the motivations behind cyberstalking perpetration. This thesis will also attempt to validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology for the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases, and will explore the Criminal Justice System (CJS) responses to stalking and cyberstalking in England and Wales. This thesis therefore aims to answer the following broad research questions:

RQ1: Who are the perpetrators of cyberstalking and what methods do they use?

RQ2: Do cyberstalking victim and perpetrator perspectives differ regarding cyberstalking methods, victim-perpetrator relationships, and motivations?

RQ3: Can Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology be validated for the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases?

RQ4: What are the criminal justice system responses to stalking and cyberstalking, and do these differ according to stalking modality?

Structure and Overview of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is dictated by each empirical study. Chapter 2 is a published systematic review of existing research of cyberstalking perpetrators and their methods (Weekes et al., 2025). Two databases were searched for empirical studies and literature reviews that explored cyberstalking perpetration and methods, identifying 80 relevant papers. The literature revealed that cyberstalking perpetrators often exhibited poor social skills, low self-control, endorsement of pro-stalking attitudes, increased levels of Internet use, and had often experienced physical abuse victimisation. Motivations for cyberstalking included attempts to reconcile a relationship; seek revenge; initiate a relationship; or exert control over the victim. Cyberstalking was most often perpetrated through unwanted, repeated online contact; accessing the victim's online accounts; tracking the victim's location; impersonating the victim; or contacting the victim's friends and family. Overall, the findings of this systematic review highlighted the varied characteristics of cyberstalking perpetrators and the range of methods adopted by perpetrators to instil alarm, distress, or fear in victims.

Chapter 3 presents an empirical study of experiences of cyberstalking from victim and perpetrator perspectives. A total of 505 individuals completed the cyberstalking victimisation questionnaire, and 527 individuals completed the cyberstalking perpetration questionnaire, identifying a victimisation rate of 14.7% and a perpetration rate of 2.1%. The most frequently reported method of cyberstalking among victims was repeated, unwanted online contact (98.6%), whereas the most common method of cyberstalking reported by perpetrators was covert online monitoring (81.8%). Relationships varied between victims and perpetrators, mostly comprising current or ex-intimate partners; friends or ex-friends; and strangers. Motivations reported by both victims and perpetrators included revenge (reported by 44.6% of victims and 36.4% of perpetrators) and reconciliation (reported by 41.9% of victims and 36.4% of perpetrators). The findings of this study reveal a significant discrepancy in how victims and perpetrators perceive and report methods of cyberstalking. Evidently, cyberstalking can be perpetrated without the victim's knowledge and perpetrators are engaging in these covert methods to monitor a victim's whereabouts and online activity. This study has important implications for defining and operationalising cyberstalking to accurately identify rates of victimisation and perpetration.

Chapter 4 presents an empirical study which aimed to validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology in the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases. Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology outlines five groups of stalking perpetrators based on perpetrator motivation, namely *Rejected*, *Resentful*, *Intimacy Seeker*, *Incompetent Suitor*, and *Predatory*. Despite the widespread use of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology, only one study to date has examined the applicability of the typology to categorise cyberstalking cases but did not involve statistical validation (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). The study presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis adopted hierarchical cluster analysis to identify subgroups in a large dataset

of stalking and cyberstalking cases. Analysis of victim and perpetrator demographics; stalking modality; methods; motivations; and victim impacts revealed that cases of stalking and cyberstalking naturally grouped into three clusters based primarily on modality: *Mixed*, the largest cluster which contained mostly cases involving in-person stalking and cyberstalking; *Online*, which contained mostly cases involving only cyberstalking; and *Offline*, which contained mostly cases involving only in-person stalking. These clusters did not align with the motivational groups outlined in Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology. Separately, cases were categorised according to Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology using clinical judgement, which was successful in identifying and categorising perpetrator motivation for cases of stalking and cyberstalking. While motivational groups differed in the number and types of stalking and cyberstalking methods used, they did not differ significantly in stalking duration or likelihood of violence which differed to findings of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) original study. The findings of this study suggest that cases of cyberstalking differ to cases of in-person stalking, but most cases involve a variety of in-person and online methods of pursuit. Additionally, Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology remains useful for understanding perpetrator motivation in stalking and cyberstalking cases, but should be utilised in conjunction with other tools to build a comprehensive picture of stalking and cyberstalking.

Chapter 5 presents an empirical study examining how stalking and cyberstalking are managed within the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in England and Wales. Including a large dataset of stalking and cyberstalking cases that had all been reported to the police and involved advocate support, the study identified the prevalence of an array of legal ramifications and explored whether CJS responses were associated with stalking modality (mixed, online, offline) and level of concern identified using the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH; McEwan et al.,

2015). Verbal warnings and cautions were used in a minority of cases and were not significantly associated with stalking cessation. Most cases subsequently involved the arrest of the perpetrator and around half involved the implementation of bail conditions. Legal injunctions included Restraining Orders; Stalking Protection Orders; and suspended or custodial sentences, all of which were significantly associated with stalking cessation. Non-Molestation Orders were also applied for in some cases, independent of the CJS. Most CJS responses were not associated with stalking modality, with the exception of a verbal warning which was most likely in offline cases. Additionally, cases identified as low or moderate concern according to the SASH were more likely than high concern cases to involve a verbal warning. High concern cases were more likely than moderate concern cases to involve arrest of the perpetrator. Most cases involved a delay or barrier in their progression through the CJS, for example, that the victim disengaged (15.3%) or that the investigating officer was unresponsive (27.6%). The study identified an overall attrition rate of 70.1% from the opening of an investigation to the implementation of a legal ramification. The findings of this study indicate that stalking modality does not appear to influence the application of various legal ramifications which suggests that cyberstalking is treated on par with stalking within the justice system. However, the findings highlight significant barriers and delays in the management of stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS and that most cases do not progress through to a legal ramification.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides an overall discussion of the thesis, bringing together the findings from the systematic literature review and three empirical studies to consider the theoretical, practical, and policy implications. This chapter concludes that discrepancies between victim and perpetrator reports complicate efforts to measure and define cyberstalking accurately. Perpetrators adopt a wide variety of in-person and online methods to cause alarm, distress, or fear

in a victim, but many of these methods can be perpetrated covertly without the victim's knowledge. Varying definitions based on victim or perpetrator samples is essential to improve the accuracy and applicability of ongoing research. When categorising cases of stalking and cyberstalking, Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology proves useful in classifying perpetrator motivation. Further inferences from the motivational groups, however, should be adopted with caution. For instance, the motivational groups could not consistently indicate the presence of certain stalking and cyberstalking methods or likelihood of violence, contrary to Mullen and colleagues' (1999) previous findings. When clustered statistically, cases of stalking and cyberstalking grouped according to modality (mixed, online, offline) suggesting that, while most cases involved both in-person stalking and cyberstalking, cases that involved only cyberstalking were distinct to cases that involved only in-person stalking. Notwithstanding, mixed, online, and offline cases were not managed significantly differently in the Criminal Justice System. While justice responses included the provision of various legal injunctions, substantial attrition of cases throughout the CJS process was noted, and many cases faced significant barriers or delays.

CHAPTER 2

A Review of 'Who' and 'How'

This chapter is published as a standalone systematic literature review in the following journal:

Weekes, C. J., Storey, J. E., & Pina, A. (2025). Cyberstalking Perpetrators and their Methods: a Systematic Literature Review. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse.* https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380251333411

The undeniable and exponential growth of the Internet and social media has streamlined communication between individuals across the globe (Paullet & Chawdhry, 2020). However, researchers have noted that social media can facilitate high-risk online behaviours such as sending sexually explicit messages (sexting), image-based sexual abuse, distribution of malware, trolling, and cyberstalking (Akram & Kumar, 2018; Cookingham & Ryan, 2015; Howard et al., 2019; Marcum et al., 2017; Powell et al., 2020). Cyberstalking is the subject of an increasing body of research, however, there remains a need to better our knowledge of cyberstalking perpetrators and their methods of cyberstalking to help inform our understanding of, and ability to predict, patterns within cyberstalking perpetration (Kaur et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2023). Thus, the aim of this systematic literature review is to summarize the existing research into cyberstalking perpetrators and their methods.

Although definitions of 'offline' stalking and cyberstalking vary across research, policy, and practice (Wilson et al., 2022), stalking is generally defined as repeated, unwanted behaviour that causes a victim distress or fear, and cyberstalking is when this behaviour is conducted solely online. Cyberstalking, therefore, generally includes repeated monitoring, contacting, or pursuit of an individual exclusively using technology and/or the Internet (Becker et al., 2020; Marcum et al., 2017; Nobles et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2022). Whether cyberstalking should be considered a

method of stalking, or that it is a fundamentally distinct form of behaviour, has been debated and a consensus has not yet been reached (Nobles et al., 2014; Sheridan & Grant, 2007; Wilson et al., 2022). Ultimately, most stalking cases include a mixture of offline and online behaviours during the course of conduct (Wilson et al., 2022; Woodlock, 2017) and there remains a need to elucidate whether there is a meaningful distinction between stalking and cyberstalking.

The academic understanding of cyberstalking is improving with an increase in research over recent years (Kaur et al., 2021). However, a literature review by Wilson and colleagues (2022), examining how cyberstalking is measured in research, highlighted inconsistencies among definitions and operationalizations of cyberstalking. All 33 studies included in the review adopted definitions of cyberstalking which stated that the behaviours were unwanted by the victim, but definitions differed in their requirements of cyberstalking duration and timeframe, perpetrator intent, and victim fear. Of the included studies, 45% provided a minimum number of incidents required for the behaviour to be considered cyberstalking. Of these, 21% defined repetition as the behaviour being experienced one or more times (e.g., Maran & Begotti, 2019), 21% required two or more times (e.g., Dardis & Gidycz, 2017), and 3% required ten or more occurrences (e.g., Sheridan & Grant, 2007). The remaining 55% of studies did not specify a minimum number of behaviours, and instead only implied that the behaviours must have been repeated (Wilson et al., 2022). Further, only 30% of studies asked the victim to identify if the behaviour caused them to feel fear for their safety (e.g., Fissel & Reyns, 2019). Thus, the operationalization of cyberstalking in research is inconsistent and there is a need for a universal definition and criteria for cyberstalking to support consistent future research. Suggestions forwarded in the research literature include requiring a minimum number of cyberstalking behaviours, or minimum duration of the

cyberstalking pursuit, but further research is needed to specify what these minimums would be (R. Purcell et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2022).

Logan and Walker (2017) have proposed a multidimensional framework which provides a basis for a consistent stalking definition and encourages a systematic approach to assessing a course of conduct. Namely, stalking is an intentional course of conduct including tactics of surveillance, life invasion, intimidation, and interference, that is unwanted by the victim and causes the victim to feel reasonable fear. The authors highlight that stalking is a dynamic act which differs in duration, intensity, and frequency. The framework applies to both stalking and cyberstalking with the only distinction being the modality of perpetration, i.e., stalking occurs 'offline' and cyberstalking occurs online. The framework aligns with many legal definitions of cyberstalking, including statutes in the United States (Branscum et al., 2021; Hazelwood & Koon-Magnin, 2013) and the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) in the United Kingdom, which generally define cyberstalking as any unwanted, repeated online behaviour that causes the victim reasonable alarm, distress, or fear. The adoption of such a framework would therefore allow a standardized approach to defining and operationalizing cyberstalking with relevance to existing legal definitions.

The lack of a universal definition of cyberstalking in research has contributed to varying estimates of the prevalence of cyberstalking perpetration and victimization. In both general population and university samples, self-reported cyberstalking victimization rates have varied from 3.4% to 40.8% and self-reported rates of cyberstalking perpetration have varied from 4.9% to 50.9% (Berry & Bainbridge, 2017; DeKeseredy et al., 2019; Dressing et al., 2014; Fissel et al., 2021; Kraft & Wang, 2010; Lee & O'Sullivan, 2014; Lyndon et al., 2011; Navarro et al., 2016; Reyns et al., 2012, 2018). Researchers have also noted that victims may be unable to self-identify

as victims, despite experiencing ‘offline’ stalking and cyberstalking according to definitional criteria. For instance, McNamara and Marsil 2012) identified that 75% of stalking victims did not label their experience as stalking, and Brady and colleagues (2023) identified that 50% of cyberstalking victims did not consider the perpetrator to be cyberstalking them. Relatedly, Delia Montero-Fernández and colleagues (2023) examined the perceived acceptability of various cyberstalking methods in the context of intimate relationships. A striking majority, 70% of females and 56% of males, agreed that reading a partner’s private online conversations was acceptable behaviour. Many methods of cyberstalking may therefore be minimized or justified by perpetrators, mirroring findings in domestic abuse research whereby perpetrators are known to often justify their actions (Giezek et al., 2023). Overall, victims and perpetrators of cyberstalking may under-recognize and under-report methods of cyberstalking, having implications for ongoing research into prevalence rates.

Nonetheless, research has highlighted the detrimental and extensive impact of cyberstalking on victims (Worsley et al., 2017). Victims of cyberstalking are likely to experience anxiety, depression, helplessness, sleep disturbance, physical health deterioration, and social withdrawal (Dressing et al., 2005, 2014; Worsley et al., 2017). Victims of cyberstalking report various coping responses and impacts on their daily life such as having to reduce their attendance or change their place of school/work, and reduce or cease use of social media (Dressing et al., 2005; Worsley et al., 2017).

Despite reviews by Wilson and colleagues (2023) and Kaur and colleagues (2021) having explored cyberstalking perpetration, there remains scope for the current systematic review, especially in light of the ever-changing technological landscape which enables perpetrators to quickly develop novel methods of cyberstalking. Wilson and colleagues (2023) highlighted key

factors relating to perpetration, including deviant peer association, low self-control, previous victimization, and personality traits. Kaur and colleagues (2021) identified the major thematic areas within cyberstalking research to date, namely predictors of perpetration and victimization as well as the role of stakeholders. These reviews provide a succinct summary of much cyberstalking research, however, neither review fully explored methods of cyberstalking. The existing body of cyberstalking research is oriented towards victimization (i.e., predictors of victimization; victim experiences, and impact on victims) and, whilst the importance of this research should not be understated, a more comprehensive understanding of cyberstalking perpetration and methods is required (Kaur et al., 2021).

Policing cyberstalking evokes a variety of challenges. For instance, many police officers have a limited working knowledge of the fast-evolving technology used by cyberstalking perpetrators or the risks that perpetrators pose to victims (O'Shea et al., 2019). With an enhanced understanding of cyberstalking perpetration set out by this systematic review, future research should investigate whether existing stalking typologies, risk factors, and risk assessment tools can be considered effective in the policing and management of cyberstalking cases. In addition, a summary of the methods used by cyberstalking perpetrators provided by this systematic review can inform authorities of what behaviours to expect in cases of cyberstalking, and consequently, which restrictions are required in legal injunctions or court orders put in place to protect victims. The current systematic literature review identifies empirical research into perpetrators and methods of cyberstalking aiming to answer two research questions: (1) Who are the perpetrators of cyberstalking?, and (2) What are the methods of cyberstalking?

Method

This systematic literature review followed PRISMA-P guidelines (Moher et al., 2015) to ensure transparency of method and was pre-registered on PROSPERO.

Terminology Parameters

Previous reviews have identified that existing literature uses a range of terminology to describe cyberstalking behaviour (Wilson et al., 2022, 2023). The search process therefore began with a preliminary search of the literature to identify keywords for use in the database search. This was performed on Google Scholar using the keyword 'cyberstalking'. The first 50 results ordered by relevance, where a full text paper was available, were consulted and the variant keywords 'online stalking', 'internet stalking', 'cyber-stalking', and 'cyber obsessional pursuit' were identified for inclusion in the search criteria. These search terms were combined to create searches on SCOPUS and Web of Science, Figure 1 demonstrates the database search process. To adopt an inclusive approach and address the issue of definitional variations, a specific definition of cyberstalking was not considered as part of the search process.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To reflect the modern-day usage of communication technologies such as social media and smartphone devices, and the perpetration of cyberstalking on these platforms, the date range of 2009 – 2024 was chosen for study inclusion. Prior to 2009, research on cyberstalking generally focused on the use of email, telephone, chatrooms, and instant messages (D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003). The availability and use of social media platforms and smartphones has grown exponentially since 2009 and it is widely understood that cyberstalking now commonly occurs through social media and smartphones (Dressing et al., 2014; Lyndon et al., 2011).

The search identified 507 papers from the two databases. Duplicates were removed (n = 131), leaving 376 papers to be screened for eligibility by the first author. Eligibility screening was conducted through title and abstract reading against the following inclusion criteria: the term 'cyberstalking' or an alternative term (i.e., 'online stalking', 'internet stalking', 'cyber-stalking',

'cyber obsessional pursuit') was included in title, keywords, or abstract, the paper was an empirical study, literature review, or meta-analysis, the paper focused on perpetration and/or methods of cyberstalking, the paper was published in a peer-reviewed journal from 2009-2024, and the full text was available in English. Empirical papers that included *only* participants under 18 were excluded, since research into children's online behaviours generally focuses on cyberbullying, defined as repeated, intentional, harmful, often anonymous online contact towards another child or adolescent, often perpetrated within school contexts and involving multiple perpetrators and victims (Aboujaoude et al., 2015; Chandrashekhar et al., 2016) and is generally considered distinct to cyberstalking (Kircaburun et al., 2018). Gray literature was excluded from the review due to the absence of peer review and issues with quality, credibility, and reproducibility. Papers were removed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria (n = 246), leaving 130 papers to be assessed for relevance and quality. The reliability of inclusion/exclusion ratings was examined using Cohen's kappa value, on a random sample of 10 papers coded independently by the first and second authors. The Cohen's kappa value was 1.0 indicating perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

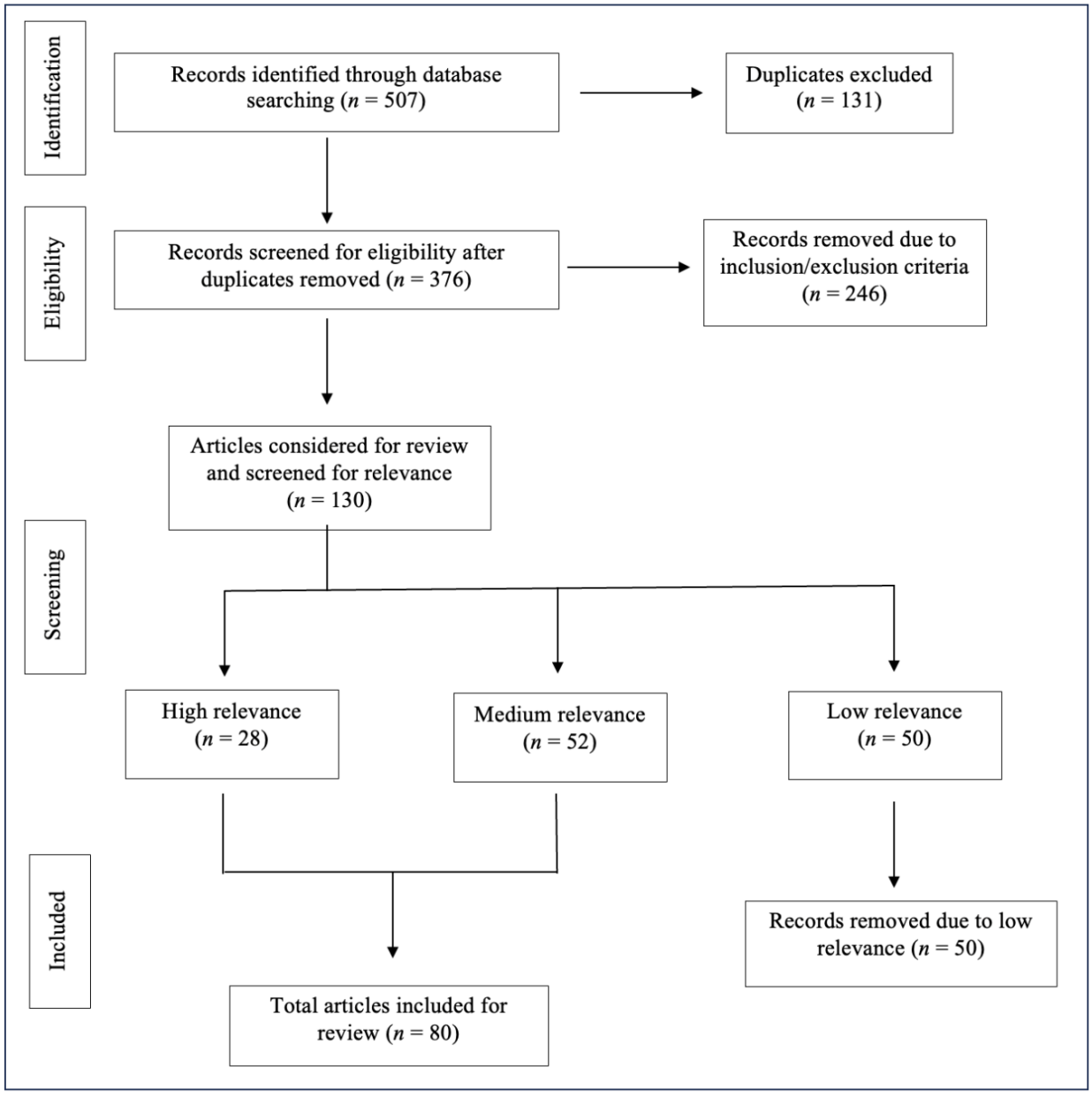
Relevance Screening

The first author categorized the 130 papers as high, medium, or low relevance based on their relevance to the research questions. Papers were rated as high relevance if they could be used to directly answer both research questions. Papers were rated as medium relevance if they could be used to answer one research question. Papers were rated as low relevance if they could not directly answer either research question. Reliability of the relevance ratings was examined using Cohen's kappa value on a sample of 10 papers, coded independently by the first and third authors. The Cohen's kappa value was .688, indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Papers rated as high relevance (n = 28), or medium relevance (n = 52) totalled 80 papers to be included in the systematic review. Papers rated as low relevance (n = 50) were not included in the results of the systematic review.

Figure 2.1

Literature Search Process



Results

Who are the Perpetrators of Cyberstalking?

Perpetrator Gender

Ten studies identified differences in the gender balance of cyberstalking perpetrators. Out of these, three studies found that being female significantly predicted cyberstalking perpetration (March et al., 2020; Resett et al., 2023; Silva Santos et al., 2021). Specifically, two further studies found that women were more likely than men to perpetrate intimate partner cyberstalking, (i.e., targeting a person of romantic interest to obtain or maintain a romantic connection; Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021; Smoker & March, 2017). Three studies found a higher prevalence of male perpetrators (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014; Fernández-Cruz et al., 2021; Reyns, 2019). Only one of the ten studies found no gender difference in cyberstalking perpetration (Fissel, 2021). Overall, there was not a consensus on the gender balance of cyberstalking perpetration, and gender alone was not identified as a reliable predictor (Wilson et al., 2023).

Research by Dardis and Gidycz (2019) explored how cyberstalking perpetration differs by gender. The authors defined 'minor cyber unwanted pursuit' behaviours as excessive contact or seeking information about the victim, motivated by the desire to reconcile a relationship, and 'severe cyber unwanted pursuit' behaviours as sending explicit threats or using GPS to monitor a victim's location, motivated by coercive control. Results showed that women were more likely to perpetrate 'minor cyber unwanted pursuit' behaviours whereas men were more likely to engage in 'severe cyber unwanted pursuit' behaviours. Studies by Begotti et al., (2020) and Nuttman-Shwartz et al., (2023) highlighted that male cyberstalking perpetrators engaged in a greater number of cyberstalking behaviours, including unwanted online sexual advances, and online threats of violence. Three studies posited that women may be more likely to engage in covert cyberstalking behaviours due to the relative anonymity afforded by these online acts, and this may be motivated

by insecurity or rejection sensitivity (March et al., 2020; Miller, 2012). Men, however, may be thrill-seeking through their overt, more severe cyberstalking behaviours (March et al., 2020; Smoker & March, 2017).

Personality and Psychological Traits

Regarding personality and psychological predictors of cyberstalking perpetration among women, high borderline traits, low self-control, childhood physical abuse, preoccupied attachment style, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and 'offline' stalking victimization have all been found to predict cyberstalking perpetration (Duffy et al., 2023; Holmes et al., 2022; Ménard & Pincus, 2012; Reyns, 2019). Conversely, sending explicit messages, experience of childhood sexual abuse, and narcissistic vulnerability (poor self- and emotion-regulation in response to self-enhancement failures) have been found to predict cyberstalking perpetration among men (Ménard & Pincus, 2012; Reyns, 2019).

Many studies also explored psychological traits and disorders as predictors of cyberstalking perpetration, without regard to gender. A meta-analysis by Kim (2023) examining self-report studies on cyberstalking perpetration and victimization, as well as systematic literature reviews by Kaur and colleagues (2021) and Moor and Anderson (2019), highlighted that anxiety, depression, PTSD, sadism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism, were most strongly correlated with cyberstalking perpetration when compared to other risk domains such as sociodemographics, relationship status, and community support. Considering the dark tetrad traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, sadism, and psychopathy), further self-report studies by Branković and colleagues (2023) and Smoker and March (2017), identified that all dark tetrad traits were positively correlated with cyberstalking perpetration. However, Kircaburun and colleagues (2018) identified

that only sadism, Machiavellianism, and narcissism were directly associated with cyberstalking, but not psychopathy.

Social Skills, Attachment and Self-Control

Jenaro and colleagues (2018) identified that cyberstalking perpetrators were more likely than non-perpetrators to be impulsive and lack social skills. Cyberstalking perpetration was also correlated with increased levels of attachment anxiety (i.e., worries about the availability of a partner, desire for closeness, and fear of rejection). The authors hypothesized that an individual may engage in intimate partner cyberstalking if they perceive a threat to their relationship and fear abandonment (Reiss et al., 2021). Research into self-control and its relationship with intimate partner cyberstalking perpetration identified that low self-control significantly predicted perpetration, including infiltrating the victim's personal accounts and tracking their location, as well as the belief that cyberstalking would not have a negative impact on the victim (Marcum et al., 2017, 2018).

Attitudes and Emotional Characteristics

Chan and colleagues (2021) highlighted correlations between emotional characteristics, endorsement of stalking-related attitudes, and cyberstalking perpetration. Specifically, emotion dysregulation, (i.e., a lack of emotional awareness/understanding, poor impulse control, and poor coping mechanisms) was directly associated with cyberstalking perpetration. The authors also measured stalking-related attitudes pertaining to the minimization of stalking, (i.e., the belief that staking is not serious), flattery (i.e., stalking is romantic), and victim blaming. A higher endorsement of these stalking-supportive attitudes was positively associated with cyberstalking perpetration, and the authors stated that this association may exist because it enables perpetrators to justify and minimize the nature of their cyberstalking (Chan et al., 2021).

Childhood and Adulthood Experiences

Research has also highlighted how childhood and adulthood experiences correlate with cyberstalking perpetration. Cano-Gonzalez and colleagues (2020) identified that participants with exposure to parental violence in childhood were more likely to perpetrate cyberstalking in adulthood, than those with no exposure. A replication study, including 1,113 young adults, also found that individuals with experiences of childhood maltreatment and parental violence were more likely to perpetrate intimate partner cyberstalking (Cano-Gonzalez et al., 2023). Considering violent experiences in adulthood, one study identified that physical abuse victimization from a partner predicted intimate partner cyberstalking perpetration (Curry & Zavala, 2020).

Extent and Nature of Internet Use

Six studies explored the relationship between cyberstalking perpetration and the extent of Internet use including the frequency and nature of use, risky online behaviours, social media engagement, and Internet addiction. Reviews by Jenaro and colleagues (2018) and Marcum and Higgins (2021) highlighted that high levels of access to technology, high rates of Internet use, and greater time spent online predicted cyberstalking perpetration. Reyns (2019) identified that cyberstalking perpetration was predicted by sexting (receiving explicit images) in both men and women. Silva Santos and colleagues (2021) identified a positive correlation between cyberstalking perpetration and social media engagement, demonstrating that perpetrators tend to use social media sites more frequently. Internet addiction, i.e., an individual's problematic use of the Internet when this is detrimental to their day-to-day functioning and social relationships (Chakraborty et al., 2010) has also been shown to predict cyberstalking perpetration (Navarro et al., 2016).

Perpetrator-Victim Relationship

Three studies aimed to identify the most common relationship between cyberstalking perpetrators and victims. Reyns et al. (2012) asked participants to indicate their relationship to the cyberstalking perpetrator, out of three categories: current or ex-intimate partner, friend/acquaintance, or stranger. Cases of cyberstalking were almost evenly split between known and unknown perpetrators, with 56% of cases involving either an (ex)intimate perpetrator (17.4%) or a friend/acquaintance (38.6%), and 44% of cases involving a stranger. Another study found that cyberstalking perpetrators and victims were most likely to be known to each other, and only 11% of cases involved an unknown (i.e., stranger) perpetrator (Fernández-Cruz et al., 2021). In a comparison of 'offline' stalking to cyberstalking in a forensic sample, perpetrators of cyberstalking were significantly more likely to be an ex-intimate partner of the victim, represented in 75% of cyberstalking cases compared to 47% of 'offline' stalking cases (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014).

Perpetrator Motivation

Seven studies explored motivations of cyberstalking perpetration. Cavezza and McEwan (2014) aimed to do this by grouping cyberstalking perpetrators into five types: *Rejected*, *Intimacy Seeking*, *Incompetent Suitor*, *Resentful*, and *Predatory*, based on Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology. The most commonly identified category, *Rejected* perpetrators who engage in stalking for reconciliation or revenge following the breakdown of a relationship with the victim, represented 75% of cyberstalking cases. This was followed by 14% of cases who fit the *Resentful* category, perpetrators who feel they have been humiliated by the victim and desire revenge. Only 5% of cases involved *Intimacy Seeking* perpetrators, who have a fantasy of love and aim to establish an intimate relationship with the victim, generally a stranger or acquaintance, and 3% *Incompetent Suitor* perpetrators who aim to initiate contact with the victim and feel entitled to a relationship with them. *Predatory* perpetrators who have deviant sexual beliefs and conduct

stalking in preparation for an attack, represented 3% of cases (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). Additional research by March et al. (2021) suggested that *Intimacy Seeking* cyberstalking perpetrators may be motivated by mate-seeking behaviour to gather information on a potential mate and may use the cyberstalking behaviour as a strategy to maximize successful dating.

The remaining studies on motivations of cyberstalking perpetrators highlighted that cyberstalking is motivated by the desire to reconcile, or that cyberstalking is motivated by power and control. In ex-intimate partner cyberstalking cases, perpetrators' behaviour has been explained by relational goal pursuit theory (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000), whereby cyberstalking perpetrators are motivated by the desire to reconcile a romantic relationship, particularly if they were surprised or distressed by the break-up (Belu et al., 2016; Dardis & Gidycz, 2019). Alternatively, other research suggests that cyberstalking perpetration is explained by coercive control theory (Stark, 2007), whereby cyberstalking perpetrators are motivated to engage in intimidation of the victim to retaliate or (re-)establish control (Dardis & Gidycz, 2019; Frampton & Fox, 2021). Victims of cyberstalking targeted by a friend, classmate, colleague, or acquaintance perceived the behaviour to be a form of control and believed the perpetrator was motivated to gain power over the victim (Fissel, 2021; Melander, 2010). Overall, motivations of cyberstalking perpetrators appear to mirror Mullen's (1999) typology of stalking, and perpetrators engage in cyberstalking in an effort to reconcile with, or control, the victim.

What are the Methods of Cyberstalking?

Categorizing Methods of Cyberstalking

Four studies attempted to categorise cyberstalking methods. Categories of cyberstalking methods were identified through: principal axis factor analysis (De Fazio et al., 2020), thematic analysis (Reiss et al., 2022), confirmatory factor analysis (Ybarra et al., 2017), and exploratory

factor analysis (March et al., 2022). The authors also identified specific methods of cyberstalking within each category (see Table 2.1). As can be seen in Table 2.1, each study's results produced a different categorization and not all categories were distinct, as many overlap in the cyberstalking methods included. For this reason, the methods of cyberstalking reported in this literature review will not be categorized in one of the four existing classification systems. Instead, the overall prevalence of different cyberstalking methods in the literature will be discussed, as well as the specific platforms and technologies used to engage in the methods of cyberstalking perpetration.

Table 2.1 overleaf

Table 2.1

Categories of Cyberstalking Methods

Study	Methodology	Categories of cyberstalking methods	Cyberstalking methods within each category
De Fazio et al. (2020)	Principal axis factor analysis	1. Disseminating private information and materials without permission	- Sending or publicly posting pictures/videos/audiotapes that someone else might consider threatening - Sending or publicly posting pictures/videos/audiotapes that are private or embarrassing to someone - Posting false information on others' social networks (e.g., Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) - Disseminating/sharing someone else's private or protected information with others without permission
		2. Physical and social threats, hacking and stealing identity	- Threats to harm someone physically through the Internet or mobile phone - Threats to harm someone socially - Deliberately forwarding computer viruses or spyware - Stealing another person's identity
		3. Harassment	- Sending unwanted sexually oriented images or messages (e.g., pornographic or - obscene materials)

			- Sending unwanted invitations or suggestions (e.g., sexual proposals) - Sending unwanted needy or overly affectionate messages
		4. Denigration and ordering goods	- Building defamatory websites about someone else - Ordering goods or subscribing unwanted services in someone else's name - Advising or guiding others to contact someone else in an unwanted way
		5. Unwanted emails and spying	- Sending unsolicited and unwanted emails - Spying on another person through GPS or other electronic devices (e.g., camera, location devices)
		6. Impersonation	- Sending messages in someone else's name - Harassing by deceiving someone or pretending to be someone else
March et al. (2022)	Exploratory factor analysis	1. Passive	- Checking the victim's online accounts to see what they have been up to - Monitor the victim's behaviours through social media - Checking the victims 'last online' status
		2. Invasive	- Check the victim's messages without them knowing - Log into the victim's accounts without them knowing - Check the victim's phone/computer history
		3. Duplicitous	- Pose as someone else over social media or email

			- Use a fake social media account to check up on the victim - Use location settings on the victim's phone/computer to see where they have been or are going
Reiss (2022)	Thematic analysis (qualitative)	1. Harmless but unhealthy	- Checking social media - Checking email, text, phone call, and Internet search histories
		2. Justified by positive intentions	- Using GPS or social media 'check-ins' - Sending/making excessive emails, texts, or calls
		3. Public vs private information	- Checking social media - Checking phone call and Internet search histories
		4. Common/normal	- Checking social media page and phone bill - Checking email, text, phone call, and Internet search histories
		5. Consensual	- Checking social media page and phone bill - Using a partner's password - Checking email, text, phone call, and Internet search histories - Using GPS or social media 'check-ins'
		6. Easily ignored or blocked	- Sending/making excessive emails, texts, or calls - Sending/making threatening emails, texts, or calls
		7. Personal experience with perpetration	- Checking social media page - Checking phone call and text histories - Sending excessive texts
		8. Invasion of privacy	- Checking phone bill - Checking email, phone call, and text histories

		- Using a partner's password - Making embarrassing, insulting, or threatening social media posts - Posting inappropriate photos - Using GPS or social media 'check-ins' - Using a webcam, hidden camera, or spyware
	9. Impacting the victim's physical, mental, social, academic, and economic health	- Sending/making threatening emails, texts, and phone calls - Making embarrassing, insulting, or threatening social media posts - Threatening to post inappropriate photos - Posting inappropriate photos - Using a webcam, hidden camera, or spyware - Using GPS or social media 'check-ins'
	10. Intentionally harmful	- Making embarrassing, insulting, or threatening social media posts - Threatening to post inappropriate photos - Posting inappropriate photos
	11. Not consensual	- Making embarrassing, insulting, or threatening social media posts - Posting inappropriate photos - Using a webcam, hidden camera, or spyware - Using GPS or social media 'check-ins'

		12. Illegal	- Sending/making threatening emails, texts, and phone calls - Threatening to post inappropriate photos - Posting inappropriate photos - Using a webcam, hidden camera, or spyware
		13. Leading to other forms of abuse	- Sending/making threatening emails, texts, and phone calls - Making embarrassing, insulting, or threatening social media posts - Threatening to post inappropriate photos - Posting inappropriate photos
		14. Uncommonly used technology	- Checking email history - Sending threatening and excessive emails
Ybarra (2017)	Confirmatory factor analysis	1. Hyper-intimacy	- Repeated phone calls
		2. Following	- Using spyware software
		3. Intrusive pursuit	- Calling, texting, posting on the victim's social media profile
		4. Threats	- Sending threats to hurt the victim or themselves via texts, social media messages, calls, or emails
		5. Surveillance	- Downloading a GPS or tracking program to the victim's phone without their knowledge

Note. Ybarra (2017) included an additional category of 'offline' stalking methods.

Prevalence of Cyberstalking Methods

Many papers reported unwanted and/or inappropriate contact as the most common method of cyberstalking, which can be conducted via repeated phone calls, text messages, social media messages, friend requests, and on dating apps (Centelles et al., 2021; DeMatteo et al., 2017; Dimond et al., 2011; Dressing et al., 2014; Every-Palmer et al., 2015; Olson et al., 2023; Romanosky & Schirmer, 2023; Sambasivan et al., 2019; Tokunaga & Aune, 2017). Begotti and Maran (2019) further explored the nature of unwanted online contact and reported that 20.2% of their participants experienced unwanted sexual advances online, and 11.8% experienced online threats of violence. Lee and O'Sullivan (2014) also identified that 22% of participants had sent their ex-partner unwanted messages of affection, and 9% had sent their ex-partner unwanted sexual messages.

There may be an unexplored minority of cyberstalking cases, however, whereby the perpetrator uses primarily covert methods to monitor or track their victim. Two papers highlighted that cyberstalking victims are less likely to report methods that do not involve direct contact (i.e., accessing the victim's devices or online accounts, downloading data from the victim's device, accessing the victim's online banking, or posing as the victim online) compared to direct repeated, unwanted contact from a perpetrator (Begotti & Maran, 2019; Dressing et al., 2014).

Platforms Used to Perpetrate Cyberstalking

An early literature review found that sending repeated, unwanted emails was the most common cyberstalking method (Miller, 2012). However, three subsequent reviews have highlighted an increase in cyberstalking on social media including through monitoring a victim's social media posts, sending repeated, unwanted messages, or posting on the victim's social media profile (Henry et al., 2020; Henry & Powell, 2018; Kaur et al., 2021). Through an analysis of cases

of cyberstalking, Al-Mutawa and colleagues (2016) also identified that cyberstalking perpetrators used social media sites such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) to post embarrassing, hateful, or threatening comments about their victims.

Early research by Lyndon and colleagues (2011) explored specific methods of cyberstalking perpetrated on Facebook. From a sample of 411 university students, 58% had created a Facebook post targeting their ex-partner, 20% had written on their ex-partner's Facebook wall, 8% had asked their ex-partner to unblock them, 7.6% posted a nasty or spiteful comment on a photo of their ex-partner, 4% had posted embarrassing photos of their ex-partner, 3.6% had created a fake Facebook profile, impersonating their ex-partner, and 3.6% had used Facebook to spread vexatious rumours about their ex-partner. More recent research highlights how newer social media platforms and dating apps have created further opportunities for perpetration of cyberstalking. Perpetrators who utilize Snapchat, for example, can also send repeated, unwanted messages, photos, or videos to a victim but these messages disappear after being viewed, and the sender is notified if the victim takes a screenshot of the messages. In addition, Snapchat enables geolocation tracking of a victim in real-time (Brady et al., 2023). The use of dating apps within cases of cyberstalking, such as Tinder, has also been noted in research. Among a sample of dating app users, Centelles et al. (2021) identified a cyberstalking victimization rate of 64.8% (n = 210), operationalized by receiving repeated, unwanted messages.

One study coined the term *"social media stalking"* (Dhir et al., 2021, p.1380) to describe cyberstalking through the surreptitious monitoring of a victim's social media, such as frequently checking the victim's profile to see what they are up to, and this method of cyberstalking has been frequently reported by victims (Ferdous & Huda, 2023). Dhir and colleagues (2021) hypothesize that the tendency to monitor others through social media may have become 'normalized' and

further research has demonstrated that methods of cyberstalking perpetrated through social media may not be labelled as cyberstalking, by victims or perpetrators. Brady and colleagues (2023) explored victim perception of cyberstalking on Snapchat. From their sample of cyberstalking victims (n = 194), 32% reported experiencing unwanted repeated contact or threats on Snapchat. However, 50% of these victims did not consider the perpetrator's use of Snapchat to be cyberstalking. Montero-Fernández and colleagues (2023) also identified that, in a sample of university students (n = 303), 27% reported monitoring their partner's social media accounts, and 70.1% of female participants and 55.7% of male participants agreed that reading a partner's private conversations on social media was acceptable behaviour within a relationship.

Technologies Used to Perpetrate Cyberstalking

Four studies detailed specific technologies that enable the perpetration of cyberstalking and how these technologies relate to particular cyberstalking methods. Horsman and Conniss (2015) investigated the use of anonymous messaging resources in cyberstalking perpetration. The authors identified a number of services which allow a perpetrator to send a victim a text message without leaving any trace of their identity. Attempts to identify the perpetrator through analysis of mobile operator logs can also be prevented by these services thus allowing for repeated, unwanted, anonymous contact.

Eterovic-Soric and colleagues (2017) further identified how specific technology and software can enable cyberstalking through location tracking. Specialized GPS tracking devices allow a perpetrator to easily trace a victim's location and movements, but concerningly, location-based apps on a victim's mobile phone can also provide this information to a perpetrator without the need to plant an additional device. The authors describe the concerning development of "stalker apps" which can be disguised and downloaded onto a victim's phone to share their location with

a perpetrator. In addition, spyware installed on a victim's computer or device without their knowledge can provide a perpetrator with information on the victim's computer usage, email accounts, and passwords. Webcams and microphones can also be compromised by cyberstalking perpetrators to monitor and gather personal images, videos, or conversations of the victim (Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017). Victims of cyberstalking who experienced online monitoring (e.g., the perpetrator tracked the victim with GPS software, monitored the victim's online activity, or accessed the victim's online accounts) were more likely to report that the cyberstalking had resulted in more life interference including having to change their Internet use, or having to change or move jobs, and also resulted in higher levels of fear when compared to cyberstalking victims who had only experienced unwanted online contact Logan, 2023). Research therefore suggests that these covert cyberstalking methods, facilitated through accessible and widespread technology such as smartphones and apps, can result in significant negative impacts on victims.

Sovacool and colleagues (2021) highlighted methods of cyberstalking perpetrated using smart home technology. Findings from their national UK sample (n = 1,032) and a review of the existing literature indicated that certain technologies in the home, such as smart surveillance systems, doorbell cameras, and smart home energy monitoring systems, can facilitate surveillance of a victim. A cyberstalking perpetrator can use smart surveillance systems or doorbell cameras to monitor the victim's whereabouts and visitors to the home, and smart home energy monitoring systems to monitor the victim's routines. The authors clarify that the perpetration of cyberstalking through smart home technology does not require face-to-face encounters and can be perpetrated regardless of the time or location of perpetrator or victim, thus facilitating constant control over the victim (Sovacool et al., 2021). Overall, research highlights a concerning trend of increasing opportunities for cyberstalking perpetrators to instil fear in their victims. Novel technology can

enable anonymous unwanted contact, location tracking, infiltration of online accounts, monitoring of online activity and home routines, negatively impacting the lives of victims greatly.

Discussion

This systematic literature review presented existing research examining who cyberstalking perpetrators are, and the methods through which they perpetrate cyberstalking. When considering the implications and wider context of the findings of this review, it is also important to consider how they relate to 'offline' stalking research, given that 'offline' stalking has been far more extensively studied. Nobles and colleagues (2014) posit that cyberstalking victims represent a subset of stalking victims, in that all victims experience unwanted, repeated communication but cyberstalking victims experience this exclusively via online avenues. Related arguments have also been presented by Cavezza and McEwan (2014), that perpetrators of 'offline' stalking and cyberstalking do not differ significantly in their motivations or demographic and clinical characteristics, and by Sheridan and Grant (2007), that the impact on victims does not differ significantly between 'offline' stalking and cyberstalking victimization. Thus, research suggests that 'offline' stalking and cyberstalking perpetration and victimization yield more similarities than differences. It is also worth noting that, the majority of stalking cases contain both online and 'offline' methods employed by the perpetrator (Wilson et al., 2023). Therefore, the findings of this systematic review will be considered in light of existing research into 'offline' stalking and cyberstalking.

Perpetrators of Cyberstalking

Research discussed in this review indicates that both men and women perpetrate cyberstalking, but male perpetrators were more likely to perpetrate severe, intrusive cyberstalking behaviours such as sexual harassment and tracking a victim's location (Begotti et al., 2020; Dardis & Gidycz, 2017). Victims of cyberstalking who experience sexual harassment and location

monitoring report high levels of fear and life interference (Logan, 2023), suggesting that victims targeted by male perpetrators may be more likely to experience significant negative impacts. The finding that male perpetrators of cyberstalking are more likely than female perpetrators to engage in severe, intrusive methods (Begotti et al., 2020; Dardis & Gidycz, 2017) is mirrored in 'offline' stalking research which has identified that male perpetrators pose a greater risk of harm to victims (Lyndon et al., 2012). Future research should aim to test hypotheses explaining why these gender differences exist, including whether male perpetrators may be thrill-seeking through overt cyberstalking perpetration compared to female perpetrators who may appreciate the anonymity afforded by covert cyberstalking perpetration (March et al., 2020; Miller, 2012; Smoker & March, 2017).

The research reviewed stipulates that perpetrators of cyberstalking were likely to have high levels of impulsivity and attachment anxiety, as well as childhood experience of parental violence, physical abuse victimization in adulthood, and low self-control (Cano-Gonzalez et al., 2023; Curry & Zavala, 2020; Jenaro et al., 2018; Marcum et al., 2018; Reiss et al., 2021). Chan and colleagues (2021) further identified that perpetration of both cyberstalking and 'offline' stalking was predicted by emotional dysregulation and stalking-supportive attitudes. Regarding dark tetrad personality traits, research identified positive correlations between cyberstalking perpetration and sadism, Machiavellianism, and narcissism (Branković et al., 2023; Smoker & March, 2017). Considering the remaining dark tetrad trait psychopathy, however, one study identified that psychopathy did not have a direct correlation to cyberstalking perpetration (Kircaburun et al., 2018) and previous research of 'offline' stalking has also identified that psychopathy is not prevalent in stalking perpetrators (Storey et al., 2009).

Thus, research to date indicates similarities between predictors and correlates of cyberstalking and 'offline' stalking perpetration, however there remains a lack of comparative research that examines precursors of both 'offline' stalking and cyberstalking perpetration concurrently. Understanding how personality and psychological characteristics predict 'offline' stalking perpetration has led to the successful development and implementation of stalking risk assessment tools, for instance, the Guidelines for Stalking Assessment and Management (SAM; Kropp et al., 2008) and the Stalking Risk Profile (SRP; MacKenzie et al., 2009) which consider psychological and social characteristics of the perpetrator (Weekes & Storey, 2024). It is likely, considering the similarities in precursors to offending, that these existing 'offline' stalking risk assessment tools have utility in the prediction of risk in cases of cyberstalking. Further research should consider using mixed samples of 'offline' stalking and cyberstalking cases to identify the extent to which the SAM and SRP can successfully predict risk of harm to victims. In addition, correlates specific to cyberstalking perpetration but not 'offline' stalking perpetration require further investigation for potential inclusion in risk assessment tools. For instance, it is hypothesized that increased time spent online and Internet addiction may disrupt an individual's ability to maintain 'in-person' relationships and increase the risk of cyberstalking perpetration, but the causal direction of this relationship has not yet been determined (Navarro et al., 2016).

Cyberstalking perpetrators were most often found to be an ex-intimate partner of the victim, however findings did vary (e.g., Cavezza & McEwan, 2014; Reyns et al., 2012). Cyberstalking perpetrators were most likely to be *rejected* perpetrators (Mullen et al., 1999) who engage in cyberstalking for reconciliation or revenge following the breakdown of a relationship (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). The 'offline' stalking literature has identified ex-intimate partner as the most common relationship between victim and perpetrator, and that stalking victims targeted by an ex-

partner are at a higher risk of violence (McEwan et al., 2017; Sheridan & Davies, 2001). However, the dearth of cyberstalking research in this area highlighted herein means that a similar conclusion has not been reached. Victims of cyberstalking targeted by an ex-partner may endure more invasive, severe, or persistent forms of cyberstalking but further exploration should aim to identify whether this presents a greater risk of harm to the victim and precedes physical violence.

One study reviewed most cyberstalking perpetrators as *Rejected* in line with Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). However, this finding was identified in a small forensic sample of perpetrators and the question remains whether Mullen and colleagues' (1999) existing typology is sufficient to categorize perpetrators of cyberstalking. Future research should include a broad sample of cyberstalking cases to identify whether the existing categories within Mullen's (1999) typology are sufficient to categorize cyberstalking perpetrators, and in turn, whether these perpetrators differ fundamentally from perpetrators of 'offline' stalking. Overall, there remains a lack of understanding regarding how to effectively predict, manage, and reduce cyberstalking perpetration and although existing stalking literature can and should inform these approaches, further comparative research would aid in the categorization of perpetrators and assessment of risk.

Methods of Cyberstalking

Results of this systematic review identified that repeated and unwanted contact was the most commonly reported method of cyberstalking which occurs through phone calls, text messages, and social media (Al-Mutawa et al., 2016; Centelles et al., 2021; Dressing et al., 2014; Lee & O'Sullivan, 2014; Sambasivan et al., 2019). Certain methods of cyberstalking that do not involve direct contact with the victim, such as impersonating the victim, accessing the victim's online accounts, downloading data from the victim's devices, or tracking the victim's location, were less

often noticed and/or reported by victims (Begotti & Maran, 2019). This could mean that true prevalence rates of these methods have not been identified, especially if they were perpetrated as part of a course of conduct of cyberstalking but without the victim's knowledge. Moreover, cyberstalking that is perpetrated through social media, for instance checking someone's private conversations, may not be recognized as cyberstalking by victims and considered as normal practice in intimate relationships (Brady et al., 2023; Montero-Fernández et al., 2023). Overall, victims may not always recognize the behaviour they are experiencing as cyberstalking or be aware that the perpetrator is using covert methods. Future research must carefully consider the operationalization of cyberstalking to ensure it is accurately reported by victims, and where possible, use victim reports alongside information from perpetrators when drawing conclusions about the prevalence and nature of cyberstalking.

As well as the use of social media, perpetrators of cyberstalking used specific technologies such as anonymous text messaging services, location-based apps, and smart home technology to target their victims (Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017; Horsman & Conniss, 2015; Sovacool et al., 2021). The use of social media apps that share a person's live location, such as Snapchat or dating apps, can increase an individual's risk of cyberstalking victimization (Centelles et al., 2021). However, the detection and identification of perpetrators using these apps to conduct cyberstalking is hindered by perpetrators' inclination to use false or anonymous accounts, and even if their accounts are frozen or removed, there are few effective measures in place to prevent perpetrators from creating new accounts. The fast-developing nature of technology and its ubiquitous presence in cases of cyberstalking means perpetrators' use of specific technology is subject to continuous change and future research must not only maintain an up-to-date operationalization of

cyberstalking to include these methods, but also recognize how new technologies allow the negative effects of cyberstalking to permeate victims' lives.

Limitations

The current study was limited by certain methodological choices. The terminology included in the database searches were identified through a preliminary search and examination of language used in published research, which was a method previously utilized by Kaur and colleagues 2021), however, some relevant terminology may have not been identified. Another potential limitation of the review is the exclusion of gray literature. Whilst some gray literature could have provided relevant insight, this was not included due to the lack of peer-review and consequent reliability. This approach is in line with PRISMA-P guidelines which dictate that it is at the discretion of the authors whether to include gray literature in a systematic review. During the literature search, only one author conducted the main screening of studies, however good inter-rater reliability of the screening was established on a sample of studies by two authors. Regarding the results of the literature review, some demographic factors such as age, socio-economic backgrounds, education, and professions of cyberstalking perpetrators were not discussed. These factors may provide relevant insight into who perpetrators of cyberstalking are and warrant further exploration.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Police often fail to sufficiently identify cyberstalking behaviours, pursue arrests or charges, and protect victims (O'Shea et al., 2019). The further exploration of existing 'offline' stalking risk assessment tools for use in cyberstalking cases, and the validation of a stalking typology for cyberstalking would allow authorities and professionals to identify risks posed to victims of cyberstalking and categorize perpetrators. Based on the similarities between findings from the

literature highlighted in this review and the plethora of 'offline' stalking research, it is unlikely that approaches to managing cases of cyberstalking would differ significantly to existing approaches to the management of 'offline' stalking cases. A comprehensive understanding of the risk of stalking persistence, escalation, and continuation has allowed stakeholders to develop effective interventions to prevent further offending, including legal protective orders, supervision requirements, and victim safety plans and so the same could be achieved for cases of cyberstalking.

Notwithstanding, there are areas of policing and managing cyberstalking where further knowledge development could improve practice within the criminal justice system. For instance, this review also highlighted that perpetrators are known to post a victim's information online, monitor their online activity, access their online accounts, and track their location, and much of this can be done covertly or anonymously. These findings are vital to consider for improving the identification and collection of evidence when behaviour is conducted covertly or anonymously. For more effective evidence collection, a holistic approach to case management should be adopted by police alongside victim support organizations and technology enterprises (e.g., social media companies, app developers) to improve detection of concerning behaviours, encourage detailed record keeping of incidents by victims, enable the identification of a perpetrator's online accounts and activity, and increase safety measures to protect victims from future harm. A transdisciplinary approach is necessary as cyberstalking is a crime that transcends physical limits and thus can have an international dimension, either due to the location of the perpetrator in relation to the victim or when requiring the cooperation of global social media companies. As such, the cooperation of technology companies must be mandated by policy change. For instance, the UK Online Safety Act (2023) holds online platforms accountable for removing illegal content, and age-inappropriate content for children. Similar policies which require technology enterprises to actively reduce

cyberstalking on their platforms and assist authorities with investigations of cyberstalking should be informed by research and implemented.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review identified existing research into cyberstalking perpetrators and their methods of perpetration. Future research should continue to compare 'offline' stalking and cyberstalking perpetration and victimization, thus identifying the utility of 'offline' stalking risk assessment tools and typologies for cyberstalking cases. Additional potential risk factors, such as a perpetrator's time spent online and technological ability, require consideration in the ongoing assessment and management of cyberstalking cases. The ongoing development of technology accompanied by the emergence of new methods of cyberstalking is inevitable and researchers must endeavour to 'keep up' with these new technologies. Collaboration, therefore, between researchers, stakeholders from the criminal justice system, victim support organizations, and technology companies is necessary to improve detection of cyberstalking perpetration and management of cases, and this must be mandated by policy change.

CHAPTER 3

Cyberstalking in Context: Examining Methods, Victim-Perpetrator Relationships, and Perpetrator Motivations

This chapter is under review as a standalone journal article at the following journal:

Weekes, C. J., Storey, J. E., & Pina, A. (under review). Experiences of Cyberstalking from Victim and Perpetrator Perspectives. *Criminal Justice and Behavior.*

Cyberstalking, generally defined as repeated, unwanted online behaviour that causes a victim alarm, distress, or fear (Nobles et al., 2014; Owens, 2016; Wilson et al., 2022) has been the subject of an emerging body of research. It should be noted, however, that inconsistencies persist in how cyberstalking is defined and operationalised; differences in definitions include the minimum number of incidents required, the requirement of victim fear, and the specific behaviours that constitute cyberstalking perpetration (Wilson et al., 2022). Rates of cyberstalking victimisation have been estimated in the literature to vary between 3.4% and 40.8% (Berry & Bainbridge, 2017; DeKeseredy et al., 2019; Dressing et al., 2014; Fissel, 2021; Kraft & Wang, 2010; Lee & O'Sullivan, 2014; Reyns et al., 2012, 2018). Although most research indicates a higher propensity of female victims than male (Bossler et al., 2012; Kalaitzaki, 2020; Reyns et al., 2012, 2016; Van Baak & Hayes, 2018), a study by Lee and O'Sullivan (2014) noted no significant difference in the rate of male and female victimisation. Cyberstalking perpetration rates have also varied from 4.9% to 50.9% (Lee & O'Sullivan, 2014; Lyndon et al., 2011; Navarro et al., 2016; Reyns et al., 2012). Some research suggests that perpetrators are most likely to be male (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014; Fernández-Cruz et al., 2021; Reyns, 2019), however other studies have identified a higher prevalence of female perpetrators (March et al., 2020; Miller, 2012; Resett et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021; Silva Santos et al., 2021).

Common methods of cyberstalking have been identified as unwanted online contact; posting online about the victim; contacting friends/family of the victim; monitoring the victim's location or online activity; and accessing their online accounts (Kaur et al., 2021; Marcum & Higgins, 2021; Wilson et al., 2023). Research suggests that perpetrators of cyberstalking are often known to the victim (Cavezza & McEwan, 2021) but relationships between victims and perpetrators vary and include ex-intimate partners, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers (Reyns et al., 2012). Generally associated with the relationship present between perpetrator and victim, cyberstalking perpetration is often motivated by revenge, reconciliation, resentment, jealousy, affection, and deviant sexual interests (Cavezza & McEwan, 2021; Fissel, 2021). The current study will explore methods of cyberstalking, relationships between victims and perpetrators, and motivations of cyberstalking, as reported by victims and perpetrators.

Methods of Cyberstalking

Cyberstalking is operationalised in the existing literature through a variety of online acts. No single method must be present to classify cyberstalking, instead the behaviour must be repeated and unwanted by the victim. Unwanted, repeated contact through technology is the most commonly reported method of cyberstalking, enacted through repeated messages, emails, phone calls, voicemails, and friend requests (Begotti & Maran, 2019; Centelles et al., 2021; DeMatteo et al., 2017; Dimond et al., 2011; Dressing et al., 2014; Every-Palmer et al., 2015; Lee & O'Sullivan, 2014; Olson et al., 2023; Tokunaga & Aune, 2017). The nature of this repeated, unwanted online contact can be sexual or threatening (Begotti & Maran, 2019), however it is important to note that the content of messages does not dictate whether cyberstalking has occurred, only that the contact is unwanted and repeated (Wilson et al., 2022).

In addition to repeated, unwanted messages, perpetrators of cyberstalking also adopt other methods of cyberstalking that range from covert, such as monitoring the victim's online activity or location and infiltrating their online accounts, to overt, such as posting publicly about the victim and contacting the victim's family or friends (Woodlock, 2017). These methods are often enacted through social media (Al-Mutawa et al., 2016; Dhir et al., 2021; Ferdous & Huda, 2023; Henry et al., 2020; Henry & Powell, 2018; Kaur et al., 2021) and further research over the years has highlighted how the evolving nature of social media has diversified the perpetration of cyberstalking. For instance, early research by Lyndon and colleagues (2011) highlighted how Facebook can be used by cyberstalking perpetrators to post about the victim; write on the victim's Facebook wall; ask the victim to unblock them; post nasty or spiteful comments on the victim's photos; create a fake Facebook profile; post embarrassing photos of the victim; or spread vexatious rumours. Newer social media platforms not only enable the perpetration of cyberstalking through similar methods but also have additional features that diversify perpetration and present new challenges to victims. For example, Brady and colleagues (2023), noted how Snapchat is used by cyberstalking perpetrators to send repeated, unwanted messages or photos, but also allows perpetrators to cover their tracks as messages and photos disappear after being opened by the victim. In addition, the sender of a message or photo is notified if the recipient takes a screenshot, potentially preventing victims from feeling able to collect evidence of cyberstalking on this platform. Snapchat also has geolocation tracking features that enables covert monitoring of a victim's live location without the need to download additional tracking technology or plant a device on the victim.

In addition to social media use, new methods of cyberstalking continue to emerge with the advent of new technologies including anonymous messaging services, which not only allow a

perpetrator to send repeated, anonymous text messages to a victim but also prevent efforts by authorities to identify the perpetrator, allowing for continued unwanted contact (Horsman & Conniss, 2015). Location tracking of a cyberstalking victim can be enabled through specific GPS tracking devices including Apple AirTags, coin-sized battery-operated devices that enable location tracking via Bluetooth (Shafqat et al., 2023). Moreover, location-based tracking apps can be downloaded onto a victim's phone and disguised by a perpetrator, thus enabling covert tracking of a victim without the need for an additional device (Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017). Spyware can be installed on a victim's computer or mobile device, providing a perpetrator with information regarding the victim's Internet usage, online accounts, and passwords; and webcams or microphones can be compromised by a perpetrator to surreptitiously gather images or record conversations (Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017). Smart home technology, including smart surveillance; doorbell cameras; virtual assistants; and energy monitoring systems can facilitate monitoring of a victim. Specifically, a perpetrator who has access to smart home devices can monitor the victim's movements to and from the home; identify visitors to the home; monitor the victim's use of a voice-activated assistant (e.g., Amazon Alexa device); and identify the victim's routines (Sovacool et al., 2021).

The perpetration of cyberstalking is therefore varied in methodology and notably, many cases of cyberstalking involve covert methods that can be perpetrated without the victim's knowledge through social media, location tracking, spyware, and smart home technology. When examining victim reports of cyberstalking methods, victims less often recognise and report covert methods of cyberstalking when compared to receiving direct unwanted, repeated messages or experiencing defamation (Dressing et al., 2014).

Victim - Perpetrator Relationship

Research has attempted to identify the most common relationship between cyberstalking perpetrators and their victims. Reyns and colleagues (2012) grouped victim-perpetrator relationship types into three broad categories: 17.4% of cyberstalking cases involved a current/ex-partner; 38.6% of cases involved a friend/acquaintance; and 44% of cases involved a stranger, meaning cases were almost evenly split between known (56%) and unknown (44%) perpetrators. Additional research indicates that most cases of cyberstalking involve a perpetrator known to the victim. For instance, Fernández-Cruz and colleagues (2021) identified that 59.8% of cyberstalking victims knew their perpetrator, often reporting their perpetrator was an ex-partner (13%), a friend (7%), or a current partner (6.6%). In a study by Dressing and colleagues (2014), most victims knew their perpetrator (69.9%), and 29.3% of victims reported cyberstalking from an ex-partner, 20.5% reported cyberstalking from an acquaintance, and 8% reported cyberstalking from a friend.

Research has also attempted to identify differences in relationship types in cases of 'offline' stalking versus cyberstalking. Cavezza and McEwan (2014) compared forensic samples of 'offline' stalking cases to cyberstalking cases; cyberstalking perpetrators were significantly more likely to be an ex-partner of the victim represented by 75% of cyberstalking cases, compared to 47% of 'offline' stalking cases. Relatedly, Heinrich (2015) used a non-forensic sample of 'offline' stalking and cyberstalking cases, with almost half of the cases of cyberstalking involved an ex-partner perpetrator (45.4%) compared to just 22.3% of 'offline' stalking cases.

Perpetrator Motivation

Motivations of cyberstalking perpetrators vary and are generally associated with the perpetrators' relationship to the victim. Based upon Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology, which categorises perpetrators of stalking based on their relationship to the victim, motivation, and other variables, research by Cavezza and McEwan (2014) attempted to categorise

cyberstalking perpetrators and identify the most common motivations of cyberstalking. *Rejected* perpetrators, who engage in stalking for reconciliation or revenge following the breakdown of a relationship with the victim, represented 75% of cyberstalking cases. This was followed by 14% of cases who fit the *Resentful* category, perpetrators who feel they have been humiliated by the victim and desire revenge. Only 5% of cases involved *Intimacy Seeking* perpetrators, who have a fantasy of love and aim to establish an intimate relationship with the victim, generally a stranger or acquaintance, and 3% *Incompetent Suitor* perpetrators who aim to initiate contact with the victim and feel entitled to a relationship with them. *Predatory* perpetrators who have deviant sexual beliefs and conduct stalking in preparation for an attack, also represented 3% of cases (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014).

Research has also explored how victims of cyberstalking perceive the motivation of their perpetrator. Dressing and colleagues (2014) identified four motivational types reported by their sample of cyberstalking victims, many of whom reported more than one motivation: 62% reported resentment; 54.9% reported jealousy; 49.4% reported the perpetrator was seeking a romantic relationship; and 40% reported revenge. A small proportion (13%) were not able to identify the perpetrator's motivation. A further study of victim perception by Fissel (2021) established the most commonly reported cyberstalking motivations as affection (47.22%); rejection (43.6%); or obsession (41.5%). Victims also reported that the perpetrator was seeking power or control through cyberstalking in almost 30% of cases; and 23% reported retaliation or revenge as the perpetrator's motivation. Similarly, 14% could not identify a motivation behind the cyberstalking and 1% indicated other reasons. Fissel (2021) also analysed the motivational types within the context of the victim-perpetrator relationships and the associated impact on victims. For instance, victims targeted by an ex-intimate partner most often reported rejection (56.7%) as the motivation, whereas

victims targeted by a classmate most often reported affection (55.9%) as the motivation. Wanting power or control was more often reported by victims targeted by an ex-intimate partner (40.5%) or family member (34.5%), compared to victims targeted by a friend (15.3%). Victims who perceived their perpetrator to be motivated by retaliation, revenge, or rejection were significantly more likely to experience fear as a result of the cyberstalking compared to victims who perceived affection as the perpetrator's motivation (Fissel, 2021).

Current Study

Existing research indicates that cyberstalking cases involve a variety of methods, perpetrator-victim relationship types, and motivations. The current study builds on this prior research by examining these elements from both victim and perpetrator perspectives. The current study adopts a definition of cyberstalking in line with legal criteria, and suggestions made by Wilson and colleagues (2022), to identify prevalence rates of cyberstalking victimisation and perpetration. Experiences of cyberstalking will then be examined in more detail, specifically the current study will identify the methods of cyberstalking reported by both victims and perpetrators and assess differences in prevalence, particularly between overt and covert methods. Examining potential disparities in methods of cyberstalking reported by victims and perpetrators is especially warranted considering how the advent of new technologies presents new opportunities for perpetrators to target victims without their knowledge (e.g., Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017; Shafqat et al., 2023). Additionally, the study will identify the types of perpetrator-victim relationships reported by victims and perpetrators, on which existing research has failed to reach a consensus (e.g., Fernández-Cruz et al., 2021; Heinrich, 2015; Reyns et al., 2012). Finally, the current study will explore the motivations of cyberstalking as reported by victims and perpetrators, building on

previous work which identified a variety of motivations including resentment, jealousy, reconciliation, revenge, and obsession (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014; Fissel, 2021).

Method

Participants

Victimisation and perpetration of cyberstalking was measured via two separate online self-report questionnaires (see Appendices A and B). Participants were only permitted to complete one of the two questionnaires, creating two distinct samples. A sample of 508 participants completed the cyberstalking victimisation questionnaire. Participants were recruited via the Research Participation Scheme at the University of Kent (n = 145) and crowdsourcing platform Prolific (n = 363). Participants who failed to complete the questionnaire or failed the attention checks (n = 3) were removed from the sample. Therefore, a total of 505 participants' responses were analysed (283 females, 215 males, 6 non-binary, 1 did not disclose).

Separately, a sample of 549 participants were recruited to complete the cyberstalking perpetration questionnaire. Participants were recruited via the Research Participation Scheme (n = 278), Prolific (n = 256), and a research participation webpage (n = 15). 22 participants did not complete the questionnaire or failed the attention checks, and their responses were removed from the analyses. Therefore, a total of 527 participants' data was analysed (343 females, 165 males, 15 non-binary, 4 did not disclose).

Procedure and Design

Both the cyberstalking victimisation and perpetration questionnaires were distributed via Qualtrics online survey platform. Participants from the Research Participation Scheme were awarded academic credits for their participation and participants from Prolific were compensated

based on an hourly rate of £9. Participants who accessed the study through the public research participation webpage were not rewarded for their participation.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires examined cyberstalking victimisation and perpetration through a series of questions with multiple response options. Gender and age category were collected first (18-21; 22-25; 26-30; 31-35; 36-40; 41-50; 51-60; 61+). The subsequent section of each questionnaire established whether the respondent had experienced or perpetrated cyberstalking. Based on the existing literature, cyberstalking was defined in the current study as repeated, persistent online behaviour that is unwanted by the victim and causes alarm, distress, or fear (Owens, 2015; Reyns et al., 2024). Cyberstalking was thus operationalised in the victimisation questionnaire by asking participants if on more than one occasion someone had ever targeted them through unwanted online contact; online monitoring; online posts about them; or accessing their online accounts. To differentiate victims of online fraud from victims of cyberstalking and subsequently remove instances of scam artists, respondents were asked whether they thought the individual who had targeted them was someone who participates in a fraudulent operation online to obtain money, bank details, or personal details. In the perpetration questionnaire, participants were asked if on more than one occasion they had ever targeted an individual with unwanted online contact; online monitoring; online posts; or accessed the individual's online accounts. Respondents of both questionnaires were asked if the cyberstalking had ever caused alarm, distress, or fear.

In the third section of the questionnaires, respondents who self-identified as victims or perpetrators of cyberstalking based on the study definition were then asked for further details about the methods of cyberstalking they had experienced or perpetrated. Cyberstalking methods were divided into four categories: online monitoring; online contact; online posting; and accessing

online accounts. Each category contained five to seven cyberstalking methods (see Table 3.1), and participants were asked to indicate if they had ever experienced or perpetrated each method. If respondents to the victimisation questionnaire reported that they had experienced a method of cyberstalking, they were asked to indicate whether they *knew* that the perpetrator had engaged in that method of cyberstalking, or that they *suspected* that the perpetrator had engaged in that method of cyberstalking.

In the final section of both questionnaires, respondents were asked if they had met the victim/perpetrator in-person before the cyberstalking began; what their relationship was to the victim/perpetrator; if the perpetrator had tried to locate the victim in-person; and what the perpetrator's (perceived) motivation was. Victims were asked whether they had complained or asked the perpetrator to stop their behaviour, and whether the perpetrator stopped as a result. Perpetrators were asked if the victim was aware of their behaviour, if the victim had complained or asked them to stop, and whether they stopped their behaviour after being contacted by the victim.

Results

Prevalence of Cyberstalking Victimisation and Perpetration

The questionnaires identified a cyberstalking victimisation rate of 14.7% (n = 74) and a perpetration rate of 2.1% (n = 11). Table 3.2 provides demographic details of the victim and perpetrator samples. The majority of cyberstalking victims were female (71.6%, n = 53). This is notably and significantly higher than the proportion of females in the total sample which was 56% (n = 283), indicating that victims were significantly more likely to be female than non-victims, χ^2 (1, 498) = 10.85, $p < .001$. Almost half of the victims (48.7%, n = 37) were aged 18-21, which is significantly higher than the corresponding proportion in the total sample (29.9%, n = 151), χ^2 (1, 505) = 18.26, p = .011. The cyberstalking perpetration rate was 2.1% (n = 11), with most

perpetrators being female and aged under 22 (72.7%, *n* = 8). This was not significantly different from the total sample, which was 65.1% female (*n* = 343) and 52.6% aged under 22 (*n* = 277).

Table 3.2

Demographic Details of Victim and Perpetrator Samples

Demographic Variable	Victimisation Questionnaire		Perpetration Questionnaire	
	Non-Victims *n* (%)	Victims *n* (%)	Non-Perpetrators *n* (%)	Perpetrators *n* (%)
Age				
18-21	114 (26.6%)	35 (47.3%)	270 (52.3%)	7 (63.6%)
22-25	40 (9.3%)	7 (9.5%)	46 (8.9%)	1 (9.1%)
26-30	42 (9.8%)	7 (9.5%)	52 (10.1%)	1 (9.1%)
31-35	58 (13.5%)	5 (6.8%)	38 (7.4%)	0
36-40	46 (10.7%)	7 (9.5%)	31 (6%)	1 (9.1%)
41-50	57 (13.3%)	8 (10.8%)	31 (6%)	1 (9.1%)
51-60	41 (9.6%)	2 (2.7%)	27 (5.2%)	0
61+	31 (7.2%)	3 (4.1%)	19 (3.7%)	0
Undisclosed	0	0	2 (0.4%)	0
Gender				
Male	196 (45.7%)	19 (25.7%)	162 (31.4%)	3 (27.3%)
Female	228 (53.1%)	53 (71.6%)	335 (64.9%)	8 (72.7%)
Non-binary	4 (0.9%)	2 (2.7%)	15 (2.9%)	0
Undisclosed	1 (0.2%)	0	4 (0.8%)	0

Note. Non-Victims (*n* = 429); Victims (*n* = 74); Non-Perpetrators (*n* = 516); Perpetrators (*n* = 11).

Many respondents to the perpetration questionnaire indicated that they had engaged in one or more of the cyberstalking methods on more than on occasion towards the same individual, but reported that the victim was not aware of, or had not complained about, their behaviour. While admissions of this nature do not meet the definition of cyberstalking used in the current study or legal definitions outlined in the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) or Protection of Freedoms Act (2012), which require that the victim experience alarm, distress, or fear, these actions reflect concerning online behaviours. Specifically, 8.3% (n = 44) of the respondents to the perpetration questionnaire had engaged in concerning online behaviour.

Methods of Cyberstalking

Table 3.1 summarises the methods of cyberstalking reported by victims and perpetrators divided into four categories: *online monitoring; online contact; online posting;* and *accessing online accounts*. Overall, all but one victim (n = 73, 98.6%) reported at least one *online contact* method of cyberstalking. The most frequently experienced individual method of cyberstalking was repeated, unwanted contact via email, text, or social media (n = 58, 78.4%). The majority of victims also reported experiencing at least one *online monitoring* method of cyberstalking (n = 52, 70.3%), and most prevalent within this category, 43.2% (n = 32) of victims reported that the perpetrator had monitored their online activity. Over half of victims (n = 44, 59.5%) also reported at least one *online posting* method of cyberstalking, most frequently that the perpetrator had repeatedly posted comments on the victim's social media posts (n = 27, 36.5%). Methods of cyberstalking from the final category, *accessing online accounts*, were reported by 29.7% (n = 22) of victims, most frequently that the perpetrator had attempted to gain access to the victim's social media or email accounts (n = 19, 25.7%). Almost half of victims, (n = 34, 45.9%) reported that the perpetrator had gathered information about them online to attempt to locate the victim in-person, and a minority

(*n* = 12, 16.2%) reported that this had happened more than once. In addition to the methods of cyberstalking reported above that victims *knew* the perpetrator had engaged in, victims also *suspected* that the perpetrator had engaged in various methods of cyberstalking. All five methods of *accessing online accounts* were more often suspected by victims than known to have occurred. For example, 12.2% (*n* = 9) of victims suspected that the perpetrator had attempted to gain access to their online shopping accounts, yet only 5.4% (*n* = 4) of victims knew that this had occurred.

Table 3.1 overleaf

Table 3.1

Methods of Cyberstalking Reported by Victims and Perpetrators

Category of Cyberstalking Methods	Cyberstalking Method	Victims		Perpetrators
		Suspected *n* (%)	Known *n* (%)	*n* (%)
Online monitoring	Monitored victim's online activity	23 (31.1%)	32 (43.2%)	7 (63.6%)
	Joined online groups/communities the victim was in	17 (23%)	13 (17.6%)	2 (18.2%)
	Checked who the victim was with in tagged posts or photos	29 (39.2%)	24 (32.4%)	5 (45.5%)
	Checked the victim's tagged locations and/or online status	27 (36.5%)	20 (27%)	5 (45.5%)
	Physically checked the victim's phone	10 (13.5%)	18 (24.3%)	4 (36.4%)
	Checked the victim's live location	22 (29.7%)	15 (20.3%)	3 (27.3%)
	Installed software on the victim's device to monitor their location or activity	5 (6.8%)	5 (6.8%)	0
Online contact	Sent repeated, unwanted messages to the victim via email, text, or social media	10 (13.5%)	58 (78.4%)	3 (27.3%)
	Sent the victim online invitations	6 (8.1%)	18 (24.3%)	0
	Created a fake account to monitor or contact the victim	29 (39.2%)	24 (32.4%)	5 (45.5%)
	Sent the victim photos of yourself	9 (12.2%)	24 (32.4%)	3 (27.3%)
	Sent the victim photos of themselves	5 (6.8%)	21 (28.4%)	3 (27.2%)
	Contacted their family or friends	12 (16.2%)	32 (43.2%)	3 (27.2%)

Online posting	Posted the victim's personal information online	10 (13.5%)	8 (10.8%)	0
	Posted private photos of the victim online	7 (9.5%)	7 (9.5%)	0
	Posted false information about the victim online	19 (25.7%)	17 (23%)	0
	Posted messages of love or adoration online about the victim	10 (13.5%)	19 (25.7%)	4 (36.4%)
	Repeatedly commented on the victim's social media posts	11 (14.9%)	27 (36.5%)	3 (27.3%)
	Posted on social media pages of the victim's family or friends about the victim	6 (8.1%)	8 (10.8%)	2 (18.2%)
	Posted in social media groups about the individual	18 (24.3%)	12 (16.2%)	0
Accessing online accounts	Tried to gain access to the victim's social media or email accounts	22 (29.7%)	19 (25.7%)	5 (45.5%)
	Tried to gain access to the victim's online shopping accounts	9 (12.2%)	4 (5.4%)	0
	Tried to gain access to the victim's personal devices	13 (17.6%)	12 (16.2%)	3 (27.3%)
	Tried to lock the victim out of their online accounts	13 (17.6%)	12 (16.2%)	1 (9.1%)
	Tried to access their Wi-fi network to check their online activities	5 (6.8%)	4 (5.4%)	1 (9.1%)

*Note***.** Victims (n=74); Perpetrators (n=11). Victims could only select either 'known' or 'suspected' and so these percentages are exclusive.

The majority of victims had asked the perpetrator to stop the cyberstalking (*n* = 48, 64.9%) and/or complained to the perpetrator about their behaviour (*n* = 22, 29.7%). Of the total victims who did complain or ask the perpetrator to stop (*n* = 61, 82.4%), 44.3% reported that the perpetrator did not stop their behaviour (*n* = 27). Out of the remaining cases where the perpetrator did stop their behaviour, only 5.9% (*n* = 2) of perpetrators stopped immediately after being asked, with most victims indicating that most perpetrators stopped after a while (*n* = 32, 94.1%). A minority of victims (*n* = 17, 23%) did not complain or ask the perpetrator to stop.

Overall, perpetrators most often reported engaging in *online monitoring* methods of cyberstalking and the majority of perpetrators (*n* = 9, 81.8%) had engaged in at least one method from this category. The most frequently perpetrated method of cyberstalking overall was monitoring the victim's online activity (*n* = 7, 63.8%). *Online contact* methods were reported by 72.7% (*n* = 8) of perpetrators overall, and methods involving accessing online accounts and online posting were perpetrated by around half of the perpetrators, with 54.5% (*n* = 6) of perpetrators attempting to access the victim's online accounts or devices and 45.5% (*n* = 5) of perpetrators making online posts or comments about the victim. Most perpetrators reported that the victim had contacted them to complain about their behaviour (*n* = 7, 63.6%) and/or asked them to stop (*n* = 8, 72.7%). The majority of perpetrators (*n* = 8, 72.7%) reported that they stopped their behaviour after being contacted by the victim, although only 25% (*n* = 2) of these perpetrators reported that they had stopped their behaviour immediately.

Victim - Perpetrator Relationship

The majority of victims (*n* = 53, 71.6%) and perpetrators (*n* = 9, 81.8%) reported that they had met in-person before the cyberstalking began. Victims most often reported that the perpetrator was an ex-partner (*n* = 23, 31.3%), this was followed by ex-friend (*n* = 16, 21.6%), stranger (*n* =

13, 17.6%), and friend (*n* = 9, 12.2%). Fewer victims reported that the perpetrator was an acquaintance (*n* = 6, 8.1%); a current partner (*n* = 2, 2.7%); a family member (*n* = 2, 2.7%), a colleague (*n* = 1, 1.4%); an ex-colleague (*n* = 1, 1.4%); or they had another relationship not listed (*n* = 1, 1.4%). Perpetrators most often reported targeting a current partner (*n* = 4, 36.4%) or an ex-partner (*n* = 3, 27.3%). Perpetrators also reported targeting a friend (*n* = 2, 18.2%), an acquaintance (*n* = 1, 9.1%), or that they had another relationship not listed (*n* = 1, 9.1%). Individuals who had engaged in concerning online behaviour had almost all met their victim in-person before perpetration (*n* = 43, 97.7%), and most often targeted a friend (*n* = 16, 36.4%) or current partner (*n* = 14, 31.8%).

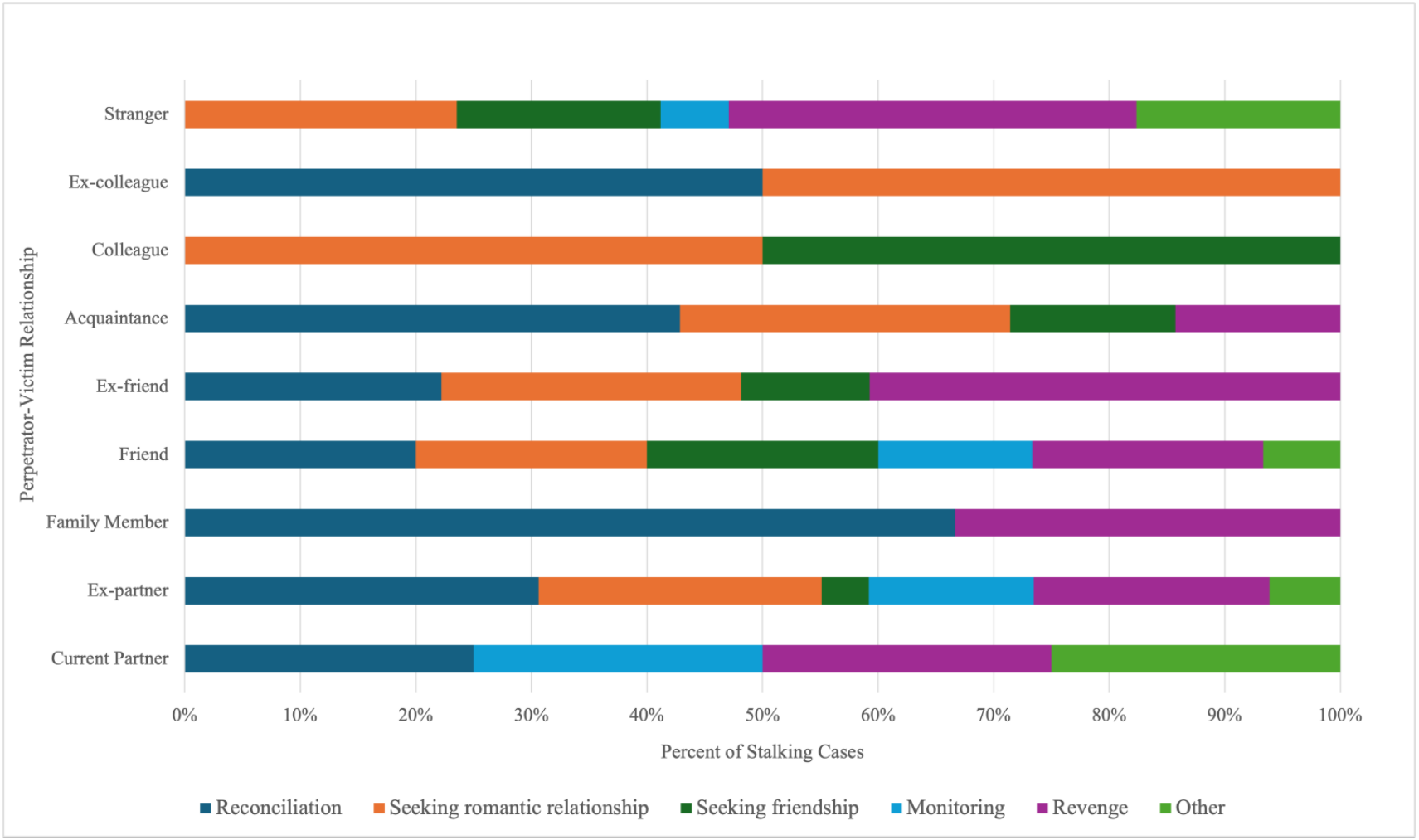
Perpetrator Motivation

Victims and perpetrators could report more than one motivation for the cyberstalking. Victims reported that the perpetrator was motivated by revenge or wanting to punish them in 44.6% of cases (*n* = 33), followed by reconciliation (*n* = 31, 41.9%); and seeking a romantic relationship (*n* = 30, 40.5%). Motivations less frequently reported by victims were seeking a friendship (*n* = 13, 17.6%); monitoring during the relationship (*n* = 11, 14.9%); or other motivations not listed (*n* = 9, 12.2%). Motivations reported by victims varied by perpetrator-victim relationship type, as demonstrated in Figure 3.1. For example, victims targeted by an ex-partner reported the widest variety of motivations including all six motivational types, whereas victims targeted by a colleague reported only two motivations, namely seeking a romantic relationship or seeking a friendship.

Figure 3.1 overleaf

Figure 3.1

Perpetrator Motivations Reported by Victims by Perpetrator-Victim Relationship Type



Perpetrators reported being motivated to engage in cyberstalking to punish or seek revenge against the victim (*n* = 4, 36.4%), to reconcile with the victim (*n* = 4, 36.4%), or to monitor the victim during their relationship (*n* = 4, 36.4%). Fewer perpetrators reported that they were seeking a romantic relationship with the victim (*n* = 3, 27.3%), or a friendship with the victim (*n* = 1, 9.1%); or that they were motivated for another reason (*n* = 2, 18.2%).

Individuals who engaged in concerning online behaviour reported that they were motivated by a desire to monitor the victim during their relationship (*n* = 31, 31.8%) but also desired to seek a friendship with the victim (*n* = 8, 18.2%); rekindle with the victim (*n* = 7, 15.9%); or seek a romantic relationship with the victim (*n* = 6, 13.6%). Only one perpetrator of concerning online behaviour (2.3%) reported that they wanted to punish the victim or seek revenge, and many reported alternative motivations not listed (*n* = 17, 38.6%).

Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate experiences of cyberstalking from victim and perpetrator perspectives, specifically identifying methods of cyberstalking; relationships between victims and perpetrators; and motivations of cyberstalking. Most victims of cyberstalking were female and aged under 30; most perpetrators of cyberstalking were also female and aged under 22. Victims most often reported experiencing repeated, unwanted online contact from the perpetrator, however perpetrators most often reported engaging in covert methods of online monitoring. Most victims were targeted by an ex-intimate partner, yet most perpetrators reported targeting a current intimate partner. The most common motivation of cyberstalking reported by both victims and perpetrators was revenge.

In order to align with previous research and identify accurate rates of cyberstalking perpetration and victimisation, the current study adopted suggestions put forward in Wilson and

colleagues' (2022) review. Namely, cyberstalking was clearly defined and operationalised in the current study, in line with legislation that dictates stalking behaviour must be repeated and unwanted and cause the victim to feel distress, alarm, or fear (e.g., Protection from Harassment Act, 1997; Protection of Freedoms Act, 2012); cases involving scam artists were removed; and clear descriptions of cyberstalking methods were provided to respondents. The current study consequently identified a cyberstalking perpetration prevalence rate of 2.1%. To identify the impact of cyberstalking operationalisation on the perpetration prevalence rate, the requirement of inducing alarm, distress, or fear was removed and as a result, 8.3% of the sample had engaged in concerning online behaviour. The current study also identified a cyberstalking victimisation prevalence rate of 14.7%, including the requirement of victim alarm, distress, or fear. This is higher than the 6.3% victimisation rate identified in previous research using the same definition (Dressing et al., 2014). It is evident that the definition and operationalisation of cyberstalking can greatly influence the rates of prevalence identified in research.

Other suggestions provided by Wilson and colleagues' (2022) review were not adopted and require careful consideration in ongoing cyberstalking research. For instance, the authors suggest that a minimum duration of two weeks and minimum repetition of 10 incidents of cyberstalking should be included in cyberstalking victimisation or perpetration operationalisation, however much stalking legislation including various statutes in the United States (Hazelwood & Koon-Magnin, 2013) and the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) in the United Kingdom do not require this minimum duration or repetition of behaviours, instead specifying that the unwanted behaviour must have happened more than once, in line with the operationalisation adopted in the current study. Wilson and colleagues' (2022) also suggest that unwanted, repeated messages sent during a course of conduct of cyberstalking should

be grouped and measured separately as unwanted contact, unwanted harassment, unwanted sexual messages, and unwanted threatening messages. It is important to note, however, that the nature of repeated, unwanted contact does not dictate whether cyberstalking has occurred and in fact many perpetrators only send messages of love or affection (e.g., Centelles et al., 2021). Additionally, Wilson and colleagues (2022) do not specify how 'unwanted online contact' and 'unwanted online harassment' would differ in measurement or operationalisation. Therefore, in keeping with the methodology of the current study, cyberstalking literature must be sure to include all instances of repeated, unwanted contact regardless of its nature or content. Ultimately, the adoption of a consistent and strict definition of cyberstalking is essential to ensure consistency in, and accuracy of, cyberstalking research. Elements of cyberstalking operationalisation can impact research findings, evidenced by the reduction in perpetration prevalence rate with the implementation of a strict definition in this study. However, some suggestions to date do not align with stalking legislation, the consideration of which is vital to ensure the practical application of ongoing research.

Methods of Cyberstalking

Cyberstalking victims and perpetrators in the current study reported a variety of cyberstalking methods including online contact, online posting, online monitoring, and infiltration of online accounts. The findings suggest a contradiction, however, in the prevalence of methods reported by victims and perpetrators; victims most often reported repeated, unwanted contact whereas perpetrators most frequently reported covert methods of online monitoring or infiltrating the victim's accounts. Almost all victims experienced repeated, unwanted online contact via text messages, email, or social media in line with existing research which highlights unwanted contact as the most frequently experienced method of cyberstalking (Begotti & Maran, 2019; Dressing et

al., 2014; Olson et al., 2023). However, the majority of perpetrators in the current study did not report sending unwanted, repeated online messages. In contrast, only a quarter of victims reported that the perpetrator had attempted to gain access to their online accounts, and this method of cyberstalking is less frequently reported by victims generally (Dressing et al., 2014), however just over half of the perpetrators in the current study reported engaging in this method of cyberstalking. Methods of cyberstalking involving online monitoring were also more frequently reported by perpetrators than victims, including checking the victim's posts, photos, locations, or online status. This suggests that many methods of cyberstalking may occur without the victim's knowledge and thus awareness of perpetrator behaviour may account for the discrepant findings herein.

Relatedly, many victims reported that they *suspected* that the perpetrator had engaged in methods of online monitoring but they were not certain if this had happened. When compared to repeated, unwanted contact, fewer victims report cyberstalking methods that do not involve direct contact (Begotti & Maran, 2019; Dressing et al., 2014) but many perpetrators in the current study reported joining online groups the victim was in, checking the victim's live location, accessing the victim's online accounts, and using a fake social media profile. Evidently, cyberstalking can be perpetrated without explicit knowledge of the victim in an effort to monitor their online activity and movements, often using a false identity. It is widely recognised that perpetrators engage in these covert methods of cyberstalking through the use of social media (e.g., Lyndon et al., 2011) but, alarmingly, researchers have also noted how novel technologies can enable entirely covert surveillance of a victim. For instance, a perpetrator could set up a fake or anonymous account on a location-enabled dating application such as Tinder or Grindr to identify their proximity to the victim, with some apps even providing this measurement down to metres or feet (Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017; Hoang et al., 2017). Additionally, Apple AirTags can be used by perpetrators to

monitor a victim's precise live location (Heinrich et al., 2024; Shafqat et al., 2023). Research should endeavour to remain up to date with novel technologies and software to ensure these are accurately explored in the context of cyberstalking victimisation and perpetration.

Victim - Perpetrator Relationship

Victims most often reported being targeted by an ex-intimate partner, representing just under a third of cases. Victims also reported being targeted by a friend or ex-friend, stranger, acquaintance, current partner, family member, and colleague or ex-colleague, in line with existing literature that demonstrates a variety of relationships between cyberstalking perpetrators and victims (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014; Fernández-Cruz et al., 2021; Reyns et al., 2012; Short et al., 2014; Worsley et al., 2017). It should also be noted here that the current study did not include an 'unknown' option for victims to indicate that they did not know who was perpetrating cyberstalking, so these victims may have selected the stranger category if they were not certain of the perpetrator's identity. Research indicates that some victims of cyberstalking do not know who the perpetrator is, particularly when cyberstalking is perpetrated covertly or through fake online accounts (Maple et al., 2011). Given that cyberstalking cases involve a variety of relationships, it would be prudent for further research to explore if relationship type within cyberstalking cases can predict impact on victims, as similar studies of offline stalking impacts have yielded mixed findings. Some research indicates that victims targeted by an ex-partner are more likely to endure more invasive and persistent methods of stalking and experience greater psychological, physical, and social impacts (Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012) but recent research suggests that a prior intimate relationship does not always predict impact, and in fact, victims of stalking targeted by a stranger report greater impacts on others around them (Storey et al., 2023).

Many perpetrators of cyberstalking, and notably almost a third of individuals who engaged in concerning online behaviour, reported targeting their current partner using methods of online monitoring, such as checking the victim's online activity, finding their live location, and monitoring their online status. Whilst these behaviours enacted towards a current partner during a relationship would fall into the legal remit of (technology-facilitated) domestic abuse (Afrouz, 2023) rather than cyberstalking, these findings warrant concern about the prevalence and impact of these behaviours. Additionally, it is well-known that domestic abuse during a relationship can predict stalking and cyberstalking after the relationship has broken down (Douglas & Dutton, 2001; Marcum & Higgins, 2021). Many victims of domestic abuse report that technology has changed the way that perpetrators pursue them long after they have left the relationship, creating a "web of entanglement" (Dimond et al., 2011, p.420). Methods of cyberstalking used by perpetrators to target an ex-partner may therefore reflect patterns of domestic abuse that they previously employed during the relationship.

Perpetrator Motivation

Victims and perpetrators reported a variety of motivations for cyberstalking in the current study. Victims and perpetrators most often reported that the cyberstalking was motivated by revenge or reconciliation, in line with existing research which identified that most cyberstalking cases fit the *Rejected* category of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology, i.e., perpetrators who engage in cyberstalking for reconciliation or revenge following the breakdown of their relationship with the victim (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). Many victims also reported that the perpetrator was motivated to seek a friendship or relationship with the victim, or to monitor the victim. In addition, many victims in the current study reported more than one motivation, and some victims and perpetrators reported 'other' motivations, i.e., not captured within the options provided

in the current study, suggesting that motivations behind cyberstalking are complex and overlapping. Motivations behind cyberstalking perpetration may also change throughout a course of conduct, for instance if a perpetrator is initially motivated to seek a relationship with the victim and is rejected, they then may be motivated by revenge or resentment (Fissel, 2021; Moriarty & Freiberger, 2008).

Victim-reported motivations also varied by relationship-type. Namely, victims targeted by a friend/ex-friend, acquaintance, ex or current partner, or stranger reported a wider variety of motivations compared to victims targeted by a colleague/ex-colleague or family member. Considering the most prevalent relationships reported by victims, those targeted by an ex-partner most often reported reconciliation as the perpetrator's motivation, and those targeted by an ex-friend most often reported revenge. Limited existing research has explored how cyberstalking motivations vary by relationship type, but one study suggests ex-partner perpetrators are most often motivated by feelings of rejection or obsession, and perpetrators who target a friend are most often motivated by affection or rejection (Fissel, 2021).

Limitations

The current study provides valuable insight into methods of cyberstalking experienced and perpetrated, as well as relationships between perpetrators and victims and motivations behind cyberstalking perpetration. However, the study is subject to some limitations. The study relied on self-reported experiences of cyberstalking from samples with limited generalisability. The over-representation of young adults, mostly undergraduate students, within the samples does not necessarily hinder the results given the proclivity of technology use among that demographic, but future research should include a wider variety of demographic groups. The current study collected limited demographic details from participants, and did not measure sexual orientation, socio-

economic status, or ethnicity. Within research that explores offending behaviours in the context of intimate relationships, it is particularly important to identify sexual orientation of victims and perpetrators to add to the literature regarding cyberstalking within heterosexual or same-sex relationships. In addition, measuring socio-economic status and ethnicity among participants would allow identification of cyberstalking prevalence rates among under-represented groups. The prevalence rate of cyberstalking perpetration identified in the current study was very low, and lower than many previous studies, but may reflect the strict definition of cyberstalking adopted. Inferences of prevalence of cyberstalking victimisation and perpetration from the samples included in the current study should be adopted with caution, as the sample consisted of university students, and individuals who choose to partake in paid survey participation. The samples are not representative of all victims and perpetrators of cyberstalking. While this sampling technique enabled the collection of a sufficient number of responses, the final samples consisted only of individuals being rewarded for their participation in the research. Conclusions drawn regarding prevalence and patterns of cyberstalking perpetration based on this sample must therefore be considered preliminary, and future research should aim to include a larger sample of cyberstalking perpetrators.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

The dichotomy in the reported prevalence of cyberstalking methods from victims and perpetrators in the current study suggests that victim reports may represent just the 'tip of the iceberg' of cyberstalking methods adopted by perpetrators, and in fact many covert behaviours are perpetrated without the victim's knowledge. A threshold of causing 'reasonable' alarm, distress, or fear is ultimately required for a case of cyberstalking to meet legal criteria. In ongoing research it must be considered that victims may not be aware of certain methods of cyberstalking and

behaviours may induce fear in some victims but not others (Pereira & Matos, 2016). In fact, by requiring fear, some cases of cyberstalking may be unduly excluded from research despite involving repeated, unwanted online behaviours (Wilson et al., 2022).

Whilst a standardised approach is unlikely, and researchers must consider the implications of their chosen definition on the practical applicability of research, studies including victim samples should define cyberstalking as any unwanted online behaviour that occurs more than once and causes alarm, distress, or fear. Varying the language used when asking victims about the impact of cyberstalking could help create a holistic picture of *how* and *why* cyberstalking causes alarm, distress, or fear. For instance, research could measure the impact of cyberstalking behaviours on victim's mental and physical health; day to day activities; safety; online confidence; and impact on others (Short et al., 2014; Storey et al., 2023; Worsley et al., 2017) to create a holistic picture of the true prevalence and impacts of cyberstalking. For research including perpetrator samples, the act itself regardless of the awareness or response of the victim could form the basis of operationalisation, in line with other offences such as upskirting, voyeurism, or image-based sexual abuse which are illegal regardless of the victim's awareness (Lewis & Anitha, 2023; Powell et al., 2020). However, limitations emerge when relying on perpetration samples. For instance, almost half of the victims in the current study who complained to the perpetrator about the cyberstalking reported that the perpetrator did not stop, yet the majority of perpetrators reported that they did stop their behaviour after being contacted by the victim. Perpetrators may therefore be attempting to downplay or dismiss the variety, duration, or severity of their cyberstalking perpetration, in line with the discrepancy in prevalence of reported perpetration and victimisation. This may mirror findings in domestic abuse research whereby perpetrators are known to minimise or justify their actions (Giezek et al., 2023). Ongoing research into cyberstalking perpetration

should consider the utility of solely perpetrator samples and, in line with the current study, it is beneficial to include both victims and perpetrators in analysis of cyberstalking prevalence and methods.

In the context of managing cases of cyberstalking and supporting victims, the current study highlights that police must prioritise professional curiosity within their investigations. Firstly, the incidents that are reported to police may represent just a fraction of the overall cyberstalking offence and police must endeavour to identify as many cyberstalking methods as possible across different technologies, devices, and platforms; the responsibility should not fall entirely on victims to identify these methods. For example, particularly in cases where the perpetrator has had previous access to the victim's device, the perpetrator could have installed additional software to track or monitor the victim through this device without the victim's knowledge (Heinrich et al., 2024). Secondly, police must adopt professional curiosity to identify the true impacts of cyberstalking on the victim. The purpose of this approach is twofold: firstly, to meet the legal criteria of stalking the victim must feel 'reasonable' alarm, distress, or fear which must be established by police; and, secondly, evidence of the perpetrator's fixation must be established to classify a case as stalking. In the UK, for instance, incidents of repeated, unwanted online contact could potentially be classified by the police as harassment, however when this contact forms part of a fixated course of conduct, it constitutes stalking. This classification then dictates the management and possible outcomes of the case, and certain legal orders such as Stalking Protection Orders can only be applied for in cases classified as stalking, not harassment (Crown Prosecution Service, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study highlighted that victims of cyberstalking experience various methods of online monitoring, online posting, online contact, and infiltration of their online accounts. Victims most often reported experiencing repeated, unwanted online contact but perpetrators of cyberstalking most often reported engaging in covert methods of online monitoring. Cyberstalking often occurred within the context of intimate relationships, motivated by revenge or reconciliation. The findings indicate that cases of cyberstalking contain a wide variety of methods, but that victims may not be aware of the true extent of the cyberstalking behaviours perpetrated against them. Perpetrators engage in covert methods of monitoring and tracking their victims and these methods continue to diversify with the advent of new technologies. Future researchers must consider the implications of defining and operationalising cyberstalking on prevalence rates, and ongoing research should focus on how new technologies are enabling the perpetration of cyberstalking at an increasing rate. In the wider context, the police should prioritise effective and thorough evidence collection and consider the impact of cyberstalking on victims, not only to provide support but also to ensure correct classification of cyberstalking cases.

CHAPTER 4

Categorising Cases of Stalking and Cyberstalking

Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis highlighted that the motivations and methods of cyberstalking perpetrators differ extensively. Due to the complex and varied nature of stalking and cyberstalking, researchers, practitioners, and police benefit from the ability to categorise perpetrators (McEwan & Davis, 2020). For instance, using a typology can aid investigators in understanding the potential course of conduct a stalking perpetrator will engage in; the risks of threats and violence to the victim; and the likely persistence of the perpetrator (McEwan et al., 2009; Mullen et al., 2006; Pinals, 2007). A stalking typology also facilitates the development of management and treatment plans, including interventions to prevent future offending (Wheatley, 2023). The following chapter will discuss existing stalking and cyberstalking typologies, and the applicability and validation of these typologies in existing research. This chapter also details Study 2, which involved the validation of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology in categorising cases of stalking and cyberstalking.

Mullen and Colleagues' (1999) Stalking Typology

Mullen and colleagues (1999) developed a typology of stalking perpetrators, utilising information from a forensic sample of 145 (115 male and 30 female) perpetrators of stalking. The authors gathered details of perpetrators' demographic characteristics; stalking duration; and methods of stalking including unwanted communication; following or approaching the victim; in-person surveillance; giving, or ordering on the victim's behalf, unsolicited gifts; initiating spurious legal actions; making threats; property damage; and physical or sexual violence. In addition, the authors collected information about the perpetrators' relationship to the victim, and the perpetrator's psychiatric status and criminal history. These contextual variables were analysed to create five motivational groups.

The first motivational group is *Rejected* perpetrators who stalk in the context of a broken-down relationship, most often with an ex-intimate partner but occasionally with a family member or friend. *Rejected* perpetrators view the termination of the relationship as unacceptable and are motivated by revenge or reconciliation, or a mixture of both, culminated by a sense of loss combined with frustration, anger, jealousy, and vindictiveness. For these perpetrators, stalking becomes a substitute for the lost relationship. *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators identify the victim as their 'true love' and seek to establish a relationship with them in response to feelings of loneliness. *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators often target an acquaintance, colleague, or a public figure. These perpetrators are convinced that the victim will appreciate their efforts, and they feel anger when their actions are not reciprocated. *Incompetent Suitor* perpetrators target their victim in the hope that their behaviour will lead to intimacy but, unlike *Intimacy Seekers*, *Incompetent Suitors* primarily seek a date or sexual encounter with the victim, rather than a relationship. These perpetrators may lack social competency, that is, have limited knowledge of appropriate courting rituals, and have a sense of entitlement to a partner without capacity or willingness to approach the victim in a typical manner. *Incompetent Suitor* perpetrators recognise that the victim does not reciprocate their feelings and if they fail to gain satisfaction from their actions they will move on to a new victim (MacKenzie et al., 2009; Mullen et al., 1999; Youngs et al., 2013).

Penultimately, *Resentful* perpetrators engage in stalking with the explicit aim to frighten and distress the victim. These perpetrators feel humiliation or injustice (actual or supposed) and target their grievance towards the person they believe is responsible. *Resentful* perpetrators experience satisfaction from the power and control enacted by stalking and feel justified in their actions. Finally, *Predatory* perpetrators stalk to prepare for a physical or sexual attack of the victim. They take pleasure in fantasising about their planned attack and experience sexual and voyeuristic

gratification. *Predatory* perpetrators are likely to engage in prolonged stalking and continue their pursuit until they attack the victim or are apprehended (MacKenzie et al., 2009; Mullen et al., 1999; Youngs et al., 2013).

Mullen and colleagues' (1999) study also identified differences in the methods of stalking adopted by perpetrators in the five motivational groups. In their sample, *Rejected* perpetrators used the widest variety of behaviours compared to the other groups. These perpetrators engaged in following, approaching, telephoning, letter-writing, and leaving notes. Most *Rejected* perpetrators threatened their victim and 54% assaulted their victim. *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators often telephoned the victim or wrote letters to them, with half of the *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators having threatened their victim. *Incompetent Suitor* perpetrators favoured methods of direct communication including letters and approaching the victim in-person, often accompanied by crude or explicit remarks towards the victim. *Resentful* perpetrators most often threatened the victim and carried out criminal damage. These perpetrators were also likely to communicate directly via telephone and letters and follow the victim in-person. *Predatory* perpetrators exhibited the most dangerous behaviours towards victims, often using direct violence and threats. Direct communication was less likely in these cases, but *Predatory* perpetrators often conducted in-person surveillance to monitor the victim.

Beyond Mullen and colleagues' (1999) study that underpinned the development of the typology, further research has identified additional differences between the motivational groups. For instance, *Rejected*, *Resentful*, and *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators are more likely to engage in longer pursuits of their victim than *Incompetent Suitor* or *Predatory* perpetrators (McEwan et al., 2009). Moreover, *Rejected* and *Predatory* perpetrators present a higher risk of violence towards the victim (Mullen et al., 2006). Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology is also used in practice,

such as forming the basis of the Stalking Risk Profile (MacKenzie et al., 2009), a tool to predict persistence and recurrence of stalking and risk of violence towards the victim or third parties. An assessor utilising the Stalking Risk Profile first identifies the motivational group of the perpetrator, then assesses risk factors within that group, as well as high risk factors that span all motivational groups. Incorporating the typology in this way allows the assessor to measure each domain of risk and delineate potential management strategies (MacKenzie et al., 2009).

Two studies have used multidimensional scaling to attempt to statistically validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology. Using a sample of 50 stalking cases reported to the police, Youngs and colleagues (2013) aimed to identify differences in stalking methods between the motivational groups, as proposed in the typology. However, Youngs and colleagues (2013) found that the modus operandi of perpetrators did not differ significantly between the *Rejected, Intimacy Seeker*, and *Resentful* groups. Many of the most frequent stalking methods within the overall sample, for example direct contact, following the victim, making threats, violence, confrontation, and surveillance, were perpetrated by perpetrators in the *Rejected, Intimacy Seeker*, and *Resentful* groups. In an examination of 241 forensic stalking cases, McEwan and Davis (2020) concluded that *Rejected* and *Resentful* perpetrators often had a similar underlying motivation to rectify a grievance, and subsequently adopted similar methods of stalking. In addition, their analysis did not identify meaningful differences between the *Intimacy Seeker* and *Incompetent Suitor* perpetrators, and the authors suggested that both groups represented perpetrators who sought romance from the victim. These studies suggest that Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology has proved difficult to statistically validate and, in fact, some of the motivational groups may not differ distinctly in methods or motivations.

Although over 20 stalking typologies have been developed (McEwan & Davis, 2020; Mullen et al., 2009; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology remains the most widely used typology to classify stalking perpetrators (Weekes & Storey, 2024). However, Mullen and colleagues' (1999) original study used only clinical opinion to categorise the stalking perpetrators, rather than a statistical grouping method. Once categorised, inferential statistics were used to identify differences between the motivational groups, however all 145 stalking perpetrators included in Mullen and colleagues' (1999) study had been referred to a forensic psychiatric clinic and therefore were likely to be representative of perpetrators on the severe end of the offending spectrum, and/or those with underlying mental health disorders. Mental health disorders are not always a precursor to stalking perpetration (McGuire & Wraith, 2000; Nijdam-Jones et al., 2018; Wheatley et al., 2020), for example, research has indicated a lower prevalence of psychopathy in forensic samples of stalking perpetrators than other offending populations (Reavis et al., 2008; Storey et al., 2008). Therefore, findings from Mullen and colleagues' (1999) original study may reflect only a small subsection of stalking perpetrators. In addition, subsequent research to validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology has yielded mixed results. For instance, whilst some research has identified distinct differences between the motivational groups in stalking methods, stalking duration, and risk of violence (McEwan et al., 2009; Mullen et al., 1999, 2006), other research indicates that the motivational groups did not differ distinctly in stalking modus operandi and motivations (McEwan & Davis, 2020; Youngs et al., 2013). These findings conflict with the differences posited by the original study and, overall, findings to date indicate that Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology has not been successfully validated. Thus, given the widespread use, lack of validation and evidence that differences between the motivational groups

are not always statistically significant, Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology should be the subject of further validation.

Cyberstalking Typologies

As discussed within Chapter 1, research has failed to reach a consensus on whether stalking and cyberstalking differ distinctly beyond modality. Within the field of research that proposes further distinctions between cyberstalking and stalking, a few studies have attempted to group cyberstalking perpetrators and/or cases. An early study by McFarlane and Bocij (2003) proposed a cyberstalking typology containing four groups, namely *vindictive*, *composed, intimate*, and *collective* perpetrators. However, the development of McFarlane and Bocij's (2003) typology was problematic in several ways. Firstly, the authors used qualitative data from just 24 cyberstalking victims to construct these groups, and did not involve the use of inferential statistics to delineate significant differences between the groups. Secondly, many of the cyberstalking methods described by victims do not meet cyberstalking definitional or legislative criteria. For example, some victims of *vindictive* perpetrators described an 'active argument' between themselves and the perpetrator (McFarlane & Bocij, 2003, p. 6). Cyberstalking perpetration is generally understood as one-way repeated, unwanted contact, and therefore does not include an online disagreement between two people (Wilson et al., 2021). Thirdly, the *collective* perpetrator group represented cases whereby the victim was being pursued by two or more perpetrators simultaneously, as part of a collective pursuit. Again, this contradicts definitions of cyberstalking in legislation which posit that a case of cyberstalking generally involves one victim and one perpetrator (Protection from Harassment Act, 1997; Protection of Freedoms Act, 2012). McFarlane and Bocij's (2003) study is now considerably dated given the advancements in communication technology in the years since. The authors also concluded that many characteristics

of perpetrators in the *composed* and *collective* groups were largely unknown. Ultimately, McFarlane and Bocij's (2003) cyberstalking typology provides only broad descriptions of cyberstalking perpetrators and does not offer the differentiators required for the typology to be utilised effectively in investigations, such as distinguishing cyberstalking methods or motivations (Stephenson & Walter, 2011).

Further research has attempted to group cyberstalking cases according to the number of cyberstalking methods experienced by victims. Begotti & Maran (2019) asked victims to report instances of unwanted online contact; online harassment; unwanted sexual advances; online threats of violence; and online identity fraud and also identified if each victim had experienced just one method or more than one method. Of the 111 victims of cyberstalking, 45% had experienced just one method, and 55% had experienced more than one method. The utility of grouping cases of cyberstalking in this way is unclear and does not form the basis of a useful cyberstalking typology. Victims who experience just one method of cyberstalking are still subject to unwanted, repeated behaviour that can greatly impact their day-to-day life and cause alarm and distress. It is also not evident how the motivations, impact, or management of cyberstalking involving just one method would differ to cyberstalking involving multiple methods.

A recent study by Suzuki (2024) included a sample of 530 self-identified perpetrators of both stalking and cyberstalking, to categorise male and female perpetrators separately and identify groupings within each gender through latent class analysis. For both male and female perpetrators, groups comprised *Indirect Seeker*, *Direct Pursuit*, and *Serious Perpetrator.* For male perpetrators, a *Mild Perpetrator* group also emerged, and for female perpetrators, a *Malicious Defamation* group also emerged. However, notably all perpetrators included in this study had targeted an ex-intimate partner, and the perpetrator group included any participant who had engaged in at least one method

of stalking or cyberstalking, meaning a course of conduct was not established. In essence, the typology presented by Suzuki (2024) categorises only *Rejected* perpetrators and failed to establish stalking behaviour repetition, an essential aspect in defining and operationalising stalking and cyberstalking (see Chapter 3).

Two studies have attempted to categorise cases of stalking and cyberstalking by stalking modality. Firstly, Sheridan and Grant (2007) divided their sample of victims into four groups; 4% comprised the 'purely online' group who experienced only cyberstalking; 4.9% comprised the 'cross-over' group who experienced cyberstalking for a minimum of four weeks before then experiencing in-person stalking; 38.6% comprised the 'proximal with online' group who experienced in-person stalking and cyberstalking; and 52.5% comprised the 'purely offline' group who had only experienced in-person stalking. The purpose of this method of categorisation was to ascertain whether there were significant differences between the groups regarding methods of pursuit and effects on victims. 'Harassment from overseas' was more likely in cases involving cyberstalking, and threats from the perpetrator to the victim were more likely in cases involving in-person stalking. The presence of other methods of pursuit, and psychological and physical impacts on victims did not differ significantly between the groups (Sheridan & Grant, 2007). As most methods of pursuit and impacts on victims did not differ significantly between the groups, Sheridan and Grant (2007) concluded that cyberstalking should generally be considered a method through which a stalking course of conduct is perpetrated, rather than a distinct offence.

Secondly, Maple and colleagues (2011) classified cases of cyberstalking into three categories: 'online only' where the victim experienced only cyberstalking; 'online to offline' where the victim first experienced cyberstalking that turned into in-person stalking; and 'mixed' where the victim first experienced in-person stalking that turned into cyberstalking. The cases were

subsequently divided into 76% ‘mixed; 20% ‘online only’; and 4% ‘online to offline’. Further differences between these groups were not analysed, but the authors note the increase from 4% ‘purely online’ cases in Sheridan and Grant’s (2007) study to 20% ‘online only’ cases in Maple and colleagues’ (2011) study. Overall, the categorisation of cases of stalking and cyberstalking based on modality suggests that many cases involve both in-person stalking and cyberstalking methods, however, these two studies do not delineate further differences between cases involving solely cyberstalking and cases involving solely in-person stalking.

In sum, cyberstalking typologies remain underdeveloped and limited in utility, especially when compared to the applicability and widespread use of Mullen and colleagues’ (1999) stalking typology. It is therefore necessary to validate whether Mullen and colleagues’ (1999) stalking typology could be used to categorise cyberstalking cases. Only one study to date has explored the utility of Mullen and colleagues’ (1999) stalking typology in categorising cyberstalking cases; Cavezza & McEwan (2014) included a gender-matched sample of 36 cyberstalking perpetrators and 36 stalking perpetrators to compare perpetrators’ offence characteristics and motivations. The authors also examined whether Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology could be used to categorise the cyberstalking perpetrators. It should be noted, however, that the authors used only clinical opinion to categorise the perpetrators and did not statistically validate the typology. Nonetheless, all cyberstalking perpetrators were successfully categorised according to the typology; 75% as *Rejected*, 14% as *Resentful*, 5% as *Intimacy Seekers*, 3% as *Incompetent Suitors*; and 3% as *Predatory*. Compared to the cyberstalking perpetrators, perpetrators of stalking were classified as 47% *Rejected*, 22% *Resentful*, 5% *Intimacy Seekers*, 8% *Incompetent Suitors* and 8% *Predatory* (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). Evidence therefore suggests that Mullen and colleagues’ (1999)

stalking typology yields utility in categorising cyberstalking cases, but validation is required to justify this conclusion.

Study 2: Validating Mullen and Colleagues' (1999) Stalking Typology in the Categorisation of Stalking and Cyberstalking Cases

Study Rationale

Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology presents five distinct motivational groups of stalking perpetrators. While some further research presents clear differences between the groups in duration of stalking, risk of violence, presence of threats, and methods of stalking (MacKenzie et al., 2009; McEwan et al., 2009; Mullen et al., 1999), other research suggests considerable overlap between some of the motivational groups in perpetrators' modus operandi and underlying motivations (McEwan & Davis, 2020; Youngs et al., 2013). In addition, only one study to date has categorised cases of cyberstalking according to Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology, but without statistical validation (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). Other cyberstalking typologies remain inadequate, failing to provide an effective way of categorising cyberstalking cases. Given the widespread use of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology, conflicting findings regarding meaningful differences between the motivational groups, and lack of exploration in a cyberstalking context, a gap in research remains to validate Mullen and colleagues (1999) stalking typology for the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases.

The current study aims to identify possible subgroups in a large sample of stalking and cyberstalking cases through hierarchical cluster analysis, based on variables mirroring those examined in Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology. Interpretation of the subgroups will explore whether the groups reflect the motivational groups outlined in Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology. Subsequently, differences between the subgroups in demographic details of victims and perpetrators; the modality of stalking (mixed, online, or offline); the presence and

absence of methods of stalking; and impacts on victims, will be identified and analysed. Given the exploratory nature of hierarchical cluster analysis, it is not appropriate to predict *a priori* the expected number, size, or nature of clusters. Independent of the cluster analysis, cases of stalking and cyberstalking will also be categorised according to Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology. To build on findings from the original study, and subsequent research exploring differences between the motivational groups, analysis of differences between the groups in stalking duration; number of stalking and cyberstalking methods; presence and absence of stalking and cyberstalking methods; and impacts on victims, will be conducted.

Method

Overview

Information on cases of stalking and cyberstalking was gathered from records created by employees of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust (Registered Charity 802567). Access to records was provided by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and the project received ethical approval from both the charity and the University of Kent. Client records were coded by the author using an electronic coding sheet. Cases were not anonymised prior to coding, as agreed by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, but personal data (e.g., names, addresses) were not coded thus creating anonymised cases for analysis. The data collection variables included in the coding process by the author comprised demographic information of the victim and perpetrator; key dates within the case; the relationship between victim and perpetrator; methods of stalking and cyberstalking; perpetrator motivation; the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH; McEwan et al., 2015); the outcome of case; and the types of impact on the victim.

Cases

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust provides victims of stalking, cyberstalking, and harassment with support and advice through the National Stalking Helpline and/or through their stalking advocacy service. The National Stalking Helpline is open to any person in the UK who is seeking advice regarding stalking, cyberstalking, or harassment; advice is provided over telephone or email by a helpline advisor. A service user of the National Stalking Helpline can then be referred into the stalking advocacy service for further ongoing support. This referral can be completed by the helpline advisor, or by an external agency such as the police or victim support charity. The advocacy service will accept a case if the behaviour experienced by the victim has been identified as stalking according to the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012), namely, two or more incidents of unwanted in-person behaviour that caused the victim fear of violence, or alarm or distress which has an adverse effect on their day-to-day life; or cyberstalking, namely two or more incidents of unwanted online behaviour that caused the victim fear of violence, or alarm or distress which has an adverse effect on their day-to-day life. In addition, the case must have been reported to the police to be accepted into the advocacy service. Herein, employees of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust advocacy service will be referred to as *advocates*, service users will be referred to as *victims* of stalking, the individuals engaging in stalking and/or cyberstalking will be referred to as *perpetrators* of stalking, and each overarching stalking situation reported to the Suzy Lamplugh Trust will be referred to as the *case*.

Included in the study were cases of stalking and/or cyberstalking that had been accepted by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust advocacy service and, to ensure they contains sufficient detail, had a minimum of 20 separate instances of contact between the victim and the advocate recorded on the database. Records of contact on the database were linked using a unique client ID number for each

victim, and these ID numbers were used in the current study to identify and manage each case. A case therefore comprised information from various entries within a single file on the database. Client records were pre-populated by helpline advisors and advocates during their course of contact with the victim and based on information provided by victims; each entry on the database was date-stamped. Advocates are trained to collect relevant information from victims such as the stalking behaviours they have experienced, duration of stalking, and impacts on the victim. Advocates may also have contact with external agencies, such as other charities and the police, regarding the victim's case and upload information from these external agencies to the client record.

Materials

The information available for the current study was information ordinarily collected and recorded on the Suzy Lamplugh Trust database by advocates through contact with victims supported by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. From lists on the database, advocates selected the year of birth, gender, location, and ethnicity of victims and perpetrators, as well as the victim-perpetrator relationship. In free-text boxes, advocates also described methods of stalking and/or cyberstalking experienced by the victim, and impacts on the victim. For the current study, information was identified and coded by the author from the advocates' entries on the database, from both the pre-determined lists and free-text sections. The author coded this information electronically using a coding sheet to extract the below data collection variables.

Data Collection Variables

Victim and Perpetrator Demographics. Demographic details collected by advocates and subsequently coded by the author included victim and perpetrator location (limited to county or London borough); victim and perpetrator gender; victim year of birth; and victim ethnicity. Perpetrator age was categorised (<18; 18-25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65; 66+; unknown).

Victim-Perpetrator Relationship. Relationships between perpetrators and victims were collected by advocates and subsequently coded by the author in ten categories: ex-partner; ex-friend; family member; colleague; ex-colleague; neighbour; stranger; acquaintance; unknown; or other (accompanied by a free-text response).

Timeline. Key dates were coded from the advocates' entries, indicating when the case was opened with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust advocacy service; when the stalking began; and when the stalking ended.

Modality. Descriptions of the nature of stalking or cyberstalking experienced by the victim were recorded by advocates on the database. The author examined these descriptions and coded each case as either *mixed*: the case involved both cyberstalking and in-person stalking; *online:* the case involved only cyberstalking; or *offline*: the case involved only in-person stalking.

Stalking Methods. Descriptions of methods of stalking experienced by the victim were recorded by advocates on the database. The author examined these descriptions and coded methods of stalking as present or absent in six categories, namely *communicating with:* contact online or offline directly with the victim and/or third-party contact; *communicating about*: speaking to acquaintances of the victim about them to obtain or spread information; *threats/ intimidation*: threats to harm in any way, to kill, to damage property, cause harm to acquaintances, or property damage; *violence*: physical or sexual assault of the victim; *approach behaviours*: any attempts from the perpetrator to get physically close to the victim; and *direct contact*: in-person face-to-face contact between the perpetrator and victim.

Cyberstalking Methods. Descriptions of methods of cyberstalking experienced by the victim were recorded by advocates on the database. The author examined these descriptions and

coded six methods of cyberstalking as present or absent: having sent unwanted contact through email, text, social media, or phone call/voicemail; used a fake social media account to contact or monitor the victim; monitored the victim's whereabouts and activity through their social media; posted publicly about the victim online; contacted the victim's family or friends; or attempted or succeeded to gain access to the victim's online accounts or devices.

Motivation. Using information recorded by advocates on the database regarding the case of stalking or cyberstalking, cases were coded by the author into one of five motivational groups based on Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology: *Rejected; Resentful*; *Intimacy Seeker*; *Incompetent Suitor*; and *Predatory*. An 'other/unknown' option was also used with a free-text response for any cases that did not appear to fit the motivational groups.

Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH). Developed by McEwan and colleagues (2015), the SASH is a screening tool containing 16 items which are coded as present, absent, or unknown. The items cover three dimensions: stalking behaviour; perpetrator history; and victim situation. Based on the number and nature of the items present, an overall level of concern of low, moderate, or high, is reached. The author, who had received previous training in using the SASH, coded the 16 individual items for each stalking case and the overall level of concern.

Victim Impact. Descriptions of the impacts of stalking on the victim were recorded by advocates on the database. The author examined these descriptions and coded impacts as present or absent across four categories, namely 'psychological'; 'physical'; 'practical life'; and 'impact on others'. These categories were derived from existing literature which highlights these as key areas of impact on stalking victims (Storey et al., 2023).

Procedure

Permission to use the data was obtained from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and ethical approval for the study was provided by the psychology ethics committee at the University of Kent. At the time of data coding, the author was also an employee at the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. A data sharing agreement was implemented by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and agreed to by the author and the second rater (who was included for the purpose of interrater reliability). The author and the second rater, in addition, passed a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

A list of all cases taken on for advocacy by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust from 2017 to 2024 was amalgamated by the author. A total of 904 cases were screened, 646 by the author and 258 by the second rater and, from these, 462 cases were excluded due to insufficient information recorded on the database (i.e., fewer than 20 recorded instances of contact between the advocate and victim). Thus, a total of 442 cases were included in the study meeting the following criteria: the case involved two or more incidents of unwanted (online or offline) behaviour that caused the victim alarm, distress, or fear; the case had been reported to the police; and the victim had contact with the advocate a minimum of 20 times.

To ensure accuracy, reliability testing using ICC and Cohen's Kappa coefficient was conducted on a sample of 50 cases (11% of the total included cases) between the author and the second rater, blind to each other's ratings. The ICC values varied from .52 to .89 indicating moderate to good agreement, and the Kappa values raged from .56 to .58 indicating good agreement. For both ICC and Cohen's Kappa coefficient, a value of .5 and above is considered sufficient to establish interrater reliability (Koo & Li, 2016; Landis & Koch, 1977).

Analyses

Cluster analysis is a statistical technique used to identify subgroups of cases in a specific population based on shared characteristics; cases within a cluster are more similar to each other than they are to a case belonging to a different cluster (Everitt et al., 2011). Hierarchical cluster analysis was chosen for the current study as it is suitable for quantitative and binary data, and large datasets. In addition, hierarchical clustering does not require a predetermined number of clusters and can capture non-spherical clusters, i.e. clusters of different sizes (Gupra et al., 2021; Hofstetter et al., 2014). Hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted in three stages in the current study to identify distinct subgroups in the dataset and to identify whether these subgroups mirrored the motivational groups of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology. For assumption checks, the hierarchical clustering technique used Gower's distance, which is most suitable for datasets including both continuous and categorical variables (Liu et al, 2024), and Ward's clustering method, which aims to minimise variance within clusters (Everitt et al., 2011).

Mullen and colleagues' (1999) study also identified differences in stalking methods between the motivational groups, and further research has identified differences in stalking duration and risk of violence between the motivational groups (McEwan et al., 2009; Mullen et al., 1999). Therefore, once the clusters were defined, chi-square analyses were used to identify differences between the clusters, including differences in the demographics of victims and perpetrators; the modality of stalking (mixed/online/offline); the relationship between victim and perpetrator; the presence or absence of methods of stalking, namely communicating with; communicating about; threats; violence; approach behaviours; and direct contact; and the types of impacts on victims, namely psychological impact; physical impact; practical impact; and impact on others. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also conducted to identify differences in stalking duration between the clusters.

Hierarchical cluster analysis did not produce groups in line with Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology and so further analysis was required, independent of the clustering, to identify differences between motivational groups. While Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology could not be statistically validated in the current study and thus the utility of conducting comparisons between the motivational groups could be called into question, Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology remained a useful method of categorising cases by perpetrator motivation. The current study aimed to explore whether inferences between the motivational groups regarding stalking duration and methods of stalking would be consistent with previous findings. One-way ANOVAs were conducted to identify differences between perpetrator motivational groups in duration of stalking (measured in months) and total number of stalking methods. Chi-square analyses were conducted to identify differences between the motivational groups in the modality of stalking (mixed, online, offline); presence or absence of methods of stalking (as listed above), and presence or absence of methods of cyberstalking, namely having sent unwanted contact through email, text, social media, or phone call or voicemail; used a fake social media account to contact or monitor the victim; monitored the victim's whereabouts and activity through their social media; posted publicly about the victim online; contacted the victim's family or friends; or attempted or succeeded to gain access to the victim's online accounts or devices. Lastly, chi-square analysis was conducted to identify differences between motivational groups in the presence or absence of psychological, physical, and practical impact on the victim, as well as impact on others around the victim. Although multiple statistical tests were conducted using this dataset including chi-square tests and ANOVAs, no formal correction for multiple comparisons (i.e., Bonferroni adjustments) was applied. Type I error was considered minimal due to the independence of the

chi-square and ANOVA tests, each including different variables and addressing different research questions. Results should therefore be interpreted relative to this analytic approach.

Results

Victim and Perpetrator Demographics

Demographic information of victims and perpetrators can be found in Table 4.1. Victims were aged between 16 and 74 years, with a mean age of 37.4 (*SD* = 11.15) and were 91.6% (*n* = 405) female. Around half of victims identified as White British (52.3%, *n* = 231). Information on perpetrator age was unavailable in 72.9% (*n* = 322) of cases, however of the cases that did include perpetrator age, the most common age group was 26-35 (33.3%, *n* = 40), followed by 36-45 (27.5%, *n* = 33). Perpetrators were mostly male (84.8%, *n* = 375).

Table 4.1 overleaf

Table 4.1

Demographic Information of Victims and Perpetrators

Demographic	Victims *n* (%)	Perpetrators *n* (%)
Gender		
Male	30 (6.8%)	375 (84.8%)
Female	405 (91.6%)	57 (12.9%)
Non-binary	2 (0.5%)	1 (0.2%)
Unknown	5 (1.2%)	9 (2%)
Age		
Under 18	3 (.5%)	0
18-25	61 (14%)	6 (1.4%)
26-35	79 (18%)	40 (9%)
36-45	77 (17.5)	33 (7.5%)

46-55	64 (14.6%)	21 (4.8%)
56-65	28 (6.5%)	17 (3.8%)
66+	8 (1.8%)	3 (0.7%)
Unknown	10 (2.3%)	322 (72.9%)
Ethnicity		
Arab	5 (1.1%)	-
Asian	34 (7.7%)	-
Black	20 (4.5%)	-
Mixed Race	29 (6.6%)	-
White British	231 (52.3%)	-
White Other	19 (4.3%)	-
Other Ethnicity	18 (4.1%)	-
Unknown	86 (19.5%)	-

Note. Perpetrator ethnicity information was not available. Total Cases ($N = 442$).

Relationships, Motivations, and Modality

Table 4.2 displays the relationships present in the stalking cases, motivations of the perpetrators as grouped by Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology, and the modality of stalking in each case. Overall, the majority of cases involved a perpetrator who was an ex-intimate partner of the victim (63.1%, $n = 279$), and most cases fit the *Rejected* category of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology (62.9%, $n = 278$). The majority of cases were mixed in modality, i.e., involved both online and offline methods of stalking (67%, $n = 296$).

Table 4.2 overleaf

Table 4.2

Relationship, Motivation, and Modality of Stalking Cases

Variable	*n* (%)
Relationship	
Ex-partner	279 (63.1%)
Acquaintance	62 (14%)
Neighbour	29 (6.6%)
Stranger	22 (5%)
Ex-friend	14 (3.2%)
Ex-colleague	12 (2.7%)
Colleague	8 (1.8%)
Family member	8 (1.8%)
Other	4 (0.9%)
Unknown	4 (0.9%)
Motivation	
Rejected	278 (62.9%)
Resentful	65 (14.7%)
Incompetent Suitor	35 (7.9%)
Intimacy Seeker	23 (5.2%)
Predatory	17 (3.8%)
Other/Unknown	24 (5.4%)
Modality	
Mixed	296 (67%)
Offline	93 (21%)
Online	53 (12%)

Note. Total Cases ($N = 442$). Relationship, Motivation, and Modality categories were exclusive.

Table 4.3 displays relationship types within each motivational group. *Rejected* cases ($n = 278$) most often involved an ex-intimate partner (97.1%, $n = 270$), with the remaining involving

an ex-friend (1.45%, *n* = 4) or acquaintance (1.45%, *n* = 4). *Resentful* cases (*n* = 65) most often involved an acquaintance (30.8%, *n* = 20), followed by a neighbour (24.6%, *n* = 16). *Incompetent Suitor* cases (n = 35) most often involved an acquaintance (42.9%, *n* = 15), and *Intimacy Seeker* cases (*n* = 23) also most often involved an acquaintance (47.8%, *n* = 11). *Predatory* cases (*n* = 17) most often involved a stranger perpetrator (47.1%, *n* = 8) or acquaintance (35.3%, *n* = 6).

Table 4.3 overleaf

Table 4.3

Relationship Types and Modality per Motivational Group

Variable	Rejected	Resentful	Incompetent Suitor	Intimacy Seeker	Predatory
	n (%[a])	*n* (%[a])	*n* (%[a])	*n* (%[a])	*n* (%[a])
Relationship					
Ex-partner	270 (97.1%)	7 (10.8%)	0	1 (4.3%)	0
Acquaintance	4 (1.45%)	20 (30.8%)	15 (42.9%)	11 (47.8%)	6 (35.3%)
Neighbour	0	16 (24.6%)	8 (22.9%)	1 (4.3%)	1 (5.9%)
Stranger	0	2 (3.1%)	3 8.6%)	4 (17.4%)	8 (47.1%)
Ex-friend	4 (1.45%)	7 (10.8%)	4 (11.4%)	0	0
Ex-colleague	0	2 (3.1%)	5 (14.3%)	2 (8.7%)	1 (5.9%)
Colleague	0	0	0	4 (17.4%)	1 (5.9%)
Family member	0	7 (10.8%)	0	0	0
Other	0	3 (4.6%)	0	0	0
Unknown	0	1 (1.5%)	0	0	0
Modality					
Mixed	212 (76.3%)	41 (63%)	14 (40%)	15 (65.2%)	4 (23.5%)
Offline	35 (12.6%)	17 (26.2%)	17 (48.6%)	3 (13.1%)	11 (64.7%)
Online	31 (11.1%)	7 (10.8%)	4 (11.4%)	5 (21.7%)	2 (11.8%)

[a] Percentage of cases within motivational group

Note. Total Cases (*N* = 442). Remaining cases not included in table (*n* = 24) were coded as motivation unknown.

Duration of Stalking, Level of Concern, and Impact on Victim

The duration of stalking was ascertainable in 35.5% (*n* = 157) of cases and ranged from 1 month to 100 months, with a mean duration of 15.3 months (*SD* = 15.6). Categorised using the

Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH), just over half of the cases (55.9%, *n* = 247) were classified as high concern; 36.7% (*n* = 162) were classified as moderate concern, and 6.6% (*n* = 29) were classified as low concern. A SASH was not completed for 4 cases (0.9%) due to insufficient information. All cases (*N* = 442) resulted in at least one type of impact on the victim. Almost all stalking cases resulted in psychological impact (95.2%, *n* = 421), and the majority resulted in practical impact (71.7%, *n* = 317). The stalking resulted in impact on others (i.e., friends or family of the victim) in 54.5% (*n* = 241) of cases and resulted in physical impact in 12.4% (*n* = 55) of cases.

Methods of Stalking and Cyberstalking

The most commonly experienced method of stalking was *approach behaviours*, present in 83% (*n* = 367) of cases as shown in Table 4.4, closely followed by *communicating with* in 81.4% (*n* = 360) of cases. Threats were also experienced in 67.4% (*n* = 298) of cases. The most commonly experienced method of cyberstalking was unwanted, repeated contact in 74% (*n* = 327) of cases.

Table 4.4 overleaf

Table 4.4

Methods of Stalking and Cyberstalking

Method	*n* (%)
Stalking Method	
Communicating with	360 (81.4%)
Communicating about	155 (35.1%)
Threats	298 (67.4%)
Violence	58 (13.1%)
Approach behaviours	367 (83%)
Direct contact	161 (36.4%)
Cyberstalking Method	
Unwanted, repeated contact	327 (74%)
Fake profile	70 (15.8%)
Posted publicly	52 (11.8%)
Contacted family/friends	97 (21.9%)
Online monitoring	39 (8.8%)
Accessed online accounts	50 (11.3%)

Note. Total Cases ($N = 442$)

Cluster Analysis

Hierarchical cluster analysis was performed in the current study to identify subgroups within the sample of stalking cases, and to identify whether the subgroups produced would mirror the motivational groups defined in Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology. Whilst Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology did not arise from a statistical clustering method, the groups differed in motivations; stalking methods; victim-perpetrator relationships; and presence of violence and threats. Therefore, the first cluster analysis included the following variables: relationship between victim and perpetrator; stalking and cyberstalking methods;

motivation; modality; SASH level of concern; and impacts on victim. The analysis did not produce meaningful clusters, or clusters in line with Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology (see Appendix C). To elucidate whether clusters would mirror the motivational groups without the motivation variable included in analysis, this variable was removed and hierarchical clustering performed again including the remaining aforementioned variables. Without the motivation variable included, a three-cluster solution was identified in the dataset. The cluster analysis was interpreted using a dendrogram (see Figure 4.1) to indicate potential subgroups, and the silhouette plot (see Figure 4.2) to confirm the optimal number of clusters (Thrun, 2018). With the three-cluster solution determined, an attempt to add the motivation variable back into the three clusters was made, however this resulting in poor clustering and did not produce a meaningful alternative solution (see Appendix D). Therefore, the three-cluster solution from the second stage of the cluster analysis was selected for further interpretation and analysis.

Figure 4.1

Hierarchical Cluster Analysis Dendrogram

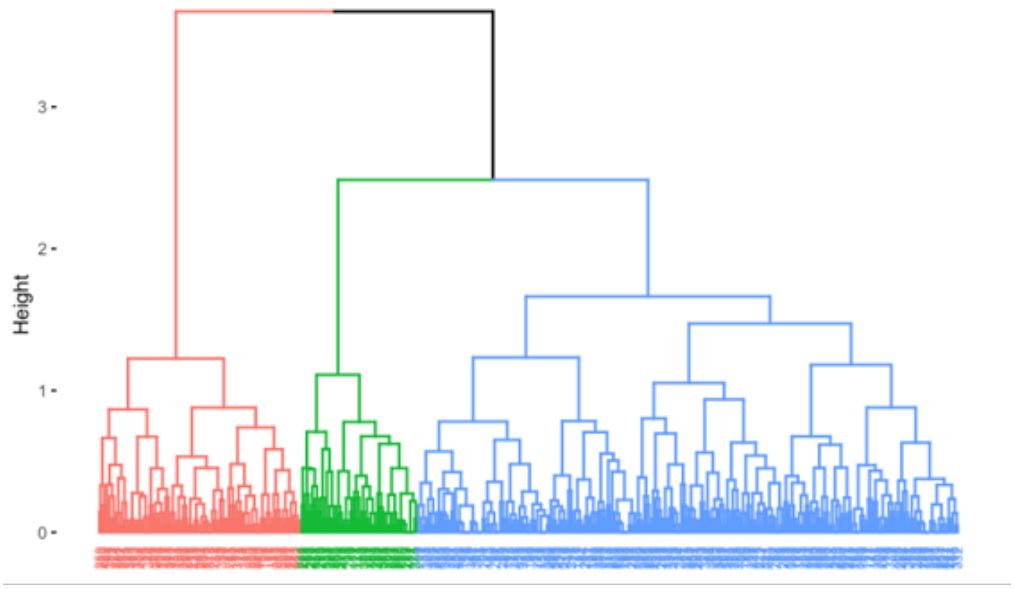
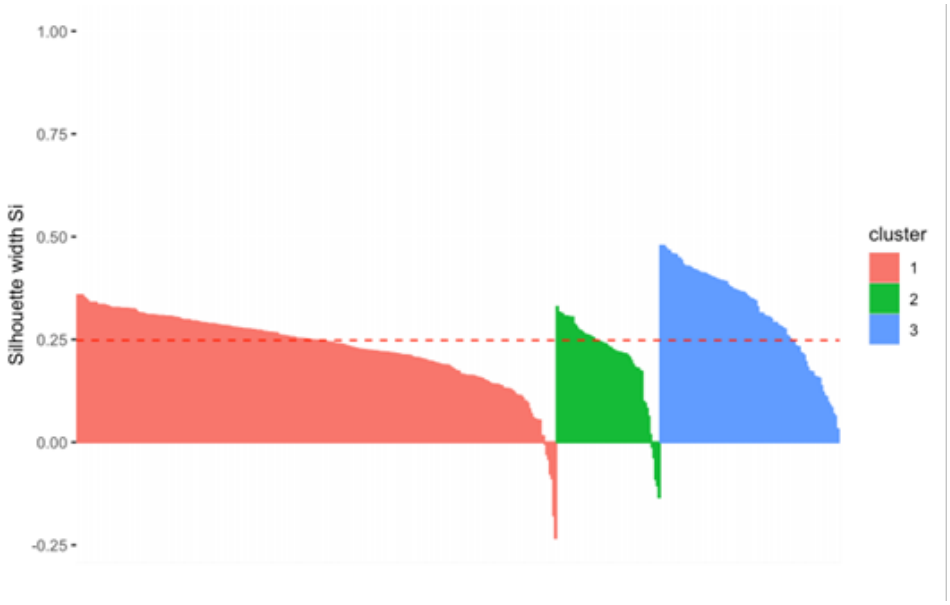


Figure 4.2

Hierarchical Cluster Analysis Silhouette Plot



Interpretation of each of the three clusters' characteristics identified a distinction in the modality of stalking most often present in each cluster. The vast majority of cases (98.9%, n = 275) assigned to Cluster 1 (n = 278) were *mixed* in modality, i.e., involved both online and offline methods of stalking. Within Cluster 2 (n = 60), 85% (n = 51) of cases were *online* in modality, and in Cluster 3 (n = 104), 87.5% (n = 91) of cases were *offline* in modality. As demonstrated in Figure 4.2, the clustering was imperfect, however this interpretation was validated using chi-square analysis which showed a significant association between the clusters and stalking modality, $\chi^2(4, N = 442) = 708.4$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .895. Examination of standardised residuals confirmed that cases in Cluster 1 were more likely to be cases of *mixed* modality ($z = 6.5$, $p < .001$), cases in Cluster 2 were more likely to be cases of *online* modality ($z = 16.3$, $p < .001$), and cases in Cluster 3 were more likely to be cases of *offline* modality ($z = 14.8$, $p < .001$), than expected under independence. Names assigned to the clusters are an interpretive description by the author and, consequently, Cluster 1 will be referred to as the *Mixed* Cluster, Cluster 2 will be referred to as the

Online Cluster, and Cluster 3 will be referred to as the *Offline* Cluster. The cluster analysis supports the conceptualisation of stalking and cyberstalking previously highlighted in Chapter 1 of this thesis, presented in Figure 1.1.

Victim gender, victim age, victim ethnicity, perpetrator age, and duration of stalking did not differ significantly between clusters. However, perpetrator gender did differ significantly between the clusters, $\chi^2(6, N = 442) = 17.70$, $p = .021$, Cramer's V = .141 (Monte Carlo 99% *CI* [.17, .25]). Cases involving a female perpetrator were more likely to fall within the *Mixed* or *Online* Clusters than the *Offline* Cluster ($z = -1.5$, $p < .05$). Further, a Monte Carlo chi-square test identified that relationships between victims and perpetrators differed significantly between clusters, $\chi^2(18, N = 442) = 133.01$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .388. Examination of significant standardised residuals revealed that cases where the perpetrator was a stranger ($z = 3.9$, $p < .001$) or neighbour ($z = 7.7$, $p < .001$) were more likely to fall within the *Offline* Cluster, than the *Mixed* or *Online* Clusters. Cases where the perpetrator was an ex-partner were more likely to fall within the *Mixed* Cluster ($z = 2$, $p < .05$), than the *Online* or *Offline* clusters. Levels of concern, identified using the SASH, also differed significantly between the clusters, $\chi^2(6, N = 442) = 28.79$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .180. High concern cases were most likely to fall within the *Mixed* cluster ($z = 1.7$, $p < .001$) and Low concern cases were most likely to fall within the *Online* cluster ($z = 2$, $p < .001$) or *Offline* cluster ($z = 2$, $p < .001$).

Further chi-square analyses revealed significant differences in the presence of various methods of stalking, including communicating with the victim; communicating about the victim; threats; violence; approach behaviours; and direct contact with the victim, between the clusters, as shown in Table 4.5. Cases that involved the perpetrator communicating with or communicating about the victim were more likely to fall within the *Mixed* or *Online* Clusters. Cases involving the

perpetrator making threats were most likely to fall within the *Mixed* cluster; cases involving violence towards the victim were most likely to fall within the *Mixed* or *Offline* Clusters and notably no cases within the *Online* Cluster involved violence. Cases involving approach behaviours or direct contact from the perpetrator to the victim were more likely to fall within the *Mixed* or *Offline* Clusters, and no cases within the *Online* Cluster involved direct contact. Frequencies of cyberstalking methods within the clusters were calculated, shown in Table 4.6. Chi-square analyses demonstrated significant differences in the presence of various methods of cyberstalking between the clusters, in that cases involving unwanted, repeated contact; use of a fake profile; posting publicly about the victim; contacting family or friends; or online monitoring were significantly less likely to fall within the *Offline* cluster than the *Mixed* or *Online* clusters. No cases involving unwanted, repeated online contact or use of a fake profile fell within the *Offline* cluster. The only cyberstalking method that did not differ significantly between the clusters was accessing online accounts.

Table 4.5 and 4.6 overleaf

Table 4.5

Frequencies of and Chi-square Results for Stalking Methods between Clusters

Stalking Method	Mixed Cluster			Online Cluster			Offline Cluster			χ^2	*p*
	n	%[a]	*z*	*n*	%[a]	*z*	*n*	%[a]	*z*		
Communicating with	276	99.3%	3.3	59	98.3%	1.4	25	24%	-6.5	296.67	<.001
Communicating about	106	38.1%	.9	25	41.7%	.9	24	23.1%	-2.1	8.86	.012
Threats	206	74.1%	1.4	36	60%	-.7	56	53.8%	-1.7	15.88	<.001
Violence	47	16.9%	1.7	0	0	-2.8	11	10.6%	-.7	13.15	.001
Approach behaviours	266	95.7%	2.3	2	3.3%	-6.8	99	95.2%	1.4	313	<.001
Direct contact	106	38.1%	.5	0	0	-4.7	55	52.9%	2.8	46.89	<.001

[a] Percentage of cases within cluster

Note. Mixed Cluster (*n* = 278); Online Cluster (*n* = 60); Offline Cluster (*n* = 104). Total Cases (*N* = 442).

Table 4.6

Frequencies of and Chi-square Results for Cyberstalking Methods between Clusters

Cyberstalking Method	Mixed Cluster			Online Cluster			Offline Cluster			χ^2	*p*
	n	%[a]	*z*	*n*	%[a]	*z*	*n*	%[a]	*z*		
Unwanted, repeated contact	270	97.1%	4.5	57	95%	1.9	0	0	-8.8	386.83	<.001
Fake profile	44	15.8%	.0	26	43.3%	5.4	0	0	-4.1	53.6	<.001
Posted publicly	35	12.6%	.4	13	21.7%	2.2	4	3.8%	-2.4	12.13	.002
Contacted family/friends	73	26.3%	1.5	20	33.3%	1.9	4	3.8%	-3.9	27.45	<.001
Online monitoring	31	11.2%	1.3	6	10%	.3	2	1.9%	-2.4	8.13	.017
Accessed online accounts	34	12.2%	.5	9	15%	.8	7	6.7%	-1.4	3.2	.200

[a] Percentage of cases within cluster

Note. Mixed Cluster (*n* = 278); Online Cluster (*n* = 60); Offline Cluster (*n* = 104). Total Cases (*N* = 442).

The presence of psychological impact on the victim, physical impact on the victim, and impact on others around the victim did not differ significantly between the clusters. Practical impact on the victim, however, did differ significantly between clusters, $\chi^2(2, N = 442) = 34.84$, $p < .001$. Practical impact included instances where the victim had to make changes to their day-to-day life or routines, such as changing their employment, school, or moving house. Cases resulting in practical impact on the victim were less likely to fall within the *Online* Cluster ($z = -2.3$, $p < .01$) than the *Mixed* or *Offline* Clusters.

Differences in Perpetration between Motivational Groups

While statistical validation of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology was not achieved in the current study, further comparison and exploration of the motivational groups was beneficial to compare case characteristics. For example, independent of the cluster analysis, a one-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference in the duration of stalking, which was only available for 35.5% ($n = 157$) of cases, between the perpetrator motivational groups (*Rejected, Resentful, Intimacy Seeker, Incompetent Suitor, Predatory*). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in the number of stalking methods adopted by perpetrators between the motivational groups, $F(6.08, 5) = 42.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$, indicating a moderate effect size. Post-hoc comparisons using Bonferroni identified that *Resentful* ($p = .047$) and *Rejected* ($p = .03$) perpetrators used significantly more methods of stalking than *Predatory* perpetrators, while other group comparisons were not significant ($p > .05$). Chi-square analysis revealed significant differences between modality across the perpetrators' motivational groups, $\chi^2(2, N = 442) = 60.03$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .261. Perpetrators who used solely offline methods were more likely to be *Incompetent Suitor* ($z = 3.6$, $p < .01$) or *Predatory* ($z = 3.7$, $p = .01$) perpetrators and less likely to be *Rejected* ($z = -3.1$, $p < .01$) perpetrators. Other group and modality comparisons were not

significant ($p > .05$). Perpetrators that caused impact on others were more likely to be *Intimacy Seeker, Resentful*, or *Rejected* perpetrators, $\chi^2(5, N = 442) = 17.38$, $p = .004$. The presence of psychological impact on the victim, physical impact on the victim, and practical impact on the victim did not differ significantly between the perpetrator motivational groups.

Regarding methods of stalking, no significant differences were identified in the perpetrators' use of violence, approach behaviours, or direct contact between the motivational groups. Perpetrators who communicated with the victim were more likely to be *Rejected* or *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators, $\chi^2(5, N = 442) = 34.58$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .28. Perpetrators who communicated about the victim were more likely to be *Rejected* or *Resentful* perpetrators, $\chi^2(5, N = 442) = 13.82$, $p = .017$. Perpetrators who exhibited threats towards the victim were more likely to be *Rejected* or *Resentful* perpetrators, $\chi^2(5, N = 442) = 20.5$, $p = .001$. Regarding methods of cyberstalking, no significant differences were identified in the perpetrators' use of a fake profile; posting publicly about the victim; or online monitoring between the motivational groups. Perpetrators who sent the victim repeated, unwanted messages were more likely to be *Rejected* or *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators, $\chi^2(5, N = 442) = 43.16$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .312. Perpetrators who contacted friends/family of the victim were more likely to be *Intimacy Seeker, Resentful,* or *Rejected* perpetrators, $\chi^2(5, N = 442) = 15.99$, $p = .007$, Cramer's V = .190. Perpetrators who attempted to access, or succeeded in accessing, the victim's online accounts were more likely to be *Rejected* perpetrators, $\chi^2(5, N = 442) = 13.51$, $p = .019$, Cramer's V = .175, (Monte Carlo 99% CI [.18, .25]).

Discussion

The current study aimed to validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology by identifying whether subgroups in a large sample of stalking and cyberstalking cases would mirror

the subgroups based on perpetrator motivation outlined by Mullen and colleagues (1999). All cases had involved advocate support and had been reported to the police. Analysis of the stalking and cyberstalking cases revealed that most victims were female and most perpetrators were male. Almost 95 percent of cases of stalking and cyberstalking in the current study were successfully classified by perpetrator motivation using Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology. As a result, almost two-thirds of cases fit the *Rejected* category of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology, and involved an ex-intimate partner relationship between the victim and perpetrator. Just over two-thirds of cases were of mixed modality, involving both cyberstalking and in-person methods of stalking. The most commonly experienced methods of stalking overall were approaching the victim and in-person contact with the victim; the most commonly experienced methods of cyberstalking overall were unwanted, repeated online contact and contacting the victim's family/friends online. According to the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH; McEwan et al., 2015), just over half of all cases were classified as high concern. All cases involved some form of impact on the victims, with almost all cases causing psychological impact, most resulting in practical impact, half resulting in impact on others, and a minority resulting in physical impact.

Clusters by Stalking Modality

The current study identified subgroups of cases of stalking and cyberstalking. Based on hierarchical cluster analysis, a three-cluster solution was identified. Interpretation and analysis of the clusters indicated that the three clusters did not mirror the perpetrator motivational groups from Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology, but instead were primarily based on stalking modality. In order of size, the clusters comprised the *Mixed* cluster containing approximately 63 percent of the cases, the *Offline* cluster containing approximately 23 percent of the cases, and the

Online cluster containing approximately 13 percent of the cases. It should be noted here that clustering by modality was imperfect. That is, the *Mixed* cluster contained two cases that were online in modality (.7%), and one case that was offline in modality (.4%). The *Offline* cluster contained thirteen cases that were mixed in modality (12.5%); and the *Online* cluster contained eight cases that were mixed in modality (13.3%), and one case that was offline in modality (1.7%). However, clustering by modality was statistically significant and further analysis identified characteristic distinctions between the clusters.

Mixed Cluster Characteristics

The *Mixed* cluster contained mostly cases that had involved both cyberstalking and in-person stalking. All but two of the cases in the *Mixed* cluster involved the perpetrator communicating with the victim through repeated, unwanted online contact (e.g., sending messages) or offline contact (e.g. sending letters). Over 95 percent of cases in the *Mixed* cluster also involved the perpetrator approaching the victim, and almost 75 percent involved threatening the victim. A minority of cases in the *Mixed* cluster involved the perpetrator communicating about the victim, for instance attempting to gather information about the victim from the victim's family or friends. A similar minority of cases in the *Mixed* cluster involved in-person contact between the perpetrator and victim, and a smaller minority involved violence towards the victim. Most cases in the *Mixed* cluster involved an ex-intimate partner relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Cases in the *Mixed* cluster were also more likely than cases in the *Online* or *Offline* clusters to be identified as high concern, according to the SASH.

Cases grouped into the *Mixed* cluster in the current study are characteristic of most cases of stalking identified in the literature to date. Most stalking cases involve both cyberstalking and in-person methods of pursuit (Dressing et al., 2014; Fernández-Cruz et al., 2021) perpetrated by

an ex-intimate partner of the victim (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014; Dressing et al., 2014; Heinrich, 2015). Research has previously identified that most cases are *Mixed* in modality, including victims who had and had not reported their experience to the police (Maple et al., 2011). Most victims of stalking experience unwanted communication from the perpetrator, towards themselves and others around them, and approach behaviours from the perpetrator (Dressing et al., 2020). The findings of the current study and research to date highlight the wide variety of online and in-person methods adopted by most perpetrators to instil alarm, distress, and/or fear in their victims. The combination of these methods encompasses the victim's day to day life and can also involve the victim's family and friends, further strengthening and widening the perpetrator's impact. The findings also demonstrate a perpetrator's ability to diversify the methods of stalking and cyberstalking they adopt to increase the intensity of their pursuit. For example, if a method of unwanted online communication does not yield a response from a victim the perpetrator may escalate to in-person contact, threats, or even violence. Violence generally occurs in the minority of stalking cases and the low rate of violence in the *Mixed* cluster in the current study mirrors low rates identified in previous research (McEwan et al., 2009a, 2009b; Storey et al., 2023). Nonetheless, cases in the *Mixed* cluster were more likely than cases in the *Online* or *Offline* Clusters to be allocated as high concern using the SASH. While the SASH does not predict risk, it has been shown to predict stalking severity (Hehemann et al., 2017) and, relatedly, existing research indicates that cases involving a diversity of stalking and cyberstalking methods from an ex-intimate partner perpetrator result in significant impacts on victims (Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012; Storey et al., 2023). The current study therefore supports the notion that cases of stalking involving both in-person and cyberstalking methods yield higher concern about stalking severity and subsequent impact, than cases involving solely cyberstalking or in-person methods.

Offline Cluster Characteristics

The remaining cases were grouped into the *Online* or *Offline* clusters. Most cases in the *Offline* cluster involved only in-person methods of stalking, including approach behaviours from the perpetrator. Just over half of the cases in the *Offline* cluster involved in-person contact and threats from the perpetrator towards the victim. A minority of cases in the *Offline* cluster involved the perpetrator communicating with or about the victim. A small number of cases assigned to the *Offline* cluster were mixed in modality, thus also involving methods of cyberstalking, however no cases in the *Offline* cluster involved only cyberstalking. The clustering of mixed modality cases into the *Offline* cluster suggest that they yield similarities to purely offline cases; these few cases may have involved primarily in-person methods of stalking such as approach behaviours, in-person contact, and threats, combined with online posts; contacting friends or family; attempting to access the victims accounts; or online monitoring (see Table 4.5). No cases in the *Offline* cluster, including those of mixed modality, involved unwanted, repeated online contact or use of a fake account. Unlike the other cyberstalking methods which were minimally present in this cluster, this suggests a true absence of unwanted, repeated online contact or use of a fake account within cases in this cluster. Mixed modality cases within the *Offline* cluster may also reflect situations where the stalking began in-person before moving online, yielding similarity to the 'proximal with online' group in Sheridan and Grant's (2007) study. Over a third of their sample had experienced primarily in-person stalking behaviours from the perpetrator with occasional unwanted online communication. Perpetrators who adopt primarily in-person methods before engaging in cyberstalking could do so in order to diversify their pursuit. Aspects of social media could facilitate this, for example, a perpetrator could utilise social media platforms such as Facebook, X, or Instagram to find the victim's online profiles or post about the victim, even if they did not possess

personal contact details of the victim (Al-Mutawa et al., 2016; Centelles et al., 2021; Sambasivan et al., 2019).

Notably, cases involving a neighbour or stranger relationship between the victim and perpetrator were more likely to fall within the *Offline* cluster, than the *Mixed* or *Online* clusters. The overall prevalence rate of cases involving a neighbour perpetrator identified in the current study was low, and research indicates that stalking involving a neighbour perpetrator is less prevalent than other relationship types such as ex-partners, ex-friends, or colleagues (Purcell et al., 2002). Regarding methods and modality of stalking, this finding is in line with previous research which indicates that a neighbour perpetrator's physical access to the victim often negates the need for online contact, and a neighbour perpetrator may also be less likely to possess online contact details for the victim or their friends/family compared to, for example, ex-partner or colleague perpetrators (Sheridan & Davies, 2001). The current study also identified a low prevalence rate of cases involving a stranger perpetrator; existing research similarly indicates that stalking involving a stranger is less prevalent than stalking involving an ex-partner or acquaintance (Podaná & Imríšková, 2016). Regarding methods and modality of stalking, stranger perpetrators tend to use fewer methods of stalking overall than ex-partner, acquaintance, or colleague perpetrators (McEwan et al., 2009; Purcell et al., 2002). Some research has identified that stranger stalking perpetrators were more likely than ex-partner perpetrators to use methods of cyberstalking in their pursuit of the victim (Reyns et al., 2012; Sheridan & Grant, 2007), contrary to the findings of the current study. However, the current study does support findings from Cavezza and McEwan (2014), whom identified that just 8% of cyberstalking cases involved a stranger perpetrator, compared to 25% of offline stalking cases; and from Heinrich (2015) whom identified that 12.8% of cyberstalking cases involved a stranger perpetrator, compared to 33.4% of offline stalking cases.

Online Cluster Characteristics

The smallest cluster, *Online*, contained mostly cases that involved only cyberstalking. All but one of the cases in the *Online* cluster involved the perpetrator communicating with the victim through unwanted, repeated contact. Just under half of the cases in the *Online* cluster involved the perpetrator communicating about the victim. Almost two-thirds of the cases in the *Online* cluster involved threats from the perpetrator to the victim, however relative to the *Mixed* cluster, cases in the *Online* cluster were less likely to involve threats. This finding is in line with existing research which has indicated that threats are more common in cases involving in-person stalking than cases involving only cyberstalking (Sheridan & Grant, 2007). These findings would suggest that cyberstalking can manifest as unwanted communication, contact towards family and friends, and threats, in line with typical cases of cyberstalking identified in the existing literature (see Chapter 2). As the clustering was imperfect, a small number of cases assigned the *Online* cluster were mixed in modality, including two cases assigned to the *Online* cluster which involved approach behaviours from the perpetrator. However, none of the cases in the *Online* cluster involved in-person contact or violence from the perpetrator. Cases in the *Online* cluster therefore involved solely or primarily cyberstalking, occasionally combined with approach behaviours. Cases in the *Online* cluster appeared to yield a lower risk of harm to the victim as in-person contact and violence were not present in cases assigned to this cluster. Overall, cases involving solely cyberstalking were less common in the dataset than cases of mixed or offline modality, hence the smaller size of the *Online* cluster. The nature of the sample should be noted here, as the dataset contained only cases that had been reported to the police and had involved advocate support. Research has established that victims of cyberstalking may not report their situation to the police unless the unwanted behaviour escalates into in-person contact or violence (Brady et al., 2023). The findings

suggest that, despite the lower prevalence of cyberstalking cases in the overall sample compared to mixed or offline cases, cyberstalking cases did represent a distinct group whereby perpetrators primarily used repeated, unwanted communication with or about their victim.

Cluster Characteristics Beyond Methodology

Further differences between the clusters regarded perpetrator gender and practical impact on the victim. Whilst most perpetrators in the current study were male, cases involving a female perpetrator were significantly more likely to fall within the *Mixed* or *Online* clusters than the *Offline* cluster. The findings of the current study therefore suggest that female perpetrators of stalking are more likely to involve cyberstalking in their pursuit of the victim, than use solely offline stalking methods. Similarly, research into the gendered nature of stalking and cyberstalking perpetration indicates that perpetrators of offline stalking are more likely to be male than female (Lyndon et al., 2012; Sheridan & Grant, 2007; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), and further research indicates that women are more likely than men to perpetrate cyberstalking, particularly against an ex-intimate partner (March et al., 2020; Resett et al., 2023; Silva Santos et al., 2021; Smoker & March, 2017). The propensity of female cyberstalking perpetrators has previously been attributed to higher levels of emotional attachment and rejection sensitivity in women than men, which often acts as a motivator of intimate partner cyberstalking (March et al., 2020). Additionally, cyberstalking is a crime which transcends physical boundaries, meaning female perpetrators do not need to be physically threatening or overpowering to instil alarm, distress, or fear in a victim. Relatedly, research has established that female perpetrators are more likely than male perpetrators to use covert methods rather than physical threats or violence (Purcell et al., 2001).

Cases assigned to the *Online* cluster were less likely to involve practical impacts on the victim, than cases in the *Mixed* or *Offline* clusters. Practical impacts on victims include having to

move house; change or leave school or employment; change routines; or limit social activities (Amar, 2006; Dressing et al., 2005; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Stieger et al., 2008). Previous research has identified that increased diversity of stalking and cyberstalking methods significantly predicts the likelihood of practical impact on a victim (Storey et al., 2023) and that victims of cyberstalking were less likely to experience practical impacts than victims of stalking (Sheridan & Grant, 2007). The current study supports these findings, suggesting that victims who experience only cyberstalking, and not in-person methods of stalking, are less likely to experience practical impacts on their day-to-day life. This could, in part, be attributed to the ubiquitous nature of technology in day-to-day life; cyberstalking can 'follow' a victim regardless of where they are. For example, if a victim is experiencing unwanted online communication from a perpetrator, this can happen at home, work, school, and in public. As a result, practical protective strategies such as changing routines, leaving employment, or moving house may not effectively reduce or prevent cyberstalking victimisation. This may explain why practical impact is less often reported by cyberstalking victims, compared to victims of in-person stalking who may need to take practical measures to avoid face to face contact with the perpetrator.

Perpetrator Motivational Groups

Cluster analysis did not produce groups in line with Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology and so the typology could not be statistically validated. However, the current study also used clinical opinion to assign cases of stalking and cyberstalking to each motivational group of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology: *Rejected*, *Resentful*, *Intimacy Seeker*, *Incompetent Suitor*, and *Predatory.* Almost 95 percent of all cases could be classified using Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology with the remaining cases generally involving a perpetrator with significant mental health difficulties and relatedly lacking a clear motivation. The

most common motivational group was the *Rejected* group, to which approximately 63 percent of cases were assigned. *Resentful* perpetrators comprised approximately 15 percent of all cases; *Incompetent Suitor* perpetrators comprised approximately 8 percent of all cases; *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators comprised approximately 5 percent of all cases; and *Predatory* perpetrators comprised approximately 4 percent of all cases. Despite the lack of statistical validation, the extant applicability of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology to identify perpetrator motivation was demonstrated in the current study and, for this reason, warranted further exploration of case characteristics within the motivational groups.

Regarding characteristics of the motivational groups, many of the findings yield similarities to the findings of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) original study. For instance, in the current study, perpetrators in the *Resentful* and *Rejected* motivational groups used significantly more methods of stalking than *Predatory* perpetrators. In a similar vein, *Rejected* perpetrators were less likely than *Incompetent Suitor* or *Predatory* perpetrators to use only offline methods of stalking. Mullen and colleagues' (1999) similarly identified that *Rejected* perpetrators used more methods of stalking than the other groups. Perpetrators in the *Rejected* or *Intimacy Seeker* groups in the current study were more likely to communicate with the victim through unwanted, repeated online or offline contact than perpetrators in the remaining motivational groups. This supports findings from Mullen and colleagues' (1999) whom identified that *Rejected* and *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators often telephoned the victim, sent letters, or left notes. In the current study, *Rejected* and *Resentful* perpetrators were more likely to threaten the victim, than perpetrators in the remaining motivational groups. Similarly, Mullen and colleagues' (1999) also identified that *Rejected* and *Resentful* perpetrators often threatened their victims. These findings provide evidence

to validate the differences between the motivational groups identified by Mullen and colleagues (1999).

Some further differences identified between motivational groups in the current study contradict findings in existing research. For instance, cases in each motivational group did not differ significantly in stalking duration. This contradicts previous research which has identified that *Rejected*, *Resentful*, and *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators engaged in longer pursuits of the victim than *Incompetent Suitor* or *Predatory* perpetrators (McEwan et al., 2009a). Stalking duration was not identifiable in a large proportion of the cases, however, and so this may have impacted this analysis and should be interpreted with caution. The likelihood of the perpetrator using violence also did not differ between the motivational groups in the current study. This contradicts findings by Mullen and colleagues' (2006) who identified that *Rejected* and *Predatory* perpetrators exhibited a higher risk of violence towards the victim compared to perpetrators in the remaining motivational groups.

Most cases in the current study involved the perpetrator exhibiting approach behaviours towards the victim, and a minority of cases involved direct in-person contact. The presence of these two methods of stalking did not differ significantly between the motivational groups. In contrast, Mullen and colleagues (1999) identified that approach behaviours and in-person contact were more often exhibited by *Rejected, Incompetent Suitor,* and *Resentful* perpetrators. In comparison, *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators were less likely to approach or contact the victim in-person compared to other forms of communication such as letters or telephoning the victim, and *Predatory* perpetrators often conducted surveillance but were unlikely to make in-person contact until their planned attack of the victim (i.e., in-person contact would not form part of the perpetrator's stalking course of conduct, but rather characterize the physical or sexual assault at

the end of their pursuit). Youngs and colleagues (2013) identified that *Rejected, Intimacy Seeker*, and *Resentful* perpetrators all exhibited direct contact and approaching/following of the victim. Therefore, in line with previous research, the current study identified that most stalking cases involved approach behaviours from the perpetrator. However, contrary to previous findings, the prevalence of approach behaviours did not differ between motivational groups. Additionally, the current study identified a lower rate of prevalence of in-person contact between perpetrators and victims than previous research including Mullen and colleagues' (1999) original study, and that the presence of this stalking method did not differ between motivational groups. The lower rate of in-person contact identified in the current study could reflect the increased availability of alternative methods to target a victim, such as cyberstalking, compared to at the time of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) study.

The current study also provided new comparisons of characteristics of the motivational groups not previously explored by Mullen and colleagues (1999) or existing research. For instance, a minority of cases in the current study involved the perpetrator communicating about the victim online or offline, including contacting the victim's family or friends to obtain information about the victim or to spread vexatious rumours about the victim. Perpetrators who contacted friends/family of the victim online were more likely to be *Intimacy Seeker, Resentful,* or *Rejected* perpetrators, than *Predatory* or *Incompetent Suitor* perpetrators. Research has generally identified that many cases of stalking involve the perpetrator contacting people in the victim's life (Dressing et al., 2020). However, this method of stalking was not examined in Mullen and colleagues' (1999) original study, or in subsequent research by McEwan and Davis (2020) and Youngs and colleagues (2013) attempting to validate differences between the motivational groups. The current study suggests that communicating about the victim was less prevalent in stalking and cyberstalking

cases than communicating with the victim, approaching the victim, or making threats, but that *Intimacy Seeker, Resentful* and *Rejected* perpetrators were most likely to engage in online communication about the victim. As highlighted by Mullen and colleagues (1999), perpetrators in the *Intimacy Seeker, Resentful* and *Rejected* motivational groups are likely to deem their behaviours as worthy of reciprocation from the victim, and when their actions are unreciprocated they view the victim as deserving of punishment suggesting that communicating about the victim is conducted as a form of retribution and a way of widening the impact of their unwanted behaviours.

The current study identified a low prevalence of cases where the perpetrator used a fake profile, posted publicly about the victim, or conducted online monitoring, and the presence of these methods of cyberstalking did not differ significantly between motivational groups. In a small minority of cases in the current study, the perpetrators attempted, or succeeded, in accessing the victim's online accounts. Perpetrators who exhibited this method of cyberstalking were most likely to be *Rejected* perpetrators. Existing research indicates that covert methods of cyberstalking such as accessing the victim's online accounts are frequently used by perpetrators but not as frequently reported by victims, likely due to lack of awareness that their accounts have been compromised (see Chapter 3). Compared to perpetrators in other motivational groups, *Rejected* perpetrators are particularly well-positioned to attempt to gain access to the victim's online accounts. The perpetrator's prior relationship with the victim may have granted them physical access to the victim's devices allowing them to install hacking software, or provided them with insider knowledge such as passwords or security question answers (Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017).

The presence of psychological, physical, and practical impacts on victims did not differ between motivational groups. However, *Rejected, Resentful,* and *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators

were more likely than *Incompetent Suitor* or *Predatory* perpetrators to cause impact on others. The impact of stalking and cyberstalking victimisation on individuals around the victim, such as family, friends, or colleagues, has been the subject of limited research. However, notably, Storey and colleagues (2023) identified that impact on others was significantly predicted by stalking diversity (i.e., the variety of stalking methods experienced). The current study supports this finding, as *Rejected* perpetrators used a greater variety of stalking and cyberstalking methods and were more likely to cause impact on others, compared to *Incompetent Suitor* or *Predatory* perpetrators. Additionally, Storey and colleagues (2023) found that closeness between victim and perpetrator inversely predicted impact on others. That is, cases involving a stranger perpetrator resulted in greater impact on others than cases involving an ex-intimate partner. The current study contradicts this finding, as *Rejected* perpetrators were more likely to result in impact on others and comprised mostly ex-intimate partners, compared to *Incompetent Suitor* or *Predatory* perpetrators who were less likely to cause impact on others and comprised mostly acquaintance or stranger perpetrators. Research to date and the current study therefore present mixed findings with regard to the association between motivation and causing impact on others. Impact on others appears to be more consistently related to the number and diversity of stalking and cyberstalking methods used, suggesting a varied course of conduct can result in impact on others around the victim.

The findings must be considered in line with the limitations and strengths of the study. Firstly, the study relied on secondary data collected by stalking advocates, based on victim and police reports. Whilst these reports generally provided a detailed account of the victims' experiences, as discussed in Chapter 2, many methods of stalking or cyberstalking can occur without the victim's knowledge. As a result, some methods may not have been reported by victims or identified by police. Secondly, the sample consisted only of victims who sought support and

had reported their experience of stalking or cyberstalking to the police. Many cases of stalking and cyberstalking go unreported by victims (Office for National Statistics, 2025) often due to lack of perceived seriousness by victims (Brady et al., 2023). As a result, research that relies on help-seeking samples, such as the current study, excludes cases of stalking and cyberstalking that victims perceive as less severe. Additionally, help-seeking behaviours have previously been associated to victim demographics, for instance, stalking victims who are female and white are more likely to seek support than male victims or ethnic minority victims (Reyns & Englebrecht, 2014). This limitation may lead to findings that are unrepresentative of the full spectrum of stalking and cyberstalking severity and not generalisable to all victim demographics.

Implications for Practice and Research

The current study identified that, when categorised statistically, cases of stalking and cyberstalking differ primarily based on stalking modality, and grouped cases into three categories: *Mixed, Online,* and *Offline.* The current study therefore did not statistically validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology which groups cases of stalking and cyberstalking based on stalking motivation. However, most cases of stalking and cyberstalking could be successfully categorised into motivational groups using Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology, when adopting clinical opinion to categorise cases. The vast majority of perpetrators of stalking and cyberstalking were categorised one of the five motivational groups demonstrating good interrater reliability, and most were *Rejected* perpetrators, whom targeted the victim following the breakdown of their relationship. Beyond Cavezza & McEwan (2014), the current study is the first to categorise cases of cyberstalking using Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology. Cases of cyberstalking were successfully grouped by motivation using the typology, indicating Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology is appropriate for the categorisation of cyberstalking perpetrators.

The findings of the current study therefore indicate that the use of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology is appropriate in grouping cases of stalking and cyberstalking based on perpetrator motivation; the typology has the ability to equip researchers, practitioners, victim advocates, and police with an understanding of why a perpetrator is targeting a victim. However, analysis of further differences between the motivational groups in the current study yielded mixed findings. The number of stalking methods used and the presence of unwanted contact and threats from the perpetrator to the victim differed between the groups, supporting findings from Mullen and colleagues' (1999) original study and suggesting that motivational group is associated with these elements of stalking and cyberstalking cases. However, other elements of the stalking and cyberstalking cases, such as duration and presence of violence and in-person contact, did not differ significantly between the motivational groups, in contrast to studies by Mullen and colleagues (1999) and McEwan and colleagues (2009a). The findings of the current study indicate that, overall, users of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology should primarily utilise it as an approach to identifying and categorising a perpetrator's motivation, but not as a tool to predict the presence of stalking methods, stalking duration, or likelihood of violence. The typology should be adopted alongside the SASH to screen a level of concern about a case and risk assessment tools to create a holistic picture of a case of stalking or cyberstalking and identify the severity, risk of harm and violence, and potential impact on a victim. Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology has, for example, influenced the design of the Stalking Risk Profile (SRP; MacKenzie et al., 2009), a risk assessment tool which assesses risk factors grouped by perpetrator motivation to predict risk of stalking persistence, violence, and recurrence.

The categorisations of stalking and cyberstalking cases presented in the current study, namely *Mixed*, *Online*, or *Offline*, suggest that modality of pursuit methods is the primary

differentiator between cases of stalking and cyberstalking. Nonetheless, most cases were *Mixed,* involving both in-person and cyberstalking methods including online or offline communication with the victim, approach behaviours, and threats, occasionally involving communicating about the victim, in-person contact, and rarely violence. This suggests that cyberstalking is often conducted alongside a stalking course of conduct, and various technology-enabled methods of pursuit are adopted by perpetrators to induce alarm, distress, or fear in a victim. Future research should therefore endeavour to include both online and offline methods when measuring perpetration and victimisation of stalking, recognising the frequent overlap of stalking and cyberstalking.

The remaining cases in the current study involved either solely in-person stalking, or solely cyberstalking. The findings suggest that cases of in-person stalking are distinct to cases of cyberstalking when grouped statistically, and examination of the groups identified differences in methods, relationships, perpetrator gender, and practical impacts on the victim. Research to date has not reached a consensus on whether stalking and cyberstalking differ distinctly beyond modality (e.g., Sheridan & Grant, 2007) and the current study provides evidence that there are key distinctions between cases of in-person stalking and cases of cyberstalking. Further research should aim to identify further differences between *Mixed, Online,* and *Offline* cases, such as whether criminal justice responses differ according to modality. Nevertheless, psychological and physical impact on the victim, and impact on others, did not differ distinctly between *Mixed, Online,* and *Offline* cases suggesting that stalking and cyberstalking both have significant negative impacts on victims regardless of modality. Further research of victim impact should consider how the evolution of technology and its ubiquitous nature in our day-to-day lives will increase and

change the impacts of cyberstalking on victims, which in turn should inform both police investigations and clinical approaches to supporting victims.

Conclusion

The current study identified subgroups in a large sample of stalking and cyberstalking cases. Analysis of victim and perpetrator demographics; modality of stalking; presence of stalking and cyberstalking methods; and impacts on victims, highlighted that cases were distinguished by modality, creating the *Mixed, Online,* and *Offline* clusters. Cases assigned to the *Mixed* cluster included a wide variety of cyberstalking and in-person methods of stalking, cases assigned to the *Online* cluster mostly involved only cyberstalking methods, and cases assigned to the *Offline* cluster mostly involved only in-person stalking. The clusters therefore did not mirror the motivational groups in Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology. Cases of stalking and cyberstalking were also categorised according to Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology using clinical opinion, and this was useful in differentiating perpetrator motivation in cases of both stalking and cyberstalking. The motivational groups demonstrated differences in number and nature of stalking and cyberstalking methods perpetrated, however did not demonstrate differences in stalking duration or use of violence. Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology should be used alongside screening and risk assessment tools to provide a holistic picture of cases of stalking and cyberstalking.

CHAPTER 5

Managing Stalking and Cyberstalking within the Criminal Justice System

Ongoing research of how stalking and cyberstalking are managed within the Criminal Justice System (CJS) is essential to aid in reducing recidivism and enabling effective protection of victims. Effective management of stalking and cyberstalking in the CJS involves the correct identification of offending behaviours; adopting professional curiosity to identify the nature and impacts of stalking and cyberstalking; and the implementation of effective legal injunctions to prevent further offending. The chapter begins by outlining how stalking and cyberstalking are investigated by police in England and Wales, and the legal ramifications that are available to place restrictions on perpetrators of stalking and cyberstalking. Existing literature has identified persistent challenges to the management of stalking and cyberstalking which this chapter will discuss in more detail.

In light of the challenges highlighted in previous literature and the ongoing need to promote effective justice responses, this chapter also presents Study 3 which examined approaches and challenges to the management of stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS, utilising a large sample of stalking and cyberstalking cases reported to the police. The study identified the prevalence of various CJS responses, including the provision of legal injunctions and protective orders. The study also examined whether CJS responses differed according to stalking modality (i.e., mixed, online, offline) and level of concern (i.e., high, moderate, low) identified using the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH; McEwan et al., 2015). Additionally, barriers and delays faced by victims in the progression of their cases through the CJS were identified, and attrition of cases throughout the CJS process was examined.

The Management of Stalking and Cyberstalking within the CJS

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, stalking is a criminal offence in England and Wales under the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012). For the purpose of this thesis and the studies presented within it, stalking refers to repeated, unwanted behaviour that occurs in-person and cyberstalking refers to repeated, unwanted behaviour that occurs online. In light of these definitions, the following chapter discusses how cases of stalking and cyberstalking are investigated and managed within the CJS; however, it is important to note that under the aforementioned legislation cyberstalking does not constitute a separate offence to stalking. The Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) dictate that stalking can occur in-person or online, and so a perpetrator of cyberstalking would be charged with stalking under these legislations. Stalking and cyberstalking methods vary widely and research indicates that most cases of stalking involve cyberstalking (Wilson et al., 2021; Woodlock, 2017) and so the inclusive approach of the legislation is necessary. Although the law does not draw a distinction between stalking and cyberstalking, research benefits from examining stalking and cyberstalking as separate offences to better our understanding of whether stalking modality influences CJS responses. Notably, the empirical study presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis identified that cases of stalking and cyberstalking formed clusters primarily based on stalking modality (i.e., mixed, online, offline). Building on this finding, the study presented in this chapter investigates whether stalking modality is associated with variations in how cases of stalking and cyberstalking are managed within the CJS.

Offence Identification and Screening

For a police investigation of stalking or cyberstalking to be opened in England or Wales, police must be able to identify evidence of a course of conduct (i.e., two or more incidents) of unwanted (in-person or online) behaviour that causes the victim to feel reasonable alarm, distress,

or fear of violence that impacts their day-to-day life (Protection from Harassment Act, 1997; Protection of Freedoms Act, 2012). Once an investigation is opened, the varied nature of stalking and cyberstalking means that it is useful to identify a level of concern associated with a case. To promote effective and timely criminal justice responses, research has led to the development of the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH; McEwan et al., 2015). The SASH generates a level of concern about a case based on the presence of 16 items over three dimensions: stalking behaviour; perpetrator history; and victim situation and can be completed by a victim advocate or a police officer. The number and nature of items present is calculated by the evaluator, after which they reach an overall level of concern of low, moderate, or high. The level of concern identified using the SASH is effective in predicting stalking severity (Hehemann et al., 2017) and aims to help police triage cases and prioritise justice responses. Utilisation of the SASH alone cannot predict risk but does indicate the need for further risk assessment by a practitioner, for instance using the Guidelines for Stalking Assessment and Management (SAM; Kropp et al., 2008) or the Stalking Risk Profile (SRP; MacKenzie et al., 2009).

Legal Ramifications

Once an investigation of stalking or cyberstalking is opened by police in England and Wales, a perpetrator may initially be served a verbal warning. A verbal warning is typically given face-to-face with a perpetrator, does not require admission of guilt or appear on a perpetrator's criminal record. Informal police warnings (when conducted without a formal warning letter or interview) have been deemed generally ineffective in reducing or preventing further stalking behaviours (Storey & Hart, 2011). Alternatively, a caution can be given by police to a perpetrator to act as a formal warning. A 'simple' (unconditional) caution requires that the perpetrator admits guilt of the offence and consists of a formal, written warning with no further requirements attached

to it. Alternatively, a conditional caution is an out-of-court disposal method which requires a perpetrator to comply with conditions as an alternative to prosecution. These conditions can be rehabilitative (e.g., substance use intervention), reparative (e.g., apologising to the victim), and/or punitive (e.g., a financial penalty; Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, 2022). A police investigation may also involve arrest of the perpetrator and implementation of pre-charge bail conditions (e.g., prohibiting in-person or online contact towards the victim). Breaching pre-charge bail conditions, however, is not a criminal offence (Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, 2022). Following arrest, if a perpetrator of stalking or cyberstalking is charged, post-charge bail can be implemented in court by the Crown Prosecution Service which imposes conditions on the perpetrator, such as prohibiting in-person or online contact towards the victim; requiring that the perpetrator regularly reports to a police station; or enforcing a curfew or location-based restrictions. Breaching post-charge bail is a criminal offence (The Crown Prosecution Service, 2023).

There are also three different types of protective orders that can be put in place and enforced to prevent further stalking perpetration, pre- and post-charge. The first type of protective order is a Non-Molestation Order, which is a civil order that the victim can apply for alongside any ongoing police investigation and places restrictions on the perpetrator. A Non-Molestation Order can be applied for and granted independently of the Criminal Justice System; implementation of a Non-Molestation Order does not require the perpetrator to be charged with stalking. However, a Non-Molestation Order is only possible in cases involving a perpetrator who is an ex-intimate partner or family member of the victim. Additionally, a victim has to meet the emotional and financial burden of applying for this order themselves, and feel physically and mentally able to attend civil court. The second type of protective order is a Restraining Order, which can be granted by a judge if a perpetrator is charged with stalking and the case proceeds to criminal court where they plead

guilty or are found guilty. A Restraining Order is a criminal order that can be enforced to place restrictions on the perpetrator, prohibiting contact with the victim and enforcing location-based restrictions. Breaching a Restraining Order is a criminal offence, and Restraining Orders are generally effective in preventing stalking recidivism (Cordier et al., 2021). However, most cases of stalking or cyberstalking take many months to reach criminal court, and so Restraining Orders cannot protect a victim living with stalking or cyberstalking while the police investigation is ongoing. A perpetrator charged with stalking may be given a probation order, a suspended sentence, or a custodial sentence and these can be enforced in conjunction with a Restraining Order.

The third type of protective order is a Stalking Protection Order, which were enacted in 2019 in response to the shortfalls of Non-Molestation Orders and Restraining Orders in protecting victims and preventing ongoing stalking or cyberstalking behaviours (Stalking Protection Act, 2019). A Stalking Protection Order is a civil order that can be applied for by the police during a stalking investigation before or after the perpetrator is charged; breaching a Stalking Protection Order is a criminal offence. A Stalking Protection Order can be applied for by the police in cases of stalking or cyberstalking where the perpetrator has carried out stalking according to the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012); the perpetrator poses a risk associated with stalking to the victim; and there is reasonable cause to believe that the Stalking Protection Order is necessary to protect the victim from such risk (Stalking Protection Act, 2019). A Stalking Protection Order places restrictions on a perpetrator, such as prohibiting in-person or online contact towards the victim or enforcing location-based restrictions. In addition, and unique to Stalking Protection Orders when compared to other protective orders, positive requirements of the perpetrator can be enforced. These can include a compulsory mental health

assessment, attendance at a behaviour intervention programme, or submission of personal devices to the police.

A review of the use of Stalking Protection Orders in the first available year (January 2020 to January 2021) found that 363 stalking cases of stalking across England and Wales involved an application for a Stalking Protection Order. Of the 331 cases where the outcome was known, an order was granted in 85.8% of these cases, in 8.5% of cases the order was withdrawn or discontinued, and in 5.7% of cases the order was refused or dismissed (Home Office, 2023). The provision of Stalking Protection Orders was a positive and necessary step in improving the protection of stalking and cyberstalking victims. Firstly, the ability to implement these orders before a perpetrator is charged aids in protecting victims living with stalking while a police investigation is ongoing. Secondly, the ability to enforce positive requirements of the perpetrator, including mental health treatment or intervention, promotes a holistic approach to reducing offending. The continued use of Stalking Protection Orders is vital in ensuring effective criminal justice responses to managing stalking and cyberstalking.

Challenges to Managing Stalking and Cyberstalking

Barriers to Help-Seeking

Despite the availability of stalking screening and risk assessment tools, protective orders, and legal ramifications, the management of stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS faces numerous challenges. In the year ending March 2024, it was estimated that 1.5 million people in England and Wales experienced stalking, however just 129,076 stalking offences were reported to police (Office for National Statistics, 2025). Evidently, victims face considerable barriers when deciding to report stalking or cyberstalking to the police. Many victims feel reluctant to report stalking due to fear of retaliation from the perpetrator (Logan et al., 2006). Additionally, many

victims only contact police once the stalking escalates, for example, the perpetrator targets a third party close to the victim; the perpetrator engages in criminal damage; or the impact on the victim becomes unbearable (Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021). Brady and colleagues (2023) found that perceived seriousness of cyberstalking, identified by whether the perpetrator made threats, was the sole factor responsible for whether victims of cyberstalking decided to report their situation to the police. Further research examining help-seeking behaviour among victims of stalking suggests that the complex and ill-defined nature of stalking and cyberstalking may cause uncertainty within victims about whether what they are experiencing is a criminal offence, and this deters many victims from reporting (Reyns & Englebrecht, 2014). Overall, victims of stalking and cyberstalking face considerable barriers when deciding whether to report their experiences to the police, highlighting a need to promote access to justice for those experiencing victimisation.

Shortfalls of Criminal Justice Responses

A 'super-complaint' made in 2022 by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and National Stalking Consortium, a body of 21 stalking support organisations, specialists, frontline services, and academics across England and Wales, outlined significant failures of the police in identifying and managing cases of stalking and cyberstalking. In summary, the Consortium highlighted a distinct lack of understanding within police forces as to what behaviours constitute stalking and how stalking impacts victims; inefficient and inadequate investigative processes; insufficient use of Stalking Protection Orders; and lack of action against breaches of protective orders. Evidence from literature supports these findings, for instance Taylor-Dunn and colleagues (2021) highlighted several areas of failure within UK police responses to stalking. Police inaction, reported by 54% of victims, generally involved a lack of understanding or appreciation by the police that the stalking behaviours experienced by victims were serious enough to constitute a criminal offence. Victims

reported that police had remarked that nothing could be done unless the perpetrator broke into the victim's home, made threats, or physically assaulted the victim, which is not in accordance with stalking legislation in the UK which defines stalking as any repeated, unwanted behaviour that causes alarm, distress, or fear (Protection from Harassment Act, 1997; Protection of Freedoms Act, 2012). A study by Martellozzo and colleagues (2023) further highlighted a lack of confidence in UK-based police officers' ability to recognise cyberstalking. Only 61% of officers felt knowledgeable of what offence constitutes cyberstalking, and 69% reported an understanding of the associated risks to victims of cyberstalking. Officers remarked that their lack of confidence in managing cyberstalking was partly due to the ever-changing nature of technology and always feeling several "steps behind" (Martellozzo et al., 2023, p. 696). Stalking and cyberstalking are also at risk of being misidentified or misattributed as other offences, such as harassment, malicious communications, or image-based sexual abuse (O'Shea et al., 2019; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021), or dealt with as individual incidents rather than a course of conduct (Korkodeilou, 2014; Suzy Lamplugh Trust & National Stalking Consortium, 2022; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2017). If a perpetrator is investigated for, or charged with, an offence of harassment they cannot be subject to a Stalking Protection Order; it is important that a stalking offence is presented as such to the court, to demonstrate a fixated course of conduct and give the court sufficient sentencing powers (The Crown Prosecution Service, 2025).

Almost a third of victims in Taylor-Dunn and colleagues' (2021) study reported that, during the course of their stalking or cyberstalking investigation, police did not keep in regular contact with them and their cases were passed around between several police officers. When victims did receive contact from the police, Taylor-Dunn and colleagues (2021) also identified a variety of inappropriate advice given to victims by the police, including to ignore the unwanted behaviours,

change their own way of life, or move house. Victims reported experiencing victim-blaming responses, for instance being told that they should not be checking their social media account if they do not want to see unwanted messages sent by the perpetrator. Cyberstalking victims have reported that the police made them feel that their situation is 'trivial' (Short et al., 2014), and that police sometimes place the responsibility of reducing stalking or cyberstalking behaviours on the victim, for example stating that victims are "unwilling to leave social network sites [or] to help themselves" (Millman et al., 2017, p. 16). Concerningly, this study by Millman and colleagues (2017) framed this issue as 'the unhelpful victim', which also included instances where the victim disengaged from the investigation or retaliated against the perpetrator. Whilst it is accurate that victim disengagement or retaliation may hinder the progress of an investigation, these behaviours should not be used as an opportunity to blame victims. Instead, the presence of these issues demonstrates the need to advise police about what guidance is appropriate to give to victims of stalking and cyberstalking, and to improve victim support provisions so that victims feel empowered to engage with a police investigation (Suzy Lamplugh Trust & National Stalking Consortium, 2022).

Additionally, 43% of victims in Taylor-Dunn and colleagues' (2021) study experienced false counter-allegations made by the perpetrator. Victims described that, not only did this cause them serious distress, but counter allegations also muddied the waters of the police investigation, suggesting to police that it was a 'tit for tat' situation. In a third of these cases, the victims were arrested due to the false counter allegations, all later released without charge (Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021). Research to date demonstrates concerns with the management of stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS, culminated by a lack of appropriate police action and insufficient protection of victims.

Challenges in Evidence Collection

Chapters 2 and 3 discussed the importance of professional curiosity when investigating stalking or cyberstalking. This premise refers to the act of conducting thorough investigations to identify the true extent of stalking or cyberstalking perpetration within a case, as well as the true impacts on the victim. To achieve this in investigations of stalking or cyberstalking, the effective and timely collection of evidence is vital (O'Shea et al., 2019). When successfully collated and linked to the perpetrator, evidence of unwanted, repeated calls, voicemails, letters, gifts, online posts, or messages can significantly strengthen a case against a stalking or cyberstalking perpetrator (Tokunaga & Aune, 2017). However, police officers face hurdles in linking anonymous online posts or messages to a specific individual (O'Shea et al., 2019). Some software utilised by cyberstalking perpetrators allows the individual to circumvent detection, such as anonymous text-messaging services which use spoof mobile phone numbers to prevent identification of the sender (Horsman & Conniss, 2015). Moreover, many methods of cyberstalking are perpetrated covertly, including online monitoring and accessing online accounts (see Chapter 3). Collecting evidence of these covert methods of cyberstalking is significantly hindered by a lack of forensic digital resources and capabilities, particularly if forensic examination of the perpetrators' devices is not possible when the perpetrator has not been located or identified (Millman et al., 2017). Ultimately, the thorough collection of evidence of stalking or cyberstalking is vital to demonstrate a perpetrator's fixated course of conduct that causes 'reasonable' alarm, distress, or fear in the victim as per the stalking legislation. In turn, this improves the likelihood that the offence is correctly classified as stalking and, consequently, that the correct legal ramifications are enacted.

Jurisdictional Limitations

The online nature of cyberstalking also means that it can be perpetrated across jurisdictional, county, or country borders. This presents additional challenges when managing cyberstalking within the CJS. Firstly, despite the fact that cyberstalking victimisation significantly impacts victims' feelings of safety and wellbeing (Worsley et al., 2017), research indicates that police do not perceive cyberstalking as a serious or harmful offence if the perpetrator is located in a different country and this can greatly hinder the effectiveness of an investigation (Millman et al., 2017). Secondly, the Crown Prosecution Service dictates that an offence of stalking tried under the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) is generally triable in the jurisdiction in which the offence takes place. However, the operationalisation of this is vague when the offence takes place online. During an investigation and prosecution of cyberstalking, the police and courts may opt to pursue an investigation within the jurisdiction of where 'a substantial measure' of the activities constituting the crime took place (The Crown Prosecution Service, 2018), generally resulting in the investigation being conducted within the perpetrator's local jurisdiction. The impact of this for the management of cyberstalking within the CJS is not fully known, however for victims, effective communication between themselves and the police is hindered when the police have to manage jurisdictional limitations (Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021).

Thirdly, it is well-documented that cyberstalking perpetrators often utilise social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, or TikTok, in their pursuit of the victim (see Chapter 2). Investigations could benefit from the identification and analysis of a perpetrator's accounts and content, however accessing this data is often difficult due to the need for cooperation from overseas technology companies that manage social media platforms (Bryant & Stephens, 2014). The changing and evolving nature of social media also causes challenges for investigators who need to

'keep up' with new platforms and recognise how to extract evidence of cyberstalking (Spyt, 2017). Ultimately, there remains a need for efficient collaboration between social media companies and authorities to identify cyberstalking perpetrators, remove harmful accounts and content, and protect victims.

Study 3: Justice in Progress: Exploring Approaches, Barriers, and Delays to Managing Stalking and Cyberstalking within the Criminal Justice System

Study Rationale

The management of stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS involves the use of stalking screening and risk assessment tools, protective orders, and legal ramifications to reduce recidivism and protect victims. The introduction of Stalking Protection Orders has improved the CJS response by facilitating the prevention of stalking or cyberstalking earlier on in an investigation compared to other protective orders, and by enforcing positive requirements. Nonetheless, research has identified key areas of failure within the current criminal justice responses to stalking and cyberstalking. Namely, police often fail to correctly identify stalking incidents; fail to conduct effective and thorough investigations; give inappropriate and unhelpful advice to victims; fail to identify risks associated with stalking; and fail to apply for appropriate protective orders (Suzy Lamplugh Trust & National Stalking Consortium, 2022).

The policing of cyberstalking faces additional challenges, with many police officers failing to recognise cyberstalking incidents or understand the technology involved (Martellozzo et al., 2023). Additionally, technological elements of cyberstalking perpetration can prevent the identification or location of the perpetrator (O'Shea et al., 2019), and jurisdictional limitations present challenges when the victim and perpetrator are located across borders or when social media is used as an avenue for perpetration (Bryant & Stephens, 2014). As previously discussed, stalking

and cyberstalking are not recognised as legally distinct offences in England and Wales, both are operationalised as stalking under the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012). As a result, research to date has not directly compared the management of stalking within the CJS to the management of cyberstalking within the CJS. Cyberstalking is increasing in prevalence (Dressing et al., 2014) but findings indicate that police responses remain inadequate (Millman et al., 2017).

While national statistics are useful to indicate the proportion of stalking cases that result in a charge, less is known about the prevalence of current CJS responses to cases of stalking and cyberstalking in England and Wales. The current study aims to identify current CJS responses to stalking and cyberstalking within a sample of cases involving advocacy support. Various steps at each stage of the justice process can help to protect victims of stalking and cyberstalking and prevent reoffending, namely arresting the perpetrator; implementing bail conditions; charging the perpetrator; and enacting protective orders such as an SPO, RO, or NMO. It is valuable, therefore, to identify the prevalence of these CJS responses in a sample of stalking and cyberstalking cases. In particular, the current study will compare the management of stalking to the management of cyberstalking within the CJS, something not yet explored in empirical research. Given that the management of cyberstalking faces considerable challenges within the justice process (Martellozzo et al., 2023), it is imperative that research, policy, and practice continues to promote and facilitate effective approaches to reducing cyberstalking recidivism.

In addition, research to date has indicated shortfalls of CJS responses to stalking and cyberstalking including failure to investigate offences effectively and delays with identification or location of the perpetrator (Suzy Lamplugh Trust & National Stalking Consortium, 2022). The current study also aims to identify some of the delays and barriers currently faced by victims of

stalking and cyberstalking as their cases progress through the CJS in England and Wales. Identifying barriers and delays faced by stalking and cyberstalking victims can help to enhance ongoing understanding of the effectiveness of justice responses and highlight areas for improvement. Promoting access to, and engagement with, the justice system is vital to empower victims to report their stalking or cyberstalking experiences and feel informed regarding effective justice responses. The current study will therefore aim to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How prevalent in the sample were the various CJS responses to stalking and cyberstalking?

RQ2: Was the presence of the CJS responses associated with stalking modality or SASH level of concern?

RQ3: How prevalent in the sample were the various barriers and delays to the progression of cases through the CJS, and were the barriers and delays associated with stalking modality?

RQ4: At what stages did case attrition occur throughout the CJS process?

Method

Overview

The dataset used in the current study is the same as that used in Study 2, "*Validating Mullen and Colleagues' (1999) Stalking Typology in the Categorisation of Stalking and Cyberstalking Cases*" (see Chapter 4). Information on cases of stalking and cyberstalking was gathered from records created by employees (victim advocates) of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust (Registered Charity 802567). Access to records was provided by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and the project received ethical approval from both the charity and the University of Kent. Client records were coded using an electronic coding sheet. Cases were not anonymised prior to coding, as agreed by the Suzy

Lamplugh Trust, but personal data (e.g., names, addresses) were not coded thus creating anonymised cases for analysis. In summary, a total of 442 cases of stalking or cyberstalking were included in the study, meeting the following criteria: the case involved two or more incidents of unwanted and intrusive behaviour (online or offline) that caused the victim alarm, distress, or fear; the case had been reported to the police; and the victim had contact with the advocate a minimum of 20 times.

Materials

From lists on the database, advocates selected the year of birth, gender, location, and ethnicity of victims and perpetrators. In free-text boxes, advocates described methods of stalking or cyberstalking experienced by the victim; all entries were date-stamped. Advocates also recorded the progression of the case through the Criminal Justice System in free-text boxes, including any barriers or delays faced by the victim, and the outcome of the case. The data collection variables therefore comprised demographic information of the victim and perpetrator; key dates within the case; the modality of stalking (mixed, online, or offline); the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH; McEwan et al., 2015); criminal justice system responses; barriers and delays faced within the criminal justice system; and the outcome of case.

Client records were coded electronically by the author using a coding sheet to extract data collection variables. For the below data collection variables, information was identified by the author from the advocates' entries on the database, from both the pre-determined lists and free-text sections. Interrater reliability was examined and found to be moderate to good, indicating sufficient reliability.

Data Collection Variables

Victim and Perpetrator Demographics

Demographic details collected by advocates and subsequently coded by the author included victim and perpetrator location (limited to county or London borough); victim and perpetrator gender; victim year of birth; and victim ethnicity. Perpetrator age was categorised (<18; 18-25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65; 66+; unknown).

Timeline

Key dates were coded from the advocates' entries, indicating when the case was opened with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust advocacy service; when the stalking began; when the case was first reported to the police; and when the police opened and closed the investigation.

Modality

Descriptions of the nature of stalking or cyberstalking experienced by the victim were recorded by advocates on the database. The author examined these descriptions and coded each case as either *mixed*: the case involved both cyberstalking and in-person stalking; *online:* the case involved only cyberstalking; or *offline*: the case involved only in-person stalking.

Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH)

Developed by McEwan and colleagues (2015), the SASH is a screening tool containing 16 items which are coded as present, absent, or unknown. The items cover three dimensions: stalking behaviour; perpetrator history; and victim situation. Based on the number and nature of the items present, an overall level of concern of low, moderate, or high, is reached. The level of concern promotes a timely and effective criminal justice response by indicating how the case should be prioritised and whether a risk assessment should be conducted. The author, who had received previous training in using the SASH, coded the 16 individual items for each stalking case as well as the consequent level of concern (low, moderate, or high).

Criminal Justice System Responses

The case inclusion criteria dictated that all cases had been reported to the police. Using information recorded by advocates on the database regarding the ongoing investigation, the author identified the nature of the police investigation and Criminal Justice System (CJS) responses for each case. The CJS responses were categorised into the three stages below.

Investigation Status. The investigation status for each case was coded by the author as one of the following options: no investigation; investigation opened without further action; or investigation opened and conducted.

Police Responses. The police responses for each case were coded as present or absent across six items. As cases could include more than one police response, items were coded as individually present or absent, rather than as multiple choice. The first three items indicated that police responded by issuing either a verbal warning; a caution; and/or arresting the perpetrator. If the perpetrator had been arrested, the final three items indicated whether the perpetrator was released without bail conditions; released with bail conditions; or held on remand.

CJS Outcomes. The Criminal Justice System outcomes for each case were coded as present or absent across nine items. As cases could include more than one outcome, items were coded as individually present or absent, rather than as multiple choice. The first two items indicated that the perpetrator was charged with stalking, or alternatively that the CPS charging threshold was not passed (i.e., the police had applied to charge the perpetrator with stalking but the threshold for authorising the charge was not passed, as dictated by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)). The remaining items indicated the presence of various legal injunctions, namely a Probation Order; Stalking Protection Order; Non-Molestation Order; Restraining Order; a suspended sentence, and/or custodial sentence, or alternatively, that the perpetrator was found not guilty.

Barriers and Delays within the Criminal Justice System

A list of potential barriers or delays faced by victims as their case progressed through the Criminal Justice system was generated before coding by the author. This list was based on findings in existing research indicating challenges to managing stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS (e.g., Martellozzo et al., 2023; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021). The barriers and delays within each case were coded as present or absent across 15 items. As cases could include more than one barrier or delay, items were coded as individually present or absent, rather than as multiple choice.

Barriers. Barriers coded as present or absent included that the perpetrator was located outside of the UK; the perpetrator was located in a different county to the victim; the perpetrator was not located; the perpetrator was not identified; the perpetrator was sectioned during the investigation; the victim disengaged from the police investigation; or that the victim did not pursue prosecution. Coding indicated the presence or absence of these seven items.

Delays. Delays coded as present or absent included delays with the assignment of an investigating officer; with obtaining responses from the investigating officer; with court dates; with the arrest of the perpetrator; with evidence collection; with statement collection; as well as delays in sending the case to the CPS; or delays from CPS decisions. Coding indicated the presence or absence of these eight items.

Case Outcome

The outcome of each case was coded as one of the following options: the stalking stopped; the victim disengaged; the stalking continued; or the outcome was unclear (i.e., it was not clear from the information within the client record if the stalking stopped or continued). If the case outcome was coded as *stalking stopped*, the date that the stalking stopped was also recorded.

Analyses

Overall frequencies of CJS responses in the dataset were gathered, along with frequencies of CJS responses within each stalking modality group (mixed, online, offline). For cases whereby the outcome was known (i.e., stalking stopped or stalking continued), chi-square analyses were conducted to identify associations between the CJS responses and case outcomes. A regression analysis to predict which legal ramifications led to stalking cessation was not appropriate as the coding did not indicate whether the legal ramification was enacted before or after the cessation of stalking. Duration of how long victims experienced stalking before reporting to police, as well as duration of police investigations, were calculated.

Chi-square analyses were conducted to assess differences in CJS responses between the stalking modalities (mixed, online, offline). In addition, to examine whether stalking modality or SASH level of concern (high, moderate, or low) would predict the CJS responses, separate binary logistic regression analyses were performed for each of the individual 18 CJS responses (listed in Table 1). Binary logistic regression was chosen as it allows for the analysis of a categorical predictor variable (stalking modality or SASH level of concern) and binary outcome variables (presence or absence of CJS response), assuming that each outcome is independent. As each analysis involved categorical predictors, and binary independent outcomes, some assumptions typically associated with regression analyses (i.e., multicollinearity and outliers) were not relevant. Based on the study design, independence of observation was assumed (i.e., cases of stalking or cyberstalking were not related to or influenced by each other). Conducting separate binary logistic regressions, rather than a multivariate regression, allowed for examination of how stalking modality influenced each specific CJS response without assuming a shared underlying construct (Harrell, 2015). Whilst some CJS responses are related (e.g., a perpetrator could only receive a

restraining order if they had been charged), binary logistic regressions are appropriate for analysis in the current study as relationships between the CJS outcomes were complex and varied beyond one shared underlying construct. For example, a perpetrator being arrested may not necessarily lead to a stalking charge, and a stalking charge may not consistently result in legal ramifications. Although multiple statistical tests were conducted using this dataset including chi-square tests and regressions, no formal correction for multiple comparisons (i.e., Bonferroni adjustments) was applied. Type I error was considered minimal due to the independence of the chi-square tests and regressions, addressing different research questions. Results should therefore be interpreted relative to this analytic approach.

The frequencies of barriers and delays in the progression of cases of stalking and cyberstalking through the CJS were calculated, and chi-square analyses were conducted to examine any significant differences in barriers and delays between the stalking modalities (mixed, online, offline). Attrition rates were calculated to demonstrate the progression of cases through the stages of the CJS.

Results

Criminal Justice System Responses

Table 5.1 shows the frequencies of Criminal Justice System (CJS) responses across the 442 cases. As dictated by the case inclusion criteria, all cases of stalking had been reported to the police. The duration that victims experienced stalking before reporting to the police ranged from under 1 month to 20 years, with a median duration of 6 months. Of all 442 cases, 92.1% (n = 407) involved an investigation being opened. Investigations (from the point of reporting to case closure) ranged in duration from 1 month to 107 months (8 years and 11 months), with a median duration of 9 months. Of the 407 cases involving an investigation, 14.7% (n = 60) involved no further action.

The majority involved the arrest of the perpetrator (65.8%, *n* = 268) and the implementation of bail conditions (56%, *n* = 228). Regarding legal injunctions, approximately a third of cases resulted in a stalking charge (36.4%, *n* = 148). Subsequently, 30.2% (*n* = 123) of cases resulted in a Restraining Order, and 7.6% (*n* = 40) received a custodial sentence. The majority of perpetrators who received a custodial sentence also received a Restraining Order (77.5%, *n* = 31). Only 9.6% (*n* = 39) of cases resulted in a Stalking Protection Order. It should be noted here that 115 cases in the dataset (26%) pre-dated the enactment of Stalking Protection Orders in January 2020, meaning 11.9% of eligible cases resulted in a Stalking Protection Order.

Table 5.1 overleaf

Table 5.1

Frequencies of Criminal Justice System Responses

Criminal Justice System Response	Total Cases *n* (%[a])	Mixed *n* (%[b])	Online *n* (%[b])	Offline *n* (%[b])
Investigation Status				
No investigation	35 (7.9%)	14 (4.7%)	3 (5.7%)	6 (6.5%)
Investigation opened	407 (92.1%)	273 (92.2%)	50 (94.3%)	84 (90.3%)
Investigation opened without further action	60 (13.6%)	39 (13.2%)	11 (20.8%)	10 (10.8%)
Police Response				
Verbal warning	57 (12.9%)	31 (10.5%)	4 (7.5%)	22 (23.7%)
Caution	18 (4.1%)	12 (4.1%)	2 (3.8%)	4 (4.3%)
Arrest	268 (60.6%)	187 (63.2%)	28 (52.8%)	53 (57%)
Bail conditions	228 (51.6%)	158 (53.4%)	26 (49.1%)	44 (47.3%)
On remand	56 (12.7%)	40 (13.5%)	4 (7.5%)	12 (12.9%)
Released without bail	10 (2.3%)	4 (1.4%)	3 (5.7%)	3 (3.2%)
CJS Outcome				
Charged	148 (33.5%)	102 (34.5%)	11 (20.8%)	35 (37.6%)
Probation Order	9 (2%)	6 (2%)	0	3 (3.2%)
Stalking Protection Order	39 (8.8%)	31 (10.5%)	2 (3.8%)	6 (6.5%)
Non-Molestation Order	75 (17%)	54 (18.2%)	10 (18.9%)	11 (11.8%)
Restraining Order	123 (27.8%)	88 (29.7%)	8 (15.1%)	27 (29%)
Suspended sentence	32 (7.2%)	24 (8.1%)	3 (5.7%)	5 (5.4%)
Custodial sentence	40 (9%)	31 (10.5%)	3 (5.7%)	6 (6.5%)
CPS threshold not passed	23 (5.2%)	13 (4.4%)	3 (5.7%)	7 (7.5%)
Found not guilty	3 (0.7%)	2 (0.7%)	0	1 (1.1%)

[a] Percentage of total cases ($N = 442$).

[b] Percentage of cases within modality group, Mixed ($n = 296$); Online ($n = 53$); Offline ($n = 93$).

Note. Percentages are not exclusive; cases could involve multiple criminal justice responses.

Regarding case outcomes, out of the 407 cases in which an investigation was opened, the stalking stopped in 46.4% (*n* = 189) of cases while the victim was in contact with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. In 18.7% (*n* = 76) of cases the stalking did not stop, and in 34.9% (*n* = 124) of cases it was unclear whether the stalking stopped or not, in part as a result of victim disengagement in 7.6% (*n* = 31) of cases. In most of the cases where the stalking stopped, an investigation had been opened (96.8%, *n* = 183) and often resulted in an arrest (70.4%, *n* = 133) and bail conditions (59.8%, *n* = 113). Just under half of the cases where the stalking stopped resulted in a stalking charge (47.6%, *n* = 90), and many perpetrators were placed under a Non-Molestation Order (12.7%, *n* = 24), a Stalking Protection Order (15.3%, *n* = 29), or a Restraining Order (41.3%, *n* = 78). The case outcome was unclear in all cases where an investigation was not opened (*n* = 35).

Of the 265 cases where the outcome (i.e. stalking stopped or stalking continued) was known, chi-square analysis revealed significant associations between several CJS responses and case outcomes. Chi-square results for the legal ramifications are displayed in Table 5.2, indicating that most legal ramifications were significantly associated with stalking cessation.

Table 5.2 overleaf

Table 5.2

Chi-square Results of Associations between Legal Ramifications and Case Outcomes

Legal Ramification	Stalking Stopped		Stalking Continued		χ^2	*p*
	n (%[a])	*z*	*n* (%[b])	*z*		
Verbal Warning	26 (13.8%)	.1	10 (13.2%)	-.1	.017	.898
Caution	11 (5.8%)	.3	3 (3.9%)	-.5	.380	.538
Arrest	133 (70.4%)	.9	39 (51.3%)	-1.5	8.64	**.003**
Bail Conditions	113 (59.8%)	.8	34 (44.7%)	-1.3	4.97	**.026**
Remand	33 (17.5%)	1.3	4 (5.3%)	-2	6.71	**.01**
Charge	90 (47.6%)	1.7	16 (21.1%)	-2.6	15.94	**<.001**
Probation Order	5 (2.6%)	.6	0	-1.2	1.91	.167
Stalking Protection Order	29 (15.3%)	1.3	3 (3.9%)	-2	6.63	**.01**
Non-Molestation Order	24 (12.7%)	-1.4	15 (19.7%)	.6	.499	.480
Restraining Order	78 (41.3%)	1.6	13 (17.1%)	-2.6	14.04	**<.001**
Suspended Sentence	23 (12.2%)	1.2	2 (2.6%)	-1.9	5.77	**.01**
Custodial Sentence	26 (13.8%)	1.5	1 (1.3%)	-2.4	9.17	**.002**

[a] Percentage of cases in which stalking stopped (*n* = 189)

[b] Percentage of cases in which the stalking continued (*n* = 76)

Predicting Criminal Justice System Responses

Table 5.1 also shows the frequencies of CJS responses across stalking modalities (mixed, online, or offline). Chi-square analyses did not identify any significant associations between CJS

responses and stalking modality. Binary logistic regressions were conducted to examine whether the stalking modality (mixed, online, or offline) predicted the 18 independent CJS responses. Of all the CJS responses, only one outcome was significantly predicted by stalking modality, with the mixed modality group serving as the reference group. Stalking modality significantly predicted a verbal warning being administered by police and cases involving only offline methods of stalking were significantly more likely to result in a verbal warning than mixed modality cases (B = 0.97, SE = 0.31, OR = 2.65, 95% CI [1.43, 4.84], p = .002), with the model explaining 46% of the variance (Nagelkerke R^2 = .46).

Binary logistic regressions were also performed to examine whether the level of concern identified by the SASH predicted the 18 independent CJS responses. Just over half of all cases (55%, n = 247) were classified as high concern using the SASH, 36.7% (n = 162) were classified as moderate concern, and 6.6% (n = 29) were classified as low concern. A small minority of cases could not be classified using the SASH due to insufficient information (0.9%, n = 4). Of the 18 CJS responses, three were significantly predicted by the SASH level of concern with the high concern group serving as the reference group. Namely, low concern cases (B = 3.25, SE = 0.49, OR = 25.79, 95% CI [0.01, 0.85], p = .016) and moderate concern cases (B = 2.14, SE = 0.31, OR = 8.49, 95% CI [1.18, 3.92], p = .013) were significantly more likely to result in a verbal warning, compared to high concern cases, with both models explaining 23% of the variance (Nagelkerke R^2 = .23). High concern cases were significantly more likely to result in an arrest than low concern cases (B = 0.82, SE = 0.40, OR = 2.27, 95% CI [1.04, 5.00], p = .039), but the model explained only 8% of the variance (Nagelkerke R^2 = .08). High concern cases were also significantly more likely to result in a Non-Molestation Order than moderate concern cases (B = 0.49, SE = 0.28, OR

= 1.63, 95% CI [1.18, 3.92], p = .012), with the model explaining 13% of the variance (Nagelkerke R^2 = .13).

Barriers and Delays within the Criminal Justice System

Almost half (45.9%, n = 203) of all cases faced at least one barrier or delay within the CJS, summarised in Table 5.3. Cases for which an investigation was opened but with no further action (13.6%, n = 60) were significantly more likely to have faced a barrier or delay than cases with an investigation involving further action, $\chi^2(1, N = 442) = 12.02$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .165. Many of the cases involving an investigation with no further action (13.6%, n = 60) faced notable barriers and delays that resulted in no further action being taken, including that the investigating officer was not responsive (23.3%, n = 14); evidence was not collected in a timely manner (16.6%, n = 10); or that the victim disengaged from the investigation (15%, n = 9). Of all cases that faced at least one barrier or delay, the most common barrier to the progression of the case through the CJS was that the victim disengaged from the police investigation in 15.3% (n = 31) of cases. The most common delay in the progression of the case through the CJS was that the investigating officer was not responsive, in 27.6% (n = 56) of cases. Chi-square analyses identified no significant differences in barriers and delays between the stalking modalities (mixed, online, offline).

Table 5.3 overleaf

Table 5.3

Frequencies of Barriers and Delays within the CJS

Barrier or Delay	Total Cases	Cases investigated with no further action
	n (%[a])	*n* (%[b])
Barriers		
Victim disengaged from police investigation	31 (7%)	9 (15%)
Victim did not pursue prosecution	24 (5.4%)	5 (8.3%)
Perpetrator not located	23 (5.2%)	4 (6.7%)
Perpetrator sectioned during investigation	15 (3.4%)	2 (3.3%)
Perpetrator located in a different county	7 (1.6%)	3 (5%)
Perpetrator located outside UK	6 (1.4%)	1 (1.7%)
Perpetrator not identified	6 (1.4%)	4 (6.7%)
Delays		
Investigating officer not responsive	56 (12.7%)	14 (23.3%)
Evidence collection	54 (12.2%)	10 (16.7%)
Arrest	31 (7%)	3 (5%)
Statement collection	29 (6.6%)	4 (6.7%)
Assignment of investigating officer	17 (3.8%)	2 (3.3%)
CPS decision	14 (3.2%)	0
Sending case to CPS	11 (2.5%)	0
Court dates	8 (1.8%)	0

Note. Total cases ($N = 442$). Cases investigated with no further action ($n = 60$).

[a] Percentage of total cases

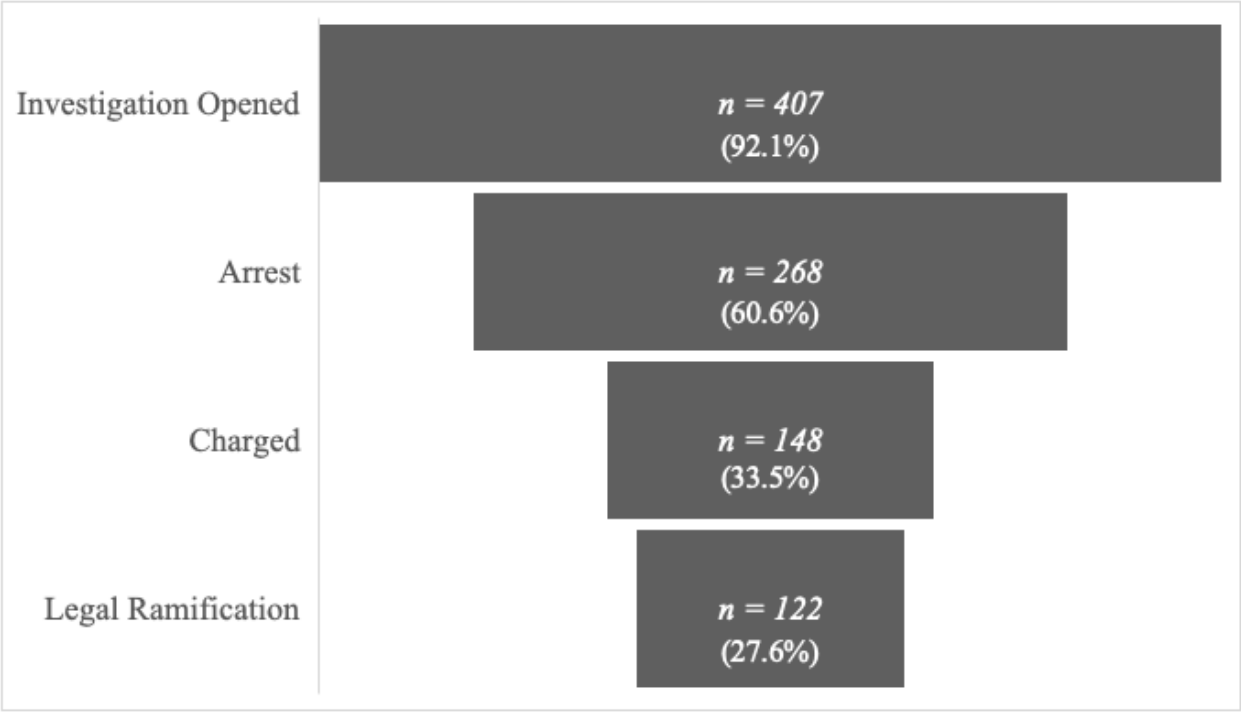
[b] Percentage of cases investigated with no further action

Case Attrition within the Criminal Justice System

Figure 5.1 demonstrates the attrition of cases through the stages of the CJS. Out of the 407 cases for which an investigation was opened, 65.8% (*n* = 268) of these cases resulted in an arrest, thus producing an attrition rate of 34.2%. Of the 268 perpetrators arrested, 55.2% (*n* = 148) were charged with stalking, thus producing an attrition rate of 44.8%. Of the 148 perpetrators charged with stalking, 82.4% were subject to a legal ramification (one or more of the following: probation order, stalking protection order, non-molestation order, restraining order, suspended sentence, custodial sentence), producing an attrition rate of 17.6%. The overall attrition rate, from an investigation being opened to the implementation of a legal ramification, was 70.1%.

Figure 5.1

Funnel Graph showing Attrition of Stalking and Cyberstalking Cases within the Criminal Justice System



Note. Percentages indicate proportion of total cases (*N* = 442).

Discussion

The current study examined criminal justice responses to cases of stalking and cyberstalking. The study provides evidence that the CJS in England and Wales is equipped with a variety of legal ramifications to prevent stalking recidivism and protect victims. The nature of the sample within the current study should be noted here, as the dataset consisted only of stalking and cyberstalking cases that had been reported to the police and had involved victim advocate support. Many victims of stalking and cyberstalking do not seek criminal justice action, with national statistics estimating that only 8 percent of stalking victims in England and Wales reported their situation to police in the year ending March 2024 (Office for National Statistics, 2025). Research has demonstrated that victim advocacy support has positive impacts on a victim's ability to engage with the justice process and even increases the likelihood of a positive case outcome (Taylor-Dunn, 2016). Therefore, the cases included in the current study provide an overview of the current approaches, barriers, and delays to managing stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS in England and Wales, for cases already within the criminal justice process.

Among the CJS responses, the use of initial verbal warnings or cautions by police occurred in a minority of cases. Verbal warnings are informal; typically utilised early on in an investigation when the police deem the offence insufficiently 'serious' to warrant formal legal action (The Crown Prosecution Service, 2018). Accordingly, cases of stalking and cyberstalking that were deemed as low or moderate concern using the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH; McEwan et al., 2015) were more likely to involve a verbal warning than high concern cases. The presence of a verbal warning was not significantly associated with stalking cessation, supporting previous findings that informal verbal warnings are generally ineffective and inappropriate in preventing ongoing stalking behaviours (Storey & Hart, 2011). The limited use of

verbal warnings in the current study suggests that most cases of stalking and cyberstalking were dealt with using formal legal ramifications. While cautions are occasionally issued with restrictive conditions on the perpetrator (Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, 2022), most cautions act as a simple warning against offending behaviour and the presence of a caution in cases in the current study was not significantly associated with stalking cessation. Cautions can be problematic in stalking investigations; as an out-of-court disposal method, if the stalking continues beyond the caution being issued the victim has to report this as a new stalking offence, and any evidence of stalking prior to the caution cannot be used in the new investigation (The Crown Prosecution Service, 2018). Securing a stalking charge under the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) requires evidence of a course of conduct of unwanted behaviour. The inability, therefore, to include prior stalking behaviour in a new investigation may substantially hinder the likelihood of securing a stalking charge. Moreover, applying for a stalking charge with limited evidence may impact whether a charge can be authorised under Section 2A or Section 4A of the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) if evidence of serious alarm, distress, or fear of violence was only collected before the caution was issued.

The majority of cases in the current study involved the arrest of the perpetrator, and, as measured using the SASH, high concern cases were significantly more likely to involve an arrest than low concern cases. Most cases involving an arrest involved the subsequent implementation of bail conditions. The presence of an arrest and bail conditions within stalking or cyberstalking cases were both significantly associated with stalking cessation, suggesting that subjecting a perpetrator to bail conditions may provide short-term protection of the victim from ongoing stalking behaviours, pending further enquiries while the investigation continues. Of the cases that involved an arrest, only half involved a subsequent stalking charge. This marked the highest rate

of attrition within the CJS, indicating a significant point at which many cases failed to progress. Previous research has demonstrated similar attrition rates in domestic abuse research, such as Hester (2006) who identified that only 27% of perpetrators arrested for domestic abuse offences were charged. Nonetheless, a third of all cases overall involved a stalking charge, which is substantially higher than national statistics; in the year ending March 2024 just 7.9% of recorded stalking offences in England and Wales resulted in a stalking charge (Home Office, 2025). This discrepancy may, in part, reflect differences in case severity, however, also highlights the possible influence of advocacy involvement. Cases in the current study involved victims engaged with advocacy support, and such support may have increased the likelihood of achieving a stalking charge compared to cases not involving advocacy support, in line with existing findings in domestic abuse cases (Taylor-Dunn, 2016).

Alternatively, there are various factors that would negate the need to charge a perpetrator with stalking or that would prevent the police from achieving a stalking charge which may explain the significant rate of attrition at the charging stage. For instance, some perpetrators may have stopped stalking after having been arrested, particularly if they were placed under bail conditions. Additionally, some cases of stalking and cyberstalking involved a Stalking Protection Order which can be enacted without a stalking charge and include conditions that would prevent further stalking behaviours. Stalking Protection Orders were issued in a small minority of stalking and cyberstalking cases in the current study; it should be noted here that Stalking Protection Orders were enacted in 2019 (Stalking Protection Act, 2019) and 26 percent of cases (n = 115) in the current study pre-dated this. The presence of a Stalking Protection Order was significantly associated with stalking cessation suggesting they are an effective method to deter stalking offending. Research on the implementation and effectiveness of Stalking Protection Orders is

limited due to their recent enactment, but a review in 2022 indicated that Stalking Protection Orders were viewed positively by police and generally deemed more effective than pre-charge bail conditions (Home Office, 2023). However, a report by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and National Stalking Consortium (2022) identified that 50 percent of stalking victim advocates found police officers to be unaware of Stalking Protection Orders, and 68 percent of Stalking Protection Orders in their sample did not include positive requirements. The addition of positive requirements to Stalking Protection Orders was in response to shortfalls of bail conditions, Non-Molestation Orders, and Restraining Orders in addressing stalking behaviours, thus promoting a holistic approach to reducing stalking offending by, for example, requiring that the perpetrator attend a behaviour intervention or mental health assessment. In a review by the Home Office (2023), concerns were raised by Police and Crime Commissioners on the availability of appropriate perpetrator interventions, programmes, and assessments to be included as positive requirements in Stalking Protection Orders. Since this report, funding for perpetrator-focused stalking programmes has increased (Home Office, 2023), facilitating the inclusion of further behaviour interventions in Stalking Protection Orders, the effectiveness of which should be monitored in ongoing research.

In 12.4 percent of cases, the victim disengaged from the police investigation or did not pursue prosecution which could partly explain the attrition of cases from arrest to stalking charge. Police can pursue a stalking charge without the victim's engagement, but this can cause challenges in proving impact on the victim's day to day life or that the stalking caused alarm, distress, or fear. In fact, half of all stalking cases recorded in the year ending March 2024 involved evidential difficulties including where the victim disengaged from the legal process. Whilst the overall prevalence of victim disengagement in the current study was low, research has identified that victims of interpersonal violence are likely to disengage from the legal process if they wish to

reconcile with the perpetrator; when victims wish for the perpetrator to be rehabilitated rather than punished; when the perpetrator agrees to seek help; or when victims engage in self-blame or feel ashamed (McGuire et al., 2021). Additionally, victims have reported concerns that if they pursue legal action the perpetrator may retaliate (Logan et al., 2006; Reyns & Englebrecht, 2014). The low rate of victim disengagement in this current study could, in part, be attributed to the victim advocacy support provided by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. Research has identified a similarly low rate of victim disengagement of 11 percent in a sample of domestic abuse cases involving advocacy support, compared to national averages (Taylor-Dunn, 2016). The findings highlight the significant positive impact of victim support provisions for stalking and cyberstalking victims, encouraging continued engagement in the criminal justice process.

An additional explanation for the low rate of stalking charges and attrition of cases identified in the current study includes that police may have applied for an alternative, lesser charge such as harassment or malicious communications. Existing research has found that many cases of stalking and cyberstalking may not involve a stalking charge due to a tendency of police to apply for a lesser charge such as harassment (Jerath et al., 2023) and this could be attributed to the police's decision-making processes based on stalking and harassment legislation. The Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) do not explicitly define all behaviours that constitute harassment or stalking; many behaviours overlap between the two offences, and a course of conduct is required to demonstrate both stalking and harassment. Police, therefore, may lack an understanding of how to distinguish between these two offences (Taylor-Dunn, 2016). This is significantly problematic for the successful management of stalking and cyberstalking cases, as Stalking Protection Orders can only be applied for in cases that are classed

as stalking according to the legislation, and the maximum custodial sentence differs significantly for harassment versus stalking (see Chapter 1).

Of the 33.5 percent of cases that did progress to a stalking charge, Restraining Orders were the most frequently used protective order, and the presence of a Restraining Order was significantly associated with stalking cessation. The current study therefore supports existing findings that protective orders such as Restraining Orders are generally effective in protecting stalking victims and reducing reoffending (Logan et al., 2007), and victims of stalking and domestic abuse report that Restraining Orders improve their feelings of safety and security (Ammar et al., 2012; Logan et al., 2007; Logan & Walker, 2009). It has been noted that determining the effectiveness of Restraining Orders in research is difficult given their varied nature and confounding factors within individual cases that may influence the effectiveness of a legal order (Cordier et al., 2021). Moreover, some research indicates that retaliation from a perpetrator is likely upon issuance of a Restraining Order (Russell, 2012), and that stalking perpetration before the enactment of a protective order predicts violation of a protective order in cases of domestic abuse, resulting in further psychological, physical, and sexual abuse against the victim (T. Logan & Walker, 2009). As such, sufficient conditions must be included in Restraining Orders to effectively protect the victim from further stalking and reduce risk of harm, and police must act quickly and efficiently if breaches of Restraining Orders are reported by victims. Alongside protective legal orders, legal ramifications in cases of stalking and cyberstalking in the current study included suspended sentences and custodial sentences. Only 7 percent of all cases resulted in a suspended sentence and 9 percent of all cases resulted in a custodial sentence, but the presence of a suspended or custodial sentence was significantly associated with stalking cessation. In fact, only 4 percent of cases involving a suspended or custodial sentence resulted in continued stalking

behaviour, suggesting that these legal ramifications were significant in preventing ongoing stalking.

Although most cases in the current study involved an investigation and the pursuit of legal ramifications, over half of the stalking and cyberstalking cases faced barriers or delays in their progression through the CJS. The presence of barriers and delays did not differ according to stalking modality (mixed, online, offline); many cases of stalking and cyberstalking faced significant delays in receiving responses from the investigating officer and delays with the arrest of the perpetrator. Notably, in many cases when an investigation was opened but no further action taken, police had indicated to the victim that steps would be taken to progress the investigation, but delays were so prominent that the case was closed before these steps were taken. Similarly inefficient police processes within stalking and cyberstalking cases have been well-documented in existing research, including that police treat stalking and cyberstalking incidents as single offences, rather than evidence of a course of conduct, resulting in a reluctance to progress stalking investigations and that victims are passed around between police officers (Backes et al., 2020; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2017). The current study also indicates that many cases of stalking and cyberstalking were hindered by insufficient collection of evidence and victim statements. Victim dissatisfaction with the police's dismissal of potential avenues of evidence collection has previously been noted (Korkodeilou, 2014; Van Der Aa & Groenen, 2010). Timely and thorough evidence and statement collection is vital to demonstrate the impact of stalking or cyberstalking on a victim, which in turn is essential for charging and prosecuting a stalking perpetrator under Section 4A of the Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) in England and Wales. The legislation requires evidence that the perpetrator's course of conduct caused significant impact on the victim's day-to-day life, or for the victim to feel alarm, distress, or fear of violence. In a study by Scott and

colleagues (2013), police officers with specialist stalking training believed that stalking would cause the victim more alarm, distress, or fear, than police officers without stalking training, demonstrating the importance of training to equip police with better understanding of how stalking and cyberstalking can cause alarm, distress, or fear, and encourage effective approaches to gathering evidence of such impacts in stalking and cyberstalking cases.

The current study found that stalking modality (mixed, online, or offline) was not significantly associated with the presence of most CJS responses. The only CJS response predicted by stalking modality was the implementation of a verbal warning, which was significantly more likely in offline cases than in mixed modality or online cases. In England and Wales, verbal warnings are administered by a police officer face-to-face with the perpetrator and so the ability of the police to administer a verbal warning is dictated by the identification and location of the perpetrator. Perpetrators of in-person stalking require physical proximity to the victim, making it easier for victims and police to identify and locate a perpetrator, compared to a perpetrator who is employing predominantly or solely online tactics, and this likely explains the results.

Overall, the management of stalking did not differ significantly to the management of cyberstalking within the CJS in England and Wales. Additionally, the presence of barriers and delays to the progression of stalking did not differ significantly according to stalking modality. The findings suggest that, generally, stalking and cyberstalking are not treated distinctly differently within the CJS. Issues unique to the management of cyberstalking identified in prior research, such as jurisdictional limitations and difficulties with identifying or locating a perpetrator (Millman et al., 2017; O'Shea et al., 2019; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021), do not appear to have been prevalent in the sample of cyberstalking cases in the current study and did not result in worse outcomes for cases of cyberstalking when compared to cases of stalking.

The findings of the current study must be considered in line with its methodological limitations. The dataset consisted of cases of stalking and cyberstalking including information ordinarily collected by victim advocates, and the strengths and limitations of this were discussed in Chapter 4. The cases were also limited to England and Wales, and examination of CJS responses to stalking and cyberstalking in Scotland and Northern Ireland would allow closer analysis of the UK's overall management of stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS. Analysis indicated significant associations between the presence of various legal ramifications and stalking cessation, but temporal information of the legal ramifications was not established. The findings of the current study therefore cannot conclude whether the legal ramifications resulted in stalking cessation or that stalking ceased before the legal ramifications were enacted.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The findings of the current study indicate that the management of stalking within the CJS in England and Wales does not appear to differ distinctly to the management of cyberstalking within the CJS, in a sample of advocacy-supported cases. The Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) dictate that stalking can occur in-person or online, and so cyberstalking does not constitute a separate offence to stalking. The findings indicate that police are following the legislative definition and operationalisation of stalking when investigating stalking and cyberstalking. Previous research has highlighted concerns with the ability of the police to recognise cyberstalking or understand the impacts of cyberstalking on victims (Martellozzo et al., 2023), but the findings of the current study indicate that cyberstalking was not managed significantly differently to stalking and stalking modality did not predict the likelihood of various CJS responses or outcomes. Future research should endeavour to include cases not involving advocacy support, to further identify if responses to stalking and cyberstalking remain

consistent. The input of a victim advocate may have improved the consistency in CJS responses between stalking and cyberstalking, encouraging police to view cyberstalking as a serious and legitimate offence.

The current study highlighted a variety of barriers and delays in the progression of stalking and cyberstalking cases through the CJS. Much of the existing literature similarly presents numerous shortcomings of the current CJS responses to stalking and cyberstalking, including inefficient police processes (Korkodeilou, 2014; O'Shea et al., 2019; Suzy Lamplugh Trust & National Stalking Consortium, 2022; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021). Stalking and cyberstalking are ongoing offences, meaning that a victim must endure repeated unwanted behaviour while a police investigation is conducted. For this reason, delays or barriers in the progression of an investigation can have detrimental impacts on a victim, and the implications of these findings for police are clear - it is vital that timely and effective criminal justice responses are adopted to prevent ongoing stalking or cyberstalking. Further stalking and cyberstalking-specific training is necessary to educate and equip police with the skills needed to facilitate effective investigations and implementation of protective orders.

Relatedly, the enactment of Stalking Protection Orders in 2019 aimed to improve the ability of the police to respond to stalking and cyberstalking by putting measures in place to protect the victim without having to wait for the case to go to court. The current study identified a low prevalence of Stalking Protection Orders in the sample and, whilst not all cases of stalking were eligible for a Stalking Protection Order, continued training and education around Stalking Protection Orders may promote an increase in the use of these orders. Additionally, the inclusion of positive requirements is vital to create a holistic approach to reducing recidivism. Examination

of the inclusion and effectiveness of positive requirements in Stalking Protection Orders would be beneficial in ongoing research.

The SASH (McEwan et al., 2015) is a screening tool to identify a level of concern about a stalking or cyberstalking case, which can in turn help to triage cases and prioritise resources. For the advocacy-supported cases in the current study, the SASH would have been completed by a victim advocate as part of their victim support. The advocate could then share the level of concern with the police, promoting a timely and effective response. Accordingly, the presence of some CJS responses appeared to align with levels of concern identified using the SASH. For instance, high concern cases more often involved arrest of the perpetrator than low concern cases in the current study, indicating effective triage of cases based on concern level. Considering the varied nature of stalking and cyberstalking, the findings of the current study indicate that level of concern adopted by police is coherent with the level of concern identified using the SASH, highlighting alignment in the management of stalking and cyberstalking cases. The SASH should continue to be used in conjunction with risk assessment tools to identify concern and risk of harm to a victim.

Conclusion

The current study examined CJS responses to cases of stalking and cyberstalking in England and Wales. The management of stalking did not differ significantly to the management of cyberstalking, suggesting that police are treating cyberstalking as a serious and legitimate offence in line with stalking legislation. However, whilst an array of legal ramifications were adopted to protect victims and prevent recidivism, cases of stalking and cyberstalking demonstrated significant attrition through the CJS and were often affected by inefficient police processes and victim disengagement. The ongoing use of Restraining Orders, Stalking Protection Orders, and suspended and custodial sentences is vital to provide timely and effective prevention

of stalking and cyberstalking and protection of victims. Research should endeavour to continue examining the experiences of stalking and cyberstalking victims throughout the CJS in an effort to shed light on what works in reducing the alarm, distress, and fear caused by stalking and cyberstalking.

CHAPTER 6

General Discussion

The overarching aim of the thesis was to examine the perpetration and victimisation of cyberstalking. In doing so, this thesis presented a systematic literature review and three empirical studies which explored the methods, relationships, and motivations present in cases of cyberstalking; validated the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases; and examined criminal justice responses to stalking and cyberstalking in England and Wales. This chapter will first summarise the findings of this thesis, focusing on the four key research questions previously introduced in Chapter 1. This chapter will examine how these findings sit alongside existing research, and consider the theoretical and practical implications.

Consolidation of Key Findings

RQ1: Who are the perpetrators of cyberstalking and what methods do they use?

Cyberstalking perpetrators appear to vary in gender, relationship to the victim, motivations, and methods. The systematic review presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis identified that perpetrators of cyberstalking have been found to be male and female, but men and women often differ in their methods and severity. The review found that male perpetrators are more likely to perpetrate severe, intrusive methods of cyberstalking that result in significant negative impacts on victims. Cyberstalking perpetrators are also likely to have high levels of impulsivity and attachment anxiety, and childhood experiences of parental violence; physical abuse victimisation; and low self-control. Emotional dysregulation and stalking-supportive attitudes are common among cyberstalking perpetrators. Sadism, Machiavellianism, and narcissism have been associated with cyberstalking perpetration. Predictors of cyberstalking perpetration have yielded similarity to predictors of 'offline' stalking perpetration overall, suggesting consistent precursors to these

related offences. Most cyberstalking occurs within the context of an ex-intimate partner targeting the victim through invasive and persistent forms of pursuit. Cyberstalking can happen 'overtly', such as unwanted, repeated online contact which can be facilitated through phone calls, text messages, and use of social media; or 'covertly', such as accessing the victim's online accounts, tracking the victim's location, installing software or applications to the victim's devices, or using smart-home technology. Cyberstalking is a complex and varied crime, and the fast-developing nature of technology means that new methods of cyberstalking are constantly emerging, permeating deep into victim's lives and routines.

RQ2: Do cyberstalking victim and perpetrator perspectives differ regarding cyberstalking methods, victim-perpetrator relationships, and motivations?

The empirical study presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis explored cyberstalking from victim and perpetrator perspectives. The prevalence rates of cyberstalking perpetration and victimisation identified in this study were low, and the study adopted a strict definition of cyberstalking based on legislative criteria in England and Wales: two or more incidents of unwanted online behaviour that caused the victim alarm, distress, or fear. The study identified a variety of cyberstalking methods, and the findings indicated a contradiction in the methods most often reported by victims to perpetrators. Victims most often reported experiencing repeated, unwanted contact, in line with the findings from the systematic literature review presented in Chapter 2. However, most perpetrators did not report engaging in this method of cyberstalking and, instead, most often engaged in covert monitoring of the victim or infiltrating the victim's online accounts. Many victims had suspected that the perpetrator used covert methods of online monitoring but could not report certainty that this had happened. Evidently, cyberstalking can be, and often is, perpetrated without the victim's knowledge. Victims most often reported being

targeted by an ex-intimate partner, but other victim-perpetrator relationships identified in the study included current partner; friend/ex-friend; acquaintance; family member; colleague/ex-colleague; and stranger. Victims and perpetrators most often reported that the cyberstalking was motivated by revenge or reconciliation, fitting the *Rejected* category of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology indicating that most perpetrators targeted the victim following the breakdown of their relationship seeking revenge or reconciliation. Remaining motivations behind cyberstalking were complex and overlapping, including seeking a friendship or relationship, or to monitor the victim. Overall, victim and perpetrator perspectives and experiences differed in reported cyberstalking methods, but yielded similarities within reported relationships and motivations.

RQ3: Can Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology be validated for the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases?

Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology presented five categories of stalking perpetrators: *Rejected* perpetrators who most often target an ex-intimate partner after the breakdown of their relationship for revenge or reconciliation; *Intimacy Seeker* perpetrators who seek to establish a relationship with the victim; *Incompetent Suitor* perpetrators who lack social competency and target their victim with the aim of a sexual encounter; *Resentful* perpetrators who aim to rectify a (perceived or real) grievance and aim to frighten and distress the victim; and *Predatory* perpetrators who stalk to prepare for a physical or sexual attack of the victim. Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology is widely used but has not been statistically validated for the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases. The study presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis aimed to statistically validate the typology using a large dataset of stalking and cyberstalking cases reported to the police. Using hierarchical cluster analysis, the identified subgroups did not mirror the motivational categories in Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology. Instead,

cases formed three subgroups based on stalking modality: *Mixed* cases involving both cyberstalking and in-person stalking; *Online* cases involving only cyberstalking; and *Offline* cases involving only in-person stalking. Most cases were in the *Mixed* cluster, involving unwanted online or offline communication from the perpetrator, approach behaviours, threats, and occasional communication about the victim, in-person contact and violence. Cases in the *Mixed* cluster were most likely to be rated as high concern according to the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH; McEwan et al., 2015). The *Online* cluster contained mostly cases that involved unwanted online communication with or about the victim, sometimes including threats, but no in-person contact or violence. The *Offline* cluster contained mostly cases that involved approach behaviours and in-person contact, sometimes threats and occasionally violence. Cases in the *Offline* cluster were less likely to involve communication with or about the victim, and most likely to involve a neighbour or stranger perpetrator.

The study presented in Chapter 4 also used clinical opinion to assign cases of stalking and cyberstalking to the motivational groups of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology, independent of the cluster analysis. Whilst this was not a statistical validation, successful categorisation of most stalking and cyberstalking cases indicated that Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology yields utility in grouping stalking and cyberstalking perpetrators based on motivation. Most cases of stalking and cyberstalking fit the *Rejected* category. When compared to the findings of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) study examining differences in characteristics between the motivational groups, some findings of the study presented in Chapter 4 were consistent in line with Mullen and colleagues' (1999) original findings. For example, perpetrators in the *Rejected* and *Resentful* motivational groups used more methods of stalking and cyberstalking than *Predatory* perpetrators; and perpetrators in the *Rejected* or *Intimacy Seeker* motivational

groups were more likely to engage in repeated, unwanted contact towards the victim than perpetrators in the other motivational groups. However, contrary to prior findings, perpetrators across the motivational groups did not differ significantly in stalking duration or likelihood of violence; and other methods of stalking including approach behaviours and in-person contact did not differ significantly between the motivational groups.

Alongside unwanted online contact, the likelihood of perpetrating other cyberstalking methods between the motivational groups had not previously been explored in research. The study presented in Chapter 4 found that cyberstalking methods such as posting about the victim, online monitoring, or using a fake profile, did not differ significantly between the motivational groups. However, perpetrators who attempted or succeeded to access the victim's online accounts were most likely to be *Rejected* perpetrators. The study presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis therefore could not statistically validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology for the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases, and findings were mixed regarding the differences between the groups. The study, alternatively, presented a categorisation of cases based on stalking modality; whilst most cases are *Mixed,* there are key differences between *Offline* cases of stalking and *Online* cases of cyberstalking.

RQ4: What are the Criminal Justice System responses to stalking and cyberstalking, and do these differ according to stalking modality?

The study presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis examined the management of stalking and cyberstalking within the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in England and Wales, with a particular focus on whether responses differed according to stalking modality (mixed, online, offline). Including a large sample of stalking and cyberstalking cases that had been reported to the police and had involved victim advocacy support, the study identified that the CJS in England and Wales

is equipped with a variety of legal ramifications to prevent stalking recidivism and protect victims, but that many cases faced significant barriers and delays. The use of verbal warnings and cautions was limited and not associated with stalking cessation in the sample. The only CJS response associated with stalking modality was the presence of a verbal warning, which was more likely in offline cases, than mixed or online cases. Most cases involved an arrest and implementation of bail conditions, both of which were significantly associated with stalking cessation. Only around half of the cases involving an arrest subsequently resulted in a stalking charge, indicating a significant point of attrition for the progression of stalking and cyberstalking cases through the CJS. However, the rate of achieving a stalking charge in the study was significantly higher than national statistics and could be attributed to the nature of the sample, with all cases having involved advocacy support.

A variety of protective orders were enacted to place restrictions on perpetrators and protect victims from ongoing stalking or cyberstalking. Restraining Orders were the most frequently used and significantly associated with stalking cessation. Stalking Protection Orders were infrequently adopted but were also significantly associated with stalking cessation. Other legal ramifications included Non-Molestation Orders, although these are independent from the CJS; suspended sentences; and custodial sentences. Levels of concern identified using the SASH appeared to correspond to the level of concern adopted by police when enacting CJS responses, for instance, high concern cases were more likely to involve an arrest and low concern cases were more likely to involve a verbal warning.

Cases of stalking and cyberstalking faced significant barriers and delays to their progression through the CJS, and these were so prominent in some cases that the investigation was closed with no further action. Barriers and delays did not differ significantly according to stalking modality. Victim disengagement was an issue in some cases of stalking and cyberstalking but was

low in prevalence overall, likely attributed to the advocacy support provided within the cases. Other delays and barriers included inefficient police processes, such as delays with arresting the perpetrator and with collection of evidence or victim/witness statements. In some cases, the victims experienced delays in obtaining responses from the investigating officer or with the assignment of an investigating officer. The study presented in Chapter 5 identified that the management of stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS in England and Wales requires improvement, with most cases failing to secure a stalking charge and negligible use of Stalking Protection Orders overall. Positively, the police and courts do not appear to manage stalking significantly differently to cyberstalking, in line with legislation that dictates that a stalking offence can occur in-person or online (Protection from Harassment Act 1997; Protection of Freedoms Act, 2012). This suggests that police are generally viewing cyberstalking as a legitimate offence, however CJS responses overall still require significant improvement.

Theoretical, Practical, and Policy Implications

Defining Stalking and Cyberstalking

Research to date has been inconsistent in defining stalking and cyberstalking which has impacted prevalence rates and the utility of research findings (Wilson et al., 2022). Two significant findings presented in this thesis should be used to improve the consistency of stalking and cyberstalking definitions and operationalisations, in turn increasing the applicability of research for policy and practice. Firstly, stalking policy and legislation define an offence of stalking or cyberstalking based not only on the offending behaviours, but also the victim's response (Purcell et al., 2004). This thesis posits that it is vital when defining and measuring stalking and cyberstalking to identify victim impact, namely that the unwanted in-person or online behaviour has caused alarm, distress, or fear in line with the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and

Protection of Freedoms Act (2012). Research that utilises a definition in line with legislation, such as the study presented in Chapter 3, yields considerably more utility in informing the development of stalking policy and legislation, compared to research using a less stringent definition or a study that does not measure victim impact. Nonetheless, identifying and measuring victim impact can be hindered when utilising perpetrator samples, which was exemplified in the study presented in Chapter 3. This study identified a cyberstalking perpetration prevalence rate of just 2.1 percent when adopting legal criteria in the cyberstalking definition: any incidents of unwanted online behaviour that occurred more than once causing alarm, distress, or fear. When the requirement of alarm, distress, or fear was removed, however, the prevalence rate of perpetrating concerning online behaviour was 8.3 percent. The perpetration rate was markedly lower than the identified cyberstalking victimisation rate of 14.7 percent. The results indicate an, arguably unsurprising, inability of cyberstalking perpetrators to recognise or admit to the impact of their offending behaviour. It is therefore recommended in ongoing research to vary the definitions of stalking and cyberstalking when including victim or perpetrator samples, ensuring victims are asked about the presence of alarm, distress, or fear, but focusing only on the presence of repeated, unwanted in-person or online behaviours from perpetrators.

Secondly, in accurately defining and measuring cyberstalking it must be recognised that many methods of cyberstalking occur covertly without the victim's knowledge, and so operationalisations of cyberstalking must account for this when utilising victim samples. The systematic review presented in Chapter 2 identified that perpetrators utilise GPS tracking software; 'stalker apps'; and smart home technology to monitor a victim covertly (Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017; Sovacool et al., 2021). The studies presented in Chapters 3 and 4 also found that perpetrators often reported engaging in methods of online monitoring, such as checking the victim's online

activity, location, or online status. Other covert cyberstalking methods included attempting or succeeding to access the victim's personal devices or online accounts, such as social media, email, or online shopping accounts. As a result, victims may only be aware of a fraction of the total methods adopted by a perpetrator in their pursuit of the victim. Some perpetrators may be able to conduct almost entirely covert operations, gathering information on a victim's online activity and movements without the victim's knowledge (Frampton & Fox, 2021) but that would cause considerable alarm, distress, or fear if the victim became aware. The perpetration of covert cyberstalking presents challenges for ongoing research to accurately measure the prevalence and nature of cyberstalking when relying on victim samples, and thus reflects the value in utilising information from both victims and perpetrators to accurately measure methods of cyberstalking.

The findings of this thesis therefore contribute significantly to improving consistent approaches to defining stalking and cyberstalking, and the related understanding of overt and covert cyberstalking. Where possible, it is imperative to include comprehensive cases of cyberstalking in research, such as the dataset utilised in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis which comprised detailed and contextualised cases of stalking and cyberstalking including information from victims, stalking advocates, police, and victim support providers. The value of this dataset for the findings presented in this thesis should not be understated. Research relying solely on victim or perpetrator samples, as discussed, faces challenges in accurately measuring the prevalence and nature of stalking and cyberstalking. Additionally, evidence of covert methods of cyberstalking may emerge throughout the course of a cyberstalking investigation which would not have otherwise been reported by victims or perpetrators. Thus, including rich datasets containing case information from victim advisors and police is vital in ongoing research, adding context to the complex phenomenon of stalking and cyberstalking which can help with the development of risk

assessments and case management, and adds significant value to the findings presented in this thesis.

Identifying Impacts of Stalking and Cyberstalking

The importance of utilising clear, consistent definitions and operationalisations of stalking and cyberstalking is evident, including consideration of victim impact. Research to date has found that the impacts of stalking and cyberstalking are overlapping, complex, and varied (Storey et al., 2023), and the findings presented in this thesis contribute significantly in the identification of *how* and *why* alarm, distress, or fear is caused to victims of stalking or cyberstalking. The study presented in Chapter 4 identified that victims of stalking and cyberstalking experienced an array of unwanted behaviours during the perpetrator's course of conduct, including unwanted online or offline contact; approach behaviours; threats; violence; in-person contact; communication about the victim; and online monitoring. As a result of these behaviours, all victims of stalking and cyberstalking in the sample had experienced some form of negative impact psychologically, physically, practically, on others around the victim, or often a combination of these. The presence of psychological or physical impact, or impact on others, did not differ according to stalking modality, thus, victims of cyberstalking experienced significant negative impacts on their wellbeing and on others around them, despite not experiencing in-person behaviours. The findings presented in this thesis therefore provide the foundations for further developing our understanding of *how* and *why* stalking and cyberstalking impacts victims. Unwanted in-person or online behaviours can permeate deep into a victim's life, resulting in detrimental effects on victims' physical and mental wellbeing and day to day lives.

These findings, in turn, also have significant implications for policy and practice. Previous research has highlighted that many victims of cyberstalking do not seek help or support unless the

situation ‘escalates’ to in-person stalking behaviours including property damage, intimidation or physical assault (Taylor-Dunn et al., 2021). Despite the findings presented in this thesis that victims of cyberstalking experience significant negative impacts without in-person behaviours, many victims may therefore feel reluctant to seek support from the criminal justice system or victim support providers. For victims who do report their experience of stalking or cyberstalking to the police, identifying the presence of alarm, distress, or fear and related impacts on a victim has significant implications for criminal justice responses to stalking and cyberstalking. As outlined in Chapter 1, the Protection from Harassment Act (1997) and Protection of Freedoms Act (2012) dictate that evidence of reasonable alarm, distress, or fear of violence which has an adverse effect on the victim’s day-to-day life is required to charge a perpetrator with stalking under Section 4A of the legislation. Identifying impacts on victims and gathering evidence of such impact is therefore key to securing a stalking charge and implementing appropriate legal ramifications, such as a Stalking Protection Order.

To assist with the identification and measurement of victim impact, this thesis supports the development of an impact index based on, but not limited to, categories of impact as suggested by Storey and colleagues (2023) and used in this thesis, namely psychological, physical, practical, and impact on others. Crucially, an impact index should also include space to measure other forms of impact and be updated with ongoing research of the nature and impacts of stalking and cyberstalking. This is particularly important given the ongoing development of technology and proliferation of new methods of cyberstalking which could result in novel impacts on victims. The introduction of such an impact index also has the potential to enhance the ability of police and practitioners in decision making processes surrounding risk and victim support (Storey et al., 2023).

Categorising Stalking and Cyberstalking

The findings presented in this thesis have made significant contributions to the effective categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases. In Chapter 4, this thesis presented the first empirical study to date which has attempted to statistically validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology for the classification of stalking and cyberstalking cases. Whilst the typology was not statistically validated, most cases in the dataset were successfully categorised based on perpetrator motivational groups in Mullen and colleagues' (1999) typology with over 60 percent of stalking and cyberstalking perpetrators falling into the *Rejected* motivational group. These findings indicate that Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology yields utility in the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases. The study presented in Chapter 4 also adds to the very limited prior research of categorising cyberstalking cases based on Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology, supporting findings of Cavezza and McEwan (2014) who similarly identified that most cyberstalking perpetrators were *Rejected*.

This thesis posits that most stalking and cyberstalking cases can be categorised based on perpetrator motivation, however, further inferences of characteristics of the perpetrator motivational groups from Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology should be adopted with caution. For instance, when characteristics of the groups were compared, there were no significant differences in stalking duration or the presence of violence, approach behaviours, or in-person contact between the groups. This is a significant finding considering the large sample and varied nature of the stalking and cyberstalking cases; the results reduce the utility of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology in indicating a perpetrator's risk of violence, stalking duration, or likelihood of approaching the victim or engaging in in-person contact, contradicting the findings of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) original study. The changing nature of stalking and cyberstalking

over time could contribute to this contradictory finding, for instance, the findings presented in this thesis noted that many perpetrators engaged in unwanted online contact towards the victim and others, or covert online monitoring such as accessing the victim's accounts. Engagement in these covert methods could negate the need for approaching the victim, in-person contact, or violence if they provide a perpetrator with a new satisfactory avenue of pursuit. As a result, the increase in cyberstalking could result in a decrease in in-person stalking, meaning the likelihood of violence, approach behaviours, or in-person contact no longer differs distinctly between motivational groups. Ultimately, the nature, motivations, and impacts of stalking and cyberstalking vary widely and Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology should be used to aid researchers, police, and practitioners in understanding why a perpetrator is targeting a victim, but not as a tool to predict the likelihood of future stalking behaviours or risk of harm to the victim.

This thesis contributes original insights to the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking cases; the study outlined in Chapter 4 presented a novel statistical grouping of stalking and cyberstalking cases based on stalking modality. Research to date has differed in either classifying stalking and cyberstalking as distinct offences (e.g., Cavezza & McEwan, 2014), or considering cyberstalking as a method of stalking (e.g., Sheridan & Grant, 2007). This thesis suggests that the conceptualisation of stalking and cyberstalking benefits from the understanding that most cases include a plethora of both in-person stalking and cyberstalking methods. As a result, researchers should identify and measure as many methods of in-person and online behaviours as possible when examining stalking and cyberstalking perpetration and victimisation, as experiences of stalking and cyberstalking overlap considerably. The understanding that many victims experience a multitude of in-person and online behaviours is beneficial for recognising the permeation of unwanted behaviours throughout a victim's life. Conversely, the findings presented in Chapter 4

indicate that researchers should create a distinction between cases that are purely in-person (stalking) to cases that are purely online (cyberstalking). Considering the statistical grouping of these cases, ongoing research would benefit from conceptualising these groups distinctly.

The largest group within the classification presented in Chapter 4, *Mixed,* contained cases which involved both in-person stalking and cyberstalking methods. This thesis therefore supports previous findings that most cases of stalking also involve cyberstalking (e.g., Woodlock, 2017) and suggests that many perpetrators employ a wide arsenal of online and in-person behaviours to instil alarm, distress, and/or fear in a victim. This echoes findings of the studies presented in Chapters 2 and 3 where a plethora of stalking and cyberstalking methods were identified, including unwanted communication; approach behaviours; online monitoring; threats; violence; and contact with family and friends. For researchers, accurately measuring the prevalence and nature of cyberstalking requires the identification of a broad and evolving range of online methods of pursuit. Crucially, these measures must be updated continuously to reflect new methods of cyberstalking emerging over time. This need has been demonstrated in empirical research; for example, a replication study by Dressing and colleagues (2020) expanded upon their 2005 study by incorporating additional online methods that were not previously captured, such as perpetrators posting false information online. This highlights the importance of continuously refining the measurement of cyberstalking to reflect changes in the digital landscape. For police and practitioners, the findings suggest that victims commonly face a sordid multitude of unwanted behaviours that can infiltrate their day-to-day life. Even if a victim takes practical steps to reduce the perpetrator's physical proximity, such as moving house, changing job, or altering routines, the use of cyberstalking methods in conjunction can diversify and strengthen the perpetrator's ability to cause ongoing alarm, distress, or fear.

The study presented in Chapter 4 identified that cases of in-person stalking (*Offline*) appeared to differ statistically to cases of cyberstalking (*Online*). These findings indicate that ongoing research would benefit from differentiating cases of stalking from cases of cyberstalking, as they appear to be distinct in characteristics beyond modality. For instance, findings of the study presented in Chapter 4 indicated that *Offline* cases were more likely than *Mixed* or *Online* cases to involve a neighbour or stranger perpetrator, often involving approach behaviours, in-person contact, and threats. *Offline* cases, therefore, often represent stalking perpetrated by an individual who does not have an intimate or familial relationship with the victim and focuses their pursuit on infiltrating the victim's physical space. These cases mirror the early conceptualisations of stalking whereby a perpetrator would loiter, follow, and approach a victim in-person (e.g., Pathe & Mullen, 1997). The findings demonstrate that, whilst cases of this nature involving only in-person stalking do still occur, they are in the minority compared to cases involving a combination of stalking and cyberstalking.

Online cases, involving solely cyberstalking, were the least common type in the study presented in Chapter 4. Whilst these cases appeared to yield a lower risk of physical harm to the victim than *Mixed* or *Offline* cases, victims who experienced cyberstalking still reported significant negative impacts. The findings presented in this thesis posit that the *Online* category of cases is distinct, and the ways in which a perpetrator can target a victim using only online methods are diversifying and increasing, thus cases of cyberstalking are likely to continue increasing in prevalence. Ongoing research should endeavour to 'keep up' with the rise in technology, identifying and measuring the nature of cyberstalking using new software, platforms, and devices (e.g., Shafqat et al., 2023). Within practice, police and practitioners must remain conscious of the potential online avenues used by cyberstalking perpetrators and recognise the significant alarm,

distress, and fear that victims of cyberstalking can feel despite not experiencing in-person behaviours.

In addition, given that most cases overall involve a combination of in-person and online behaviours, it is important to monitor how perpetration of cyberstalking could lead to in-person stalking, increasing the risk of harm to a victim. For instance, Sheridan and Grant (2007) identified that 10.6% of perpetrators engaged in cyberstalking followed by in-person stalking, and Maple and colleagues (2011) identified that 4 percent of cases in their sample began with cyberstalking which evolved to in-person stalking. This thesis posits that most cases involve stalking and cyberstalking but did not explore whether cases began online, offline, or involved both avenues simultaneously. Examining temporal patterns of stalking and cyberstalking perpetration would be beneficial in ongoing research to highlight precursors to the crossover of these methods and potential subsequent risk of harm to victims.

Policy to tackle the rise in cyberstalking must also be developed continuously to protect victims. The implementation of the Online Safety Act (2023), for example, is a key step in protecting victims from online harms and holding social media companies accountable for the detection and removal of harmful content on their platforms. The findings of this thesis suggest that, not only must social media enterprises protect victims of cyberstalking from harmful content, but should also be held responsible for reducing the ability of perpetrators to conduct covert monitoring of a victim. The enforcement of this presents a significant challenge given the likely reluctance of social media companies to admit that their platforms can facilitate harmful covert cyberstalking. Many social media platforms or applications are designed to contribute to the social aspect of the applications, such as location-based tracking between users, and illicit use of these features is hard to detect. As a result, educating victims and vulnerable individuals about the use

and features of these applications is also an important factor in reducing risk of cyberstalking and subsequent harm.

Managing Stalking and Cyberstalking

The findings of this thesis presented prominent findings regarding the current management of stalking and cyberstalking through the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in England and Wales. The study presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis found that whilst the management of cyberstalking did not differ significantly to the management of stalking in England and Wales, approaches to protecting victims and reduce recidivism require improvement. The management of stalking and cyberstalking within the CJS in England and Wales was significantly hindered by inefficient police processes and most cases did not progress to a stalking charge. Marked delays with collecting evidence, victim statements, in receiving responses from police officers, and making arrests, greatly hindered the progress of stalking and cyberstalking investigations. The police and/or civil and criminal courts are the only authorities with the power to prevent ongoing stalking or cyberstalking behaviours by implementing legal ramifications, but many cases of stalking and cyberstalking were closed without these vital steps being taken to protect victims and prevent recidivism. Whilst a victim can take their own protective steps to reduce the perpetrator's ability to pursue them, such as changing routines, blocking online accounts, or securing personal devices, substantive legal actions against a perpetrator can only be facilitated by the Criminal Justice System and this is an integral aspect of presenting a united front against stalking and cyberstalking perpetration.

This thesis therefore contributes significantly to informing CJS approaches for the successful managing stalking and cyberstalking. For instance, whilst various reasons can arise for a case not progressing to a charge, the findings of this thesis highlight the need for police to do

everything in their power to identify stalking or cyberstalking behaviours and their impacts on victims. The evolution of technology presents new challenges to the identification and prevention of cyberstalking, particularly covert methods of online monitoring. The advent of Apple Airtags, for example, has enabled perpetrators to easily and covertly track a victim's movements and location from afar without advanced technological knowledge or expertise (Shafqat et al., 2023). Research has noted the limited resources available to police when conducting digital analysis of devices, platforms, or software in cyberstalking investigations (O'Shea et al., 2019). Police must not only have the resources and ability to conduct investigations into digital methods of pursuit or online monitoring, but also the professional curiosity to explore covert methods of cyberstalking perpetration that may form part of a course of conduct against a victim. As discussed, this thesis also presented an array of impacts of stalking and cyberstalking, and the adoption of an impact index (Storey et al., 2023) could streamline police responses to stalking and cyberstalking, increasing the chance of identifying and demonstrating significant alarm, distress, or fear, in turn securing a stalking charge.

In addition to effective investigations, victims must feel supported and empowered to keep themselves safe from stalking and cyberstalking. The study presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis demonstrated the impact of an advocacy service in improving criminal justice outcomes. Around a third of cases included in the study presented in Chapter 5 resulted in a stalking charge, compared to just under 8 percent of stalking cases within national statistics (Home Office, 2025), highlighting the significant and positive impact of victim support provisions in improving CJS outcomes. A vital aspect of cyberstalking victim support is also to enhance a victim's ability to protect their devices and accounts and to spot unwanted activity. Equipping victims with technological skills is vital in promoting a collaborative effort between police, victim support providers, and victims to

reduce the risk of harm and build strong cases against perpetrators. Work to achieve this is already underway by charities such as The Cyber Helpline, who educate victims with technological knowledge to protect their accounts and devices against unauthorised access from a perpetrator, and to gather evidence of unwanted online contact (The Cyber Helpline, 2025).

In line with presenting a united front against stalking and cyberstalking, the adoption of appropriate and effective legal ramifications must be improved. As highlighted in the study presented in Chapter 5, the use of Stalking Protection Orders was negligible in the sample of stalking and cyberstalking cases. For cases where the perpetrator poses a risk to the victim and there is reasonable cause to believe that the Stalking Protection Order is necessary (Stalking Protection Act, 2019), promoting the use of Stalking Protection Orders is key to improving criminal justice responses to stalking and cyberstalking. Particularly, the inclusion of positive requirements within a Stalking Protection Order is an important topic of further research and a point of improvement for the management of stalking and cyberstalking. For example, requiring a perpetrator to submit their devices to police allows for the better identification of methods of cyberstalking while an investigation is ongoing, providing a complete picture of the unwanted behaviours faced by a victim. Additionally, requiring a perpetrator to attend a mental health assessment or behavioural intervention is important to target the causes of stalking and cyberstalking behaviour, holistically reducing the prevalence and impact of stalking or cyberstalking. For instance, the Early Awareness Stalking Intervention (Wheatley, 2023) aims to improve a perpetrator's psychological flexibility, helping them to manage and cope with their emotional responses and in turn reducing the chance of stalking reoffending.

Methodological Considerations

The studies presented in this thesis employed a range of sampling and analytical techniques which require consideration when examining the contributions of this thesis. Study 1 relied on voluntary participation from self-identified victims and perpetrators of cyberstalking, resulting in an over-representation of young adults. However, given the proclivity of technology use and typical exploration of intimate relationships among this demographic, the nature of this sample did not significantly hinder the relevance or applicability of the results. Studies 2 and 3 utilised a large dataset of stalking and cyberstalking cases provided by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. The strengths and limitations of this dataset were discussed in more detail within Chapters 4 and 5, however the value of this data source should not be understated. Unlike some previous studies of stalking and cyberstalking which have relied on information from victims or perpetrators separately, the dataset used in Studies 2 and 3 offered a more comprehensive perspective. The information was compiled by advocates through interactions with the victim, police, and other victim support provisions, presenting a contextualised and detailed account of each stalking or cyberstalking case.

The cluster analysis approach adopted in Study 2 allowed for the first statistical validation of Mullen and colleagues' (1999) stalking typology to date. Hierarchical cluster analysis has been noted as a useful technique for identifying grouping patterns (Frades & Matthiesen, 2010) and appropriately produced distinct clusters in the dataset in Study 2. The clustering, however, was imperfect. For example, a small proportion of cases assigned to the *Offline* or *Online* clusters were actually mixed in modality. Further examination is therefore required to validate the clustering of stalking and cyberstalking cases by modality, however it could be argued that this result reflects the varied and complex nature of the stalking and cyberstalking cases. The conclusions drawn that most cases are *Mixed*, and cases that are *Online* or *Offline* are distinct, contribute substantially to

the conceptualisation of stalking and cyberstalking and pave the way for further research using this classification.

Conclusion

This thesis provides meaningful insights into the ongoing study of stalking and cyberstalking, demonstrating empirical evidence upon which considerations in research, policy, and practice should be made for the protection of stalking and cyberstalking victims. The use of definitions in line with legal criteria and a large, comprehensive sample of stalking and cyberstalking cases increases the utility and applicability of the findings presented in this thesis.

Firstly, the findings demonstrated the varied and complex nature of stalking and cyberstalking, involving a plethora of methods adopted by perpetrators to instil alarm, distress, and fear. Most cases involved a combination of in-person and online methods of pursuit, culminating in unwanted communication with or about the victim, approach behaviours, in-person contact, threats, violence, online monitoring, online posts, use of fake profiles, and accessing victim's online accounts. Notably, covert methods of cyberstalking, such as online monitoring, were being perpetrated without the victim's knowledge which has considerable implications for defining, identifying, measuring, and preventing cyberstalking.

Secondly, this thesis provided significant advancements in the categorisation of stalking and cyberstalking, having presented the first attempt to statistically validate Mullen and colleagues' (1999) widely used stalking typology. Whilst the typology could not be statistically validated, categorising cases of stalking and cyberstalking based on the perpetrator motivational groups was useful in identifying why a perpetrator was targeting a victim. However, further inferences of the motivational groups, such as stalking duration or risk of violence, should not be assumed. An impactful original contribution of this thesis is a statistical categorisation of stalking and

cyberstalking cases based on modality, mixed; online; or offline. Most cases involved a combination of in-person stalking and cyberstalking, but cases of solely stalking differ distinctly to cases of cyberstalking.

Finally, this thesis demonstrated the various barriers and delays faced by victims of stalking and cyberstalking within the criminal justice system. Police do not appear to treat cyberstalking distinctly differently to stalking, suggesting the legal classification of these offences is being followed. Despite this, there is substantial room for improvement in the implementation of effective and appropriate legal ramifications to prevent recidivism. Victims of stalking and cyberstalking experience ongoing behaviours which means timely responses to offending behaviours are vital. Relatedly, impacts of stalking and cyberstalking victimisation are significant and wide-reaching, further highlighting the need for effective measures to reduce offending and ongoing support for victims.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Cyberstalking Victimisation Questionnaire

Q1 The following research study is part of a PhD project by Cassidy Weekes at the University of Kent. The project is supervised by Dr Jennifer Storey. The aim of this research study is to identify experiences of certain online behaviours, in a sample of the general population. This questionnaire consists of 3 sections. You will first be asked for your demographic information. Section 2 will then ask you about your experiences of several online behaviours. This includes your experiences on social media apps and interaction with other online users, including any experiences of negative or unwanted behaviours. Section 3 will ask you about the impact of these experiences. The questionnaire should take under 10 minutes to complete. There is no time limit, but please try to complete the survey in one sitting as your answers may not be saved. The information collected is anonymous, confidential, and will only be seen by myself and my supervisor. You may withdraw from the study at any time by closing the page and your data will be deleted. If you wish to withdraw after having completed the questionnaire, please contact the researcher by email. If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, you can direct these, in writing, to the Chair of the Psychology Research Ethics Committee by email at: psychethics@kent.ac.uk If you have questions about this research project, please email: Cassidy Weekes c.weekes@kent.ac.uk

- ☐ I have been provided with the name and email of the researcher
- ☐ I have read the information presented above
- ☐ I understand the answers I provide are anonymous and confidential
- ☐ I give consent to participate in the study, and understand I can withdraw from the study at any time

Q4 How old are you?

- ○ Under 18
- ○ 18-21
- ○ 22-25
- ○ 26-30
- ○ 31-35
- ○ 36-40
- ○ 41-50
- ○ 51-60
- ○ 61+
- ○ I do not wish to disclose

Q5 What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Non-binary / third gender
- ○ Prefer not to say

Q6 What is your highest level of education to date?

- ○ No qualifications
- ○ GCSE's, High School Diploma, or equivalent
- ○ A-level's, AP, or equivalent
- ○ Undergraduate degree
- ○ Master's degree
- ○ PhD/Postgraduate degree

Q7 Which of the following options would best describe your profession?

- ○ Unemployed
- ○ Student
- ○ Retail/Hospitality
- ○ Corporate/Sales/Customer Service
- ○ Education
- ○ Healthcare
- ○ Charity/Third Sector
- ○ None of the above

Q14 Please select Green for the following question. This is an attention check. What colour have you been asked to select?

- ○ Blue
- ○ Green
- ○ Purple
- ○ Orange
- ○ Red

Q9 Please TICK if you have **ever** experienced **any** of the following behaviours.

- ☐ Received repeated, unwanted messages through email, text, or social media
- ☐ Been contacted by someone using a fake social media profile
- ☐ Been monitored or surveilled online by someone (e.g., beyond them just 'keeping up' with your online activity)
- ☐ Someone posted publicly about you on social media
- ☐ Someone contacted your friends or family online to gain information about you
- ☐ Someone attempted to gain access to your social media, online shopping, or email accounts
- ☐ I have never experienced any of the above behaviours

Q44 Did you ever experience the behaviour(s) more than once from the same individual?

- Yes
- No

Q47 Do you believe this individual was a scam artist? (i.e., someone who participates in a fraudulent operation online to obtain your money, bank details, or personal details)

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q11 **Please answer the following questions in relation to the individual who directed these behaviours towards you. If you experienced the behaviour from more than one individual, please answer the following questions considering the one individual that you experienced it from on the most.**

Q12 Did you ever meet this individual in-person before experiencing these behaviours?

- Yes
- No

Q13 What was your relationship with this individual **at the time of the behaviour**?

- ○ Current partner
- ○ Ex-partner
- ○ Family member
- ○ Friend
- ○ Ex-friend
- ○ Acquaintance
- ○ Neighbour
- ○ Colleague
- ○ Ex-colleague
- ○ Stranger
- ○ Other (please state) _____

Q51 Please indicate if you experienced any of the below behaviours from the individual. If you did, please also specify if you only *suspected* these were occurring, or you *knew* that these were occurring.

	No	Yes: Suspected	Yes: Known
They monitored and/or contacted you about your online activity	○	○	○
They joined online groups/communities that you were in	○	○	○
They checked who you were with in tagged photos	○	○	○
They checked your tagged locations in posts or photos	○	○	○
They physically checked your phone when you were with them	○	○	○
They checked your live location (e.g., through SnapMaps or FindmyiPhone)	○	○	○
They installed software (e.g., an app) on your device to check your location or activity	○	○	○

Q16 Please indicate if you experienced any of the below behaviours from the individual. If you did, please also specify if you only *suspected* these were occurring, or you *knew* that these were occurring.

	No	Yes: Suspected	Yes: Known
They sent repeated, unwanted messages to you via email, text or social media	○	○	○
They sent you online invitations (e.g., to join Facebook groups)	○	○	○
They created a fake account to monitor or contact you	○	○	○
They sent you photos of themself	○	○	○
They sent you photos of yourself (e.g., memes, edited/photoshopped pictures, photos taken without your knowledge)	○	○	○
They contacted your family or friends	○	○	○

Q17 Please indicate if you experienced any of the below behaviours from the individual. If you did, please also specify if you only *suspected* these were occurring, or you *knew* that these were occurring.

	No	Yes: Suspected	Yes: Known
They posted your personal information online	○	○	○
They posted private photos of you online	○	○	○
They posted false information about you online	○	○	○
They posted messages of love or adoration online about you	○	○	○
They repeatedly commented on your social media posts	○	○	○
They posted on social media pages of your family or friends about you	○	○	○
They posted on social media groups/pages about you	○	○	○

Q18 Please indicate if you experienced any of the below behaviours from the individual. If you did, please also specify if you only *suspected* these were occurring, or you *knew* that these were occurring.

	No	Yes: Suspected	Yes: Known
They tried to gain access to your social media accounts or email accounts	○	○	○
They tried to gain access to your online shopping accounts, (e.g., Amazon)	○	○	○
They tried to gain access to your personal devices	○	○	○
They tried to lock you out of your online accounts	○	○	○
They tried to access your Wi-Fi network to check your online activities	○	○	○

Q19 To your knowledge, did this individual ever use the information that they had gathered about you online, to try to find/locate you in-person?

- ○ No
- ○ Yes, once
- ○ Yes, more than once

Q20 To your knowledge, which of the following statements would best describe the motivation for their behaviours?

- [ ] They were hoping to rekindle/reconcile with you
- [ ] They were seeking a romantic relationship with you
- [ ] They were seeking a friendship with you
- [ ] It was for the purpose of monitoring you during your relationship with them
- [ ] They were trying to punish you or seek revenge against you
- [ ] Other (please state) _____

Q25 To your knowledge, has this individual ever experienced any form of mental health difficulty (e.g., depression, anxiety)?

- ○ No
- ○ Unsure
- ○ I suspect they did
- ○ Yes, self-diagnosed by them
- ○ Yes, diagnosed by a medical professional

Q26 Which of the below would best describe the mental health difficulty they experienced?

- ☐ Depression
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ ADHD
- ☐ Bipolar Disorder
- ☐ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- ☐ Schizophrenia
- ☐ Borderline Personality Disorder
- ☐ Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- ☐ Eating Disorder
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Other (please state) _____

Q23 Please answer the following question. This is an attention check. Is the following mathematical statement correct? 10 + 5 = 15

- ○ No
- ○ Yes

Q21 How did you react to their behaviour? Please TICK **all** that apply

- ☐ I contacted them to complain about their behaviour
- ☐ I asked them to stop their behaviour
- ☐ I was aware of their behaviour but did not complain or ask them to stop
- ☐ Other (please state) _____

Q45 Did they stop their behaviour after being contacted by you?

- ○ Yes, immediately
- ○ Yes, after a while
- ○ No
- ○ I didn't contact them

Q48 Did you **ever** feel alarm, distress, or fear of violence because of their behaviour?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Response

Start of Block: Block 5

Q3 Thank you for completing this questionnaire. The purpose of this study is to identify experiences of certain online behaviours. Context of these behaviours was then explored, including relationship, motivation, methods, and impact. The answers you have provided will be analysed by the researchers but remain entirely anonymous and confidential. If you have been affected by online crime, support is available at: 1. The Cyber Helpline can provide support with any type of online crime: www.thecyberhelpline.com 2. The Suzy Lamplugh Trust can provide support and advice if you have experienced stalking or cyberstalking: www.suzylamplugh.org 3. Action Fraud can assist with concerns about online safety and security: www.actionfraud.police.uk If you have further questions relating to this study, please contact c.weekes@kent.ac.uk. If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, you can direct these, in writing, to the Chair of the Psychology Research Ethics Committee by email at: psychethics@kent.ac.uk. **Please click the next arrow to be redirected back to RPS**

Appendix B

Cyberstalking Perpetration Questionnaire

Q1 The following research study is part of a PhD project by Cassidy Weekes at the University of Kent. The project is supervised by Dr Jennifer Storey. The aim of this research study is to identify online behaviours in a sample of the general population. This questionnaire consists of 3 sections. You will first be asked for your demographic information. Section 2 will then ask you about particular online and offline behaviours. This includes your use of social media, apps, or other websites to contact or gather information about an individual. Section 3 will ask you about your personal characteristics. The questionnaire should take under 10 minutes to complete. There is no time limit, but please try to complete the survey in one sitting as your answers may not be saved. The information collected is anonymous, confidential, and will only be seen by myself and my supervisor. You may withdraw from the study at any time by closing the page. If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, you can direct these, in writing, to the Chair of the Psychology Research Ethics Committee by email at: psychethics@kent.ac.uk If

you have questions about this research project, please email: Cassidy Weekes c.weekes@kent.ac.uk

- ☐ I have been provided with the name and email of the researcher
- ☐ I have read the information presented above
- ☐ I understand the answers I provide are anonymous and confidential
- ☐ I give consent to participate in the study, and understand I can withdraw from the study at any time

Q4 How old are you?

- ○ Under 18
- ○ 18-21
- ○ 22-25
- ○ 26-30
- ○ 31-35
- ○ 36-40
- ○ 41-50
- ○ 51-60
- ○ 61+
- ○ I do not wish to disclose

Q5 What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Non-binary / third gender
- ○ Prefer not to say

Q6 What is your highest level of education to date?

- ○ No qualifications
- ○ GCSE's, High School Diploma, or equivalent
- ○ A-level's, AP, or equivalent
- ○ Undergraduate degree
- ○ Master's degree
- ○ PhD/Postgraduate degree

Q7 Which of the following options would best describe your profession?

- ○ Unemployed
- ○ Student
- ○ Retail/Hospitality
- ○ Corporate/Sales/Customer Service
- ○ Education
- ○ Healthcare
- ○ Charity/Third Sector
- ○ None of the above

Q14 Please select Green for the following question. This is an attention check. What colour have you been asked to select?

- ○ Blue
- ○ Green
- ○ Purple
- ○ Orange
- ○ Red

Q9 Please TICK if you have **ever** engaged in **any** of the following behaviours

- ☐ Sent an individual an unwanted message through email, text, or social media
- ☐ Created a fake social media account to contact or monitor an individual
- ☐ Monitored or surveilled an individual's whereabouts and activity through their social media (beyond just 'keeping up' with their social media)
- ☐ Posted publicly about an individual on social media
- ☐ Contacted an individual's friends or family online to gain information about them
- ☐ Attempted to gain access to an individual's social media, online shopping, or email accounts
- ☐ I have never engaged in any of the above behaviours

Q43 Who was the behaviour/s targeted towards?

- ○ One individual
- ○ Multiple individuals

Q44 Did you ever engage in the behaviour/s **more than once** towards **the same individual**?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q11 **Please answer the following questions in relation to the individual who you directed these behaviours towards. If your behaviour was directed at more than one individual, please answer the following questions considering the one individual you focused on the most.**

Q12 Did you ever meet this individual in-person before engaging in these behaviours?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q13 What was your relationship with this individual **at the time**?

- ○ Current partner
- ○ Ex-partner
- ○ Family member
- ○ Friend
- ○ Ex-friend
- ○ Acquaintance
- ○ Neighbour
- ○ Colleague/ex-colleague
- ○ Stranger
- ○ Other (please state) _____

Q15 Below are some behaviours you may have engaged in towards the individual. Please read them carefully and **TICK all that apply**.

- ☐ I monitored their online activity, e.g. by continuously checking their profile for updates
- ☐ I joined online groups/communities that they were in
- ☐ I checked who they were with in tagged photos
- ☐ I checked their tagged locations in posts or photos
- ☐ I kept an eye on when they were online
- ☐ I physically checked their phone when I was with them
- ☐ I checked their live location (e.g., through SnapMaps or FindmyiPhone)
- ☐ I installed software (e.g., an app) on their device to check their location or activity
- ☐ None of the above

Q16 Below are some behaviours you may have engaged in towards the individual. Please read them carefully and **TICK all that apply**.

- ☐ I sent repeated, unwanted messages to them via email, text or social media
- ☐ I sent them online invitations (e.g., to join Facebook groups)
- ☐ I created a fake account to monitor or contact them
- ☐ I sent them photos of myself
- ☐ I sent them photos of themself (e.g., memes, edited/photoshopped pictures, photos taken without their knowledge)
- ☐ I contacted their family or friends
- ☐ None of the above

Q17 Below are some behaviours you may have engaged in towards the individual. Please read them carefully and **TICK all that apply**.

- ☐ I posted the individual's personal information online
- ☐ I posted private photos of the individual online
- ☐ I posted false information about the individual online
- ☐ I posted messages of love or adoration online about the individual
- ☐ I repeatedly commented on their social media posts
- ☐ I posted on social media pages of the individual's family or friends, about the individual
- ☐ I posted in social media groups/pages about the individual
- ☐ None of the above

Q18 Below are some behaviours you may have engaged in towards the individual. Please read them carefully and **TICK all that apply**.

- ☐ I tried to gain access to their social media accounts or email accounts
- ☐ I tried to gain access to their online shopping accounts, (e.g., Amazon)
- ☐ I tried to gain access to their personal devices
- ☐ I tried to lock them out of their online accounts
- ☐ I tried to access their Wi-Fi network to check their online activities
- ☐ None of the above

Q19 Did you ever use information that you had gathered about the individual online, to try to find/locate them in-person?

- ○ No
- ○ Yes, once
- ○ Yes, more than once

Q20 Which of the following statements would best describe the reason for your behaviours?

- [ ] I was hoping to rekindle/reconcile with the individual
- [ ] I was seeking a romantic relationship with the individual
- [ ] I was seeking a friendship with the individual
- [ ] It was for the purpose of monitoring the individual during our relationship
- [ ] I was trying to punish the individual or seek revenge
- [ ] Other (please state) _____

Q46 Was the individual aware of your behaviour?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q21 How did the individual react to your behaviour?

- [ ] The individual contacted me as a result of my behaviour
- [ ] The individual complained about my behaviour
- [ ] The individual asked me to stop the behaviour
- [ ] The individual was aware of my behaviour but did not complain or ask me to stop
- [ ] Other (please state) _____

Q45 Did you stop your behaviour after being contacted by the individual?

- ○ Yes, immediately
- ○ Yes, after a while
- ○ No
- ○ They didn't contact me

Q22 Now consider your online behaviour within any online community, towards any individual. Please TICK if you have **ever** engaged in any of the following behaviours.

- ☐ Posted inflammatory, insincere, or unsolicited content in an online community
- ☐ Engaged with an individual's online posts or images in a provocative or controversial manner
- ☐ Created provoking, unsolicited, or controversial content targeted towards a particular individual or online community
- ☐ None of the above

Q23 Please answer the following question. This is an attention check. Is the following mathematical statement correct? 10 + 5 = 15

- ○ No
- ○ Yes

Q24 Do you agree with the below statements about yourself?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
When I'm close to someone, it gives me a sense of comfort about life in general	○	○	○	○
I often worry my partner doesn't really love me	○	○	○	○
I have trouble getting others to be as close as I want them to be	○	○	○	○
I find it easy to be close to others	○	○	○	○
I often worry my partner will not want to stay with me	○	○	○	○
Others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being	○	○	○	○
It feels relaxing and good to be close to someone	○	○	○	○
I am very comfortable being close to others	○	○	○	○
I don't worry about others abandoning me	○	○	○	○
My desire to be close to others sometimes scares people away	○	○	○	○

I prefer not to be too close to others	○	○	○	○
I find others are reluctant to get as close as I would like	○	○	○	○
I get uncomfortable when someone wants to be very close	○	○	○	○
Being close to someone gives me a source of strength for other activities	○	○	○	○

Q25 Have you ever experienced any form of mental health difficulty (e.g., depression, anxiety)?

- ○ No
- ○ Yes, self-diagnosed
- ○ Yes, diagnosed by a medical professional

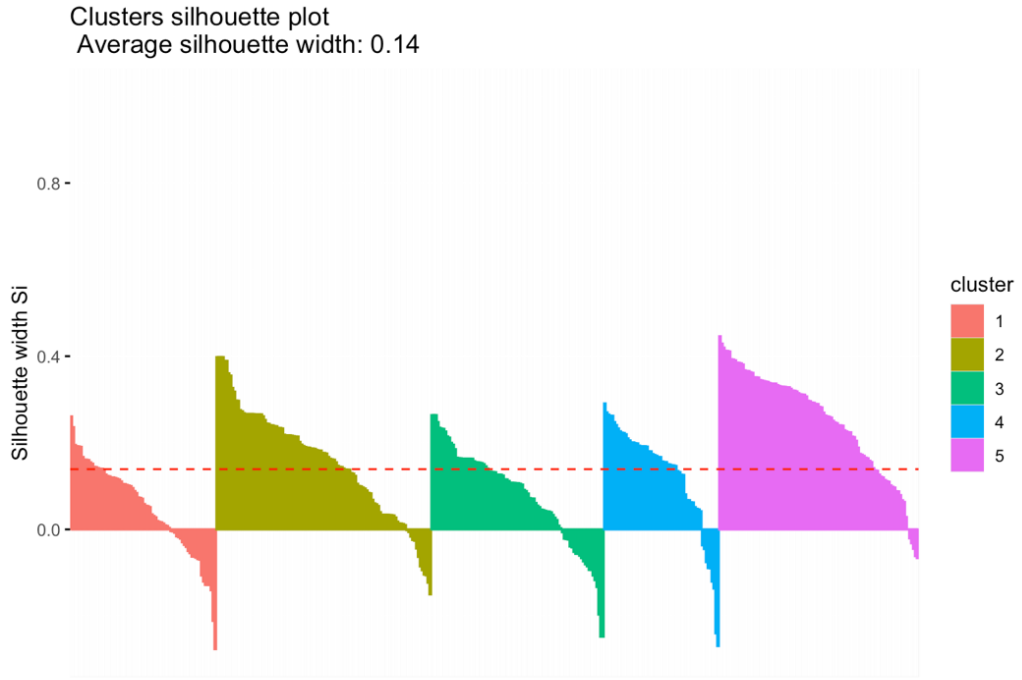
Q26 Which of the below would best describe the mental health difficulty you experienced?

- ☐ Depression
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Bipolar Disorder
- ☐ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- ☐ Schizophrenia
- ☐ Borderline Personality Disorder
- ☐ Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- ☐ Eating Disorder
- ☐ Other (please state) _____

Q3 Thank you for completing this questionnaire. The purpose of this study is to identify online and offline behaviours, and how these relate to demographics and personality characteristics. The answers you have provided will be analysed by the researchers but remain entirely anonymous and confidential. If you have been affected by online crime, support is available at: 1. The Cyber Helpline: www.thecyberhelpline.com 2. The Suzy Lamplugh Trust: www.suzylamplugh.org 3. Action Fraud: www.actionfraud.police.uk If you have further questions relating to this study, please contact c.weekes@kent.ac.uk. If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, you can direct these, in writing, to the Chair of the Psychology Research Ethics Committee by email at: psychethics@kent.ac.uk. **Please click the next arrow to be redirected back to RPS**

Appendix C

Silhouette Plot of First Cluster Analysis Attempt



Appendix D

Silhouette Plot of Third Cluster Analysis Attempt

