

Predicting Violent Behavior in Stalkers: A Preliminary Investigation of Canadian Cases in Criminal Harassment

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the factors associated with violent/aggressive behavior in stalkers using a sample of 100 Canadian cases of persons charged with criminal harassment (more commonly known as stalking). Results revealed that the typical profile of a “simple obsessional” type of stalker was a middle-aged male, single or separated/estranged, with a history of emotional and/or anger management problems. The most common initial strategies used by the victims to cope with the stalkers were oriented towards legal resources. Initial legal remedies, including court orders or police warnings, seemed to be ineffective as a strategy to stop stalking given that most stalkers chose to ignore them. The study also provided partial support for a preliminary model of predictors of violent/aggressive behavior in stalkers. Stalkers with previous violent behaviors, strong negative emotions, and obsessional tendencies toward the victim may be most at risk of future violent and aggressive acts.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, forensic psychology, stalking, obsessional harassment, violence in relationships

In 1991, the horrific crossbow murder of Patricia Allen in Ontario, Canada by her estranged husband, despite months of repeated complaints to police of harassment, attracted public outrage. Due in part to high profile cases such as this one and the increasing incidence of stalking in general, stalking laws have since been passed in Canada and the U.S.

Canadian criminal harassment legislation, more commonly known as stalking, came into effect on August 1, 1993 and states that no person shall repeatedly follow, repeatedly communicate, beset or watch the place where the other person resides, works, carries on business or happens to be; or, engage in threatening conduct directed at the other person or member of their family which causes that other person reasonably to fear for their safety.

It is important to note that a victim’s reasonable fear for their safety not only includes their physical safety but also psychological safety as well. In other words, their need not be a threat to cause physical harm for a victim to reasonably fear for their safety. This reasonable fear also includes the right to freedom from psychological harm, emotional well-being and/or personal sense of security (7).

Research by Statistics Canada in 1996 revealed that most victims of criminal harassment are women and that the majority of accused

are male (3). The former survey also indicated that a majority of women are stalked by current or past partners. Increasingly, the focus on stalkers has changed from perpetrators who harass celebrities or media figures to those who harass their former partners and are involved in domestic violence disputes (1,2).

The Canadian study, along with others suggests most stalkers are not physically violent and that serious physical injuries as a result of stalking are not common (3,4). Despite media stories that tend to emphasize reporting of more tragic cases, the homicide rate among victims of stalking is less than 2% (4).

However, according to Meloy (4), the frequency of some form of violence among stalkers toward their victims averages in the 25 to 35% range, seemingly high when contrasted with other criminally violent groups. Moreover, despite the limited physical injuries in most cases, the threat of harm can seriously affect one’s emotional and physical well-being. Some research has shown that stalking victims may have severe psychological stress placed on themselves and those closest to them by the actions of the stalker (5,6).

The purpose of this investigation is to develop a better understanding of the characteristics of individuals who are charged with criminal harassment and in particular those who become violent with their victim. Instead of focusing on the demographic characteristics of stalkers which to date has shown to be of little help in understanding stalking, this study examined more closely factors associated with the stalker’s emotional relationship with the victim that is proposed to be key in developing a more complete picture of the stalker.

In addition, this study included only cases where the alleged stalker and victim had some past knowledge of each other, (i.e., simple obsessional), such as ex-partner or nonintimate situations such as neighbor; unlike much of the previous research that has examined the victimization of celebrities and well-known individuals (8,9). Past research indicates that the relationship between the two parties is important in understanding stalkers and their motivations (4).

Given the fact that stalking behavior can sometimes have devastating and even deadly consequences for victims, it seems vital that empirical research concerning stalking and the prediction of violence be completed. It appears that the criminal harassment legislation may not be offering victims sufficient protection. Moreover, the effectiveness of protection or restraining orders in stopping stalking behaviors has had mixed results. A number of studies show that protection orders do decrease the perpetrator’s behavior toward the victim; however, most samples are nonrandom surveys of a short time span (10,11). On the other hand, studies on victims suggest that most stalkers violate restraining orders (12).

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Thus, a better understanding of a perpetrator's potential for aggressive and violent behavior and its' correlates is important and worthwhile. More detailed information in this area may help police and victims of this crime deal with the perpetrators more effectively. Overall, this study attempts to add to the relatively few empirical investigations on stalking and violent behavior, and to my knowledge, is one of a small number of Canadian studies in this area.

Hypothesized Model of Stalking Aggression/Violence

Despite the slowly growing research in the area of stalking, few studies have examined the predictors of stalking violence. Violence in this study is defined as aggressive behavior that involved bodily harm or intended to result in bodily harm to another person.

In reviewing the literature, the only known study comparing violent and nonviolent stalkers was completed by Schwartz-Watts and Morgan (13). No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups with respect to age, sex, marital status, education, substance abuse, Axis I diagnosis, military history, and head injuries. The relationship of the stalker to his victim approached significance with those having had a prior attachment to the stalker more likely to be assaulted than causal acquaintances of victims. This study seems to suggest that factors relating to the relationship between victim and stalker may be more influential than demographics in identifying stalkers who are violent.

One variable examined in research concerned with the prediction of aggressive behavior is whether the stalker has made explicit threats about the victim. Past research examining this area has found that while a majority of stalkers do make threats and that threats are more common in cases where stalkers are violent, only a small minority (one-fourth to one-third) of those actually follow through on their threats of violence (14–17). Recent studies suggest previous threats in addition to previous criminal activity may predict stalkers who assault their victims (18,19). We hypothesize that threats made by stalkers about their victims will be a predictor of violent behavior given that threats and violence are typically correlated.

A stalker's previous record of violent offenses may also be a valuable predictor of current aggressive behavior towards the victim. Past research has indicated that aggression in individuals tends to be stable across contexts and across time (20–22) and that persons with a record of violent crime commit a disproportionate amount of violence (23,24). In addition, a recent study by Mullen, Pathe, Purcell and Stuart (19) indicated that stalkers who committed assault was predicted by previous convictions in addition to substance-related disorders and previous threats. Thus, we hypothesize that stalkers with a previous record of aggressive/violent offences will be more likely to engage in future violent behavior.

Similarly, stalkers with a previous history of domestic abuse may be more apt to engage in violent behavior towards their stalking victim. The majority of advocates for battered women believe that a battered woman is at higher risk than a nonbattered woman to be seriously harmed or killed once the relationship has been terminated (25). Furthermore, Coleman (26) found that a group of stalking victims who had more verbally or physically abusive relationships prior to the dissolution of the relationship than other non-stalking groups also reported more aggressive acts after the breakups. Thus, we hypothesize that stalkers who engage in domestic violence during the relationship may have a greater tendency to pursue their partners in a harassing or violent manner after the end of the relationship.

Another possible predictor of stalker aggression and violence is the presence of a mental and/or personality disorder. All stalkers, to varying degrees, are obsessed with their victim, but not all stalkers suffer from mental illness and/or personality disorders. One study found that mental illness was present in 63% of the stalkers ($n = 74$), although when broken into subgroups of types of stalkers, 43% of the simple obsessional group ($n = 35$) did not have clear evidence of a mental illness (27). In general, however, research has found that a majority of stalkers have been shown to have Axis I mental disorders including drug and alcohol problems, mood disorders, or schizophrenia and/or Axis II personality disorders (4,14,15,28).

The relationship between the presence of a mental and/or personality disorder in the stalker and degree of violence is not clear. Hodgins (29) suggests that perpetrators with major mental disorders behave more aggressively than those with no diagnosed mental illness. On the other hand, Kienlen et al., (15) examined differences between psychotic or delusional ($n = 8$) and nonpsychotic ($n = 15$) stalkers. No statistically significant differences in the incidence of violence was found between the two groups; although, the nonpsychotic group (which tended to exhibit Axis I disorders and a variety of Axis II personality disorders) showed a trend toward higher levels of threats, weapons possession, and acting out violently more often than the psychotic group. Overall, we hypothesize that the presence of a likely mental or personality disorder will effectively predict future violent behavior in stalkers given the higher probability for irrational ideation.

It could be said that all simple obsessional stalkers are obsessed with their victim; however, the degree of obsessiveness or fixation of stalkers with their victims (as operationally defined in this study by the frequency of contact between stalker and victim and the degree the stalker goes out of his way to contact the victim) may play an important role in predicting aggression of the stalker towards their victim. While little research has focused on the relationship between these two variables, it is hypothesized that a stalker who has a greater number of unwanted contacts with the victim and/or goes to great lengths to contact the victim, may tend to become more violent towards their victim given that all of this expended energy does not result in successfully engaging the victim.

Finally, another potential predictor of aggression in stalkers is the degree of perceived negative affect or emotion in the actions of the stalker towards the victim after the breakup of the relationship. In this study perceived negative affect was operationally defined as the degree of serious verbal abuse, including threats, lack of empathy, and apparent hostility or hatred by the stalker towards the victim. It is hypothesized that stalkers who exhibit a high degree of anger or negative emotion towards the victim may tend to act out more aggressively. These strong negative emotions exhibited by the stalker may motivate the stalker to physically abuse the victim, beyond the common psychological and verbal abuse engaged in by the stalker.

Method

A hypothesized model of personal and relationship variables influencing the degree of violent/aggressive behavior of stalkers is shown in Fig. 1.

The population for this study was defined as all individuals in Canada who had been formally charged with criminal harassment as previously defined under the Criminal Code of Canada, who also

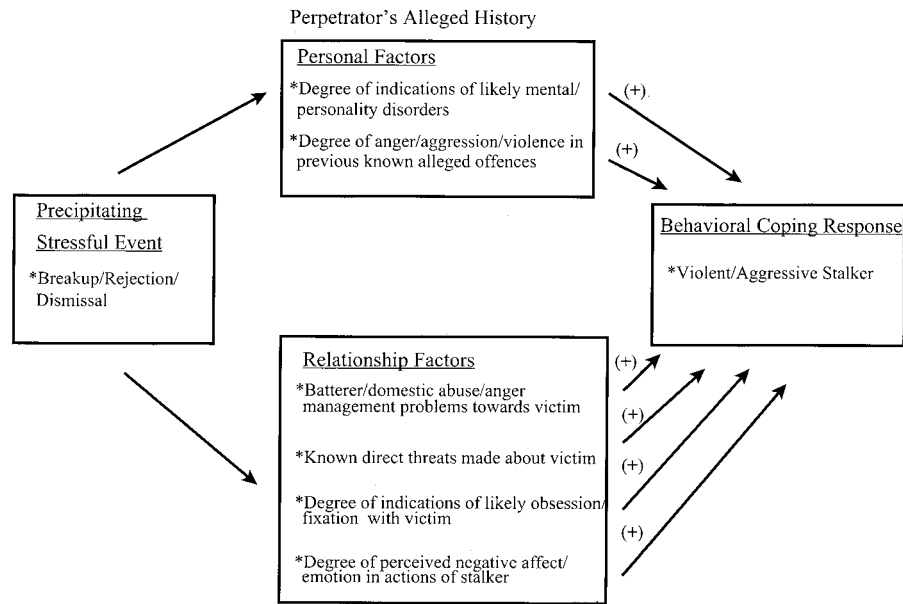


FIG. 1—Model of hypothesized factors to be assessed in the prediction of violent/aggressive stalkers.

met the following criteria: (1) the stalker-victim relationship was known as “simple obsessional” as described by Zona, Palarea, and Lane (30), and (2) the case contained sufficient information to allow for analysis related to the objectives of the study.

This investigation examined the “simple obsessional” type of relationship exclusively given that these cases are most common in empirical studies and in police investigations and these cases tend to be the most violent (14,27,31).

Case studies were chosen from two databases: (1) Lexis-Nexis—A legal database containing selected cases from Canadian courts; and (2) Canadian News-Disc 1993 to 1999—a news database containing news stories from the major newspapers across Canada.

Since attaining a complete database of all individuals in Canada charged with criminal harassment whose stalker-victim typology could be classified as “simple obsessional” was not available to the researcher, a truly random sample could not be drawn. Thus, the researcher was forced to use a nonrandom sample of convenience. Subsequently, one cannot assume that the final sample accurately characterized the entire defined population.

This does not necessarily mean that the final sample was a non-representative group, especially since the researcher included every available case from these two databases that met the population definition. In addition, other research in this area has supported the use of nonrandom samples of convenience in order to study this hard-to-reach population (14,15).

The sample size was constrained by the availability of criminal harassment cases on the two databases used in this study. A review of the two databases for cases meeting the definition described above, yielded 100 usable cases between August 1993 and December 1999. Given that the sample contained cases from various provinces, and varying degrees of criminal behavior, it was thought to be representative of perpetrators of this crime in general. Thus, the results appeared to be generalizable to the overall defined population.

After an extensive review of the literature on stalking and criminal harassment in published journals, books, and government documents as well as the author’s own expertise in consultation with

associates practicing in the forensic psychology field, the data collection was initiated. The collection of data was based on:

- (1) determination of data necessary for hypotheses testing;
- (2) generation of questions that would obtain this data from cases; and
- (3) data required for statistical analysis.

A data code was produced in order to quantify the patterns of harassment developed in the review. After editing, 32 items were chosen for use, some of which used a nominal scale for measurement (i.e., 1, 0) and others that were measured on a 5 point or 7 point interval-ratio scale.

The dependent measure—degree of violent/aggressive behavior leading to current criminal charges (DegViol)—was rated on a 7-point interval/ratio scale ranging from (1) no physical violence or threats of violence by the stalker to (7) the most serious aggressive/violent behavior including such crimes as attempted/counseling murder, murder, kidnapping, and rape.

The predictors rated on a 5-point interval/ratio scale were defined as follows:

- (1) Previous known alleged offences rated for aggressive/violent behavior (PrevAng)—ranging from (0) no previous none offences to (5) high physical contact and/or repeated assaults or repeated charges for aggressive behavior;
- (2) Degree of indications of likely obsession/fixation (Obses)—ranging from (1) low/none obvious to (5) high relating to the relative number of contacts with victim as well as the degree to which the perpetrator either went out of his way to contact the victim or acted in a unusual or peculiar manner;
- (3) Degree of indications of likely mental or personality disorder (Ment)—ranging from (1) low/none obvious to (5) high relating to the symptomology detailed in the case and/or court observations from appointed experts of probable problems;
- (4) Degree of perceived negative affect/emotion in actions (NegAff)—ranging from (1) low to (5) high relating to the degree

of perceived anger/hatred towards the victim based on known threats, verbal abuse, and empathy or hostility portrayed towards the victim.

(5) Threat/no threat status towards victim, (Threat)—nominally-scaled item (1 = yes, 0 = no);

(6) Batterer/nonbatterer, (Batt) nominally-scaled item, 1 = yes, 0 = no.

Scorer reliability was estimated by having the subjective questions from a small sample of cases ($n = 25$) independently rated by another expert rater. The scores for each subjective question were then correlated. Correlations between the scores for all items were computed and found to be relatively high ($r = >.80$) and therefore, the possibility of scorer variance was significantly reduced (32,33).

Results

The sample consisted of $n = 100$ perpetrators charged with criminal harassment (more commonly known as stalking) from seven different provinces including Ontario ($n = 56$), British Columbia ($n = 18$), Alberta ($n = 12$), Saskatchewan ($n = 1$), Manitoba ($n = 4$), Nova Scotia ($n = 3$), and Newfoundland ($n = 6$).

The sample of perpetrators charged with criminal harassment ranged in age from 14 to 58 years old with a mean age of 38 and consisted mainly of males (92% male, $n = 92$). The marital status of the perpetrators consisted of 59% single ($n = 59$), 40% divorced, estranged, or separated ($n = 40$), and 1% married or commonlaw ($n = 1$). The mean age, marital status, and gender of the group is consistent with other research involving those charged with stalking (15,16,17). Background of the perpetrators is shown in Table 1.

Little personal information was available on the victims other than their sex, (93% female, $n = 93$), and their marital status—which consisted of 51% single ($n = 51$), 40% divorced, estranged, or separated ($n = 40$), and 9% married or commonlaw ($n = 9$).

Six types of previous relationships between perpetrator and victim were found in the sample. The majority consisted of either couples that had been living together as married or commonlaw relations (34%, $n = 34$) or girl/boyfriends in a dating/intimate relationship but not living together (32%, $n = 32$). Other types of attachments found in the sample consisted of casual acquaintances (22%, $n = 22$), professional relations (doctor/teacher) (2%, $n = 2$), work colleagues (7%, $n = 7$), and personal friends (3%, $n = 3$).

TABLE 1—Perpetrators' alleged life history prior to current criminal charges.

Characteristic	Frequency (%)	<i>n</i>
Drug or alcohol abuse	16	16
Mental illness personality/mood disorder	27	27
Violence/abuse (no criminal record)	17	17
Previous stalking/criminal harassment charge	12	12
Previous stalking behavior in past relationships	18	18
Sexual assault/abuse	6	6
Military/weapons/firearm background	5	5
Physical assault or other similar violent offence	31	31
Fraud	7	7
Property/burglary/break and enter	10	10
Breach of court order	28	28
Other	5	5
Unknown	5	5
No previous offences	44	44

The length of the previous cordial relationship ranged from under two months ($n = 14$) to over 15 years ($n = 9$) with a mean of between one and two years ($n = 22$). Almost three-quarters ($n = 74$) of the previous relationships between perpetrator and victim lasted less than four years, and a majority ($n = 61$) of relations lasting less than two years.

Moreover, a large number of perpetrators (84%, $n = 84$) had apparent psychosocial stressors one year prior to the onset of criminal harassment. These various stressors are outlined in Table 2.

Various types of contact were made by the perpetrators towards their victim as seen in Table 3. The most frequent types of contact made by the majority of perpetrators included repeated phone or email (67%), unwelcome visits (55%), verbal abuse (49%), and threats to the victim (47%). The most frequent violent behavior involving contact was physical assault without a weapon in which slightly over one-quarter (28%) of perpetrators were involved. This percentage is consistent with other studies that examined the frequency of violence in stalkers (15,28).

The length of time the perpetrator stalked their victim after the relationship reportedly ended ranged from less than one week (7%)

TABLE 2—Type of alleged psychosocial stressors of stalker one year prior to stalking charge.

Stressor	Frequency (%)	<i>n</i>
Loss of employment/financial problems	10	10
Child custody/concerns regarding children	14	14
Death/serious illness in family/relative	2	2
Legal problems other than current charges	23	23
Relationship problems other than current victim	3	3
Alleged alcohol/drug abuse	15	15
Possible psychiatric/personality/emotional problems	39	39
Batterer/domestic abuse/anger management problems	23	23
New date/partner in life of victim	17	17
Other	3	3
No know stressors	16	16

TABLE 3—Type of contact made by stalker towards victim.

Type of Contact	Frequency (%)	<i>n</i>
Repeated phone/email	67	67
Unwelcome visits to home/work	55	55
Verbal abuse/left verbal messages intended to fear	49	49
Threats to victim	47	47
Surveillance at home/work/other	40	40
Sent letters/cards/notes	38	38
Follow	36	36
Approached victim	31	31
Physical assault without weapon	28	28
Harass other 3rd parties	23	23
Property damage	21	21
Sent gifts/flowers	18	18
Threats to harm 3rd person	18	18
Break and enter (victim's property)	17	17
Extortion or threat of extortion	14	14
Assault with weapon	14	14
Sexual assault	7	7
Arson/attempted arson	3	3
Sent/left odd items	2	2
Other	15	15

to over ten years (2%) with a mean of between six months to one year. Almost three-quarters (73%) of the sample of perpetrators harassed their victim one year or less, and a large majority (86%) two years or less. It is important to note that length of harassment can be sharply influenced by a number of factors including legal interventions, police aggressiveness, victim's response time, type of contact made by perpetrator, and so on.

Table 4 displays the location of the stalking behaviors. The majority of stalking incidents took place at the main residence or home of the victim (90%), followed by the victim's work environment (48%). In addition, it is important to note that it was not uncommon for perpetrators to engage in stalking behavior at more than one location.

Current criminal charges against the perpetrators included almost half (43%) charged solely with stalking (i.e., criminal harassment); one-fifth or 20% were charged with stalking and other minor nonviolent crime such as mischief or breach of probation; and over one-third (37%) of the sample were charged with violent-related crimes. Of these 31% were charged with stalking and aggressive crimes such as assault, arson, and/or unlawful confinement and a further 6% were charged with stalking and attempted murder/murder or counseling murder.

From the detailed information contained in the cases including psychiatric or psychological evaluations, judges' observations based on case history and/or an analysis of symptoms and behavior of the perpetrator, several types of alleged psychiatric/psychological disorders were evident in the sample of perpetrators. These alleged disorders are indicated in Table 5. Not surprisingly in this sample of stalkers, a large majority of perpetrators (69%) were alleged to be severely obsessed and fixated on their victim, and/or ap-

peared to have extreme difficulties in controlling their emotions (53%). Also of note is the fact that almost one-third of the sample (29%) were alleged batterers and/or appeared to have a personality disorder (26%).

Although one could argue that all stalkers corresponding to the "simple obsessional" typology are obsessed with their victims and have emotional problems, the behavior of the perpetrators in this study identified as such was notably excessive in the frequency of contacts with their victim.

An examination of known direct threatening statements made by perpetrators reveals that slightly more than two-thirds (68%, $n = 68$) made some kind of threatening statements. Of these, a majority (57%) were made either directly to or about the victim; one-fourth of the threats (25%) were made to or about a third party; 11% regarding property or things and only 2% regarding animals or threats of perpetrator suicide.

The perceived motive for harassment of the stalkers was based on a combination of direct statements and/or actions of the perpetrators. The most common motives were either hostility/retaliation (41%), or infatuation/fixation of the stalker with the victim (39%).

With respect to police warnings or court orders to stay away and/or discontinue any type of contact with the victim, a majority of perpetrators (62%) had such orders; yet, of those who did, an overwhelming 55% chose not to obey the order or warning. Indeed, only a very small proportion (7%) chose to obey a known legal order.

Table 6 presents the initial strategy(s) used by the victim to cope with the stalker. The two most common strategies used by the majority of victims were calling police (56%) and/or obtaining a restraining order (50%). Interestingly, over one-third of the victims (38%) chose to either ignore the stalker or to confront the stalker.

Table 7 presents the Pearson correlation matrix for the variables under study. Some of the most relevant findings were as follows: (1) negative affect was the most highly correlated variable with degree of aggressive/violent behavior of the stalker ($r = .73$) followed by batterer/nonbatterer status ($r = .67$) and degree of aggression/violence in previous known alleged offences ($r = .64$). (2) Not surprisingly, negative affect was also highly correlated with threats to the victim ($r = .78$). However, threats to the victim was only moderately correlated with degree of aggressive/violent behavior ($r = .54$) indicating that threats by a stalker may not, by itself, accurately predict aggressive/violent behavior towards the victim. As Gavin de Becker (34) suggests, the context in which threats take place may be more relevant in predicting violence than the content of the threat.

Other correlations not included in Table 7 but noteworthy include: (1) personal violence against the victim associated with cur-

TABLE 4—Location of stalking incidents.

Location	Frequency (%)	<i>n</i>
Main residence/home of victim	90	90
Work (commercial)	48	48
Public street	39	39
Car/bus (in or around victim's car or bus)	28	28
Social places/events/stores	20	20
Other residence/cottage/friend's home	16	16
Parking lot	12	12
School (related to victim or victim's family)	11	11
Other	1	1
Unknown	1	1

NOTE: Frequencies add up to more than 100 given that some perpetrators engaged in stalking behavior in more than one location.

TABLE 5—Type of alleged psychiatric/psychological disorder(s) of stalker at time of current charge(s).

Type of Alleged Disorder	Frequency (%)	<i>n</i>
Obsessive/desperate/fixated/compulsive	69	69
Emotional problems (i.e., not in control of emotions)	53	53
Batterer/mounting aggression towards victim	29	29
Personality disorder (i.e., narcissistic)	26	26
Drug/alcohol/steroid abuse	16	16
Mood disorder (i.e., depression)	10	10
Schizophrenia/delusional/psychotic	9	9
Other	1	1
No known disorder	7	7

TABLE 6—Initial strategy(s) used by victim to cope with stalker.

Initial Strategy(s)	Frequency (%)	<i>n</i>
Call police/security	56	56
Restraining/legal order	50	50
Ignore stalker	38	38
Confront/talk to stalker	38	38
Avoid	27	27
Call/use friend/family/relative	19	19
Document/collect evidence against stalker	18	18
Move to different house/school/area	13	13
Change phone line	6	6
Change name/identity	2	2

TABLE 7—Pearson correlation matrix of dependent and independent variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. DegViol	...						
2. PrevAng	0.64	...					
3. Obses	0.54	0.41	...				
4. Ment	0.63	0.54	0.49	...			
5. NegAff	0.73	0.47	0.46	0.65	...		
6. Threat	0.54	0.30	0.21	0.52	0.78	...	
7. Batt	0.67	0.72	0.28	0.47	0.52	0.44	...

NOTE: All coefficients are significant at $p < .01$.

Variable Definitions:

DegViol = Degree of aggressive/violent behavior leading to current charges;

PrevAng = Previous known alleged offences rated for anger/aggression/violence;

Obses = Degree of indications of likely Obsession/fixation with victim; Ment = Degree of indications of likely mental disorder/personality/disorder/severe behavioral problems

NegAff = Degree of perceived negative affect/emotion in actions of stalker;

Threat = Status regarding known direct threatening statements made about victim;

Batt = Status regarding known battering/domestic abuse/anger management problems towards victims.

rent stalking charges was significantly correlated ($r = 0.52, p < .01$) with the strength of previous emotional attachment (defined by length and type of relationship). Property violence was moderately correlated with negative affect ($r = .44, p < .01$). Also, degree of aggressive/violent behavior in stalkers was only moderately associated with either type of previous attachment ($r = .48, p < .01$) or strength of previous emotional attachment, defined by length and breadth of relationship ($r = .48, p < .01$).

A series of stepwise multiple linear regression analyses were performed with degree of aggressive/violent behavior as the dependent measure and predictor variables related to characteristics of the stalker included in Table 7. The equations that were most effective in accounting for the variance in the degree of aggression/violent behavior in the stalker are noted in Table 8a and Table 8b.

Results from Table 8a indicated that perceived negative affect, aggression in previous alleged offences and degree of obsession/fixation were able to account for a significant portion of the variance in degree of aggressive/violent behavior in the stalker

TABLE 8a—Hierarchical regression analysis summary for stalker variables predicting aggressive/violent behavior ($n = 100$).

Step	Predictor Variable	B	SE B	Beta	R^2	Change in R^2
1	Perceived Negative Affect	0.63	0.09	0.48*	0.53*	0.53*
2	Aggression in Previous Alleged Offences	0.33	0.7	0.33*	0.64*	0.11*
3	Degree of Obsession/Fixation	0.29	0.11	0.18*	0.66*	0.02*

* $p < .05$.

TABLE 8b—Hierarchical regression analysis summary for stalker variables predicting aggressive/violent behavior ($n = 100$).

Step	Predictor Variable	B	SE B	Beta	R^2	Change in R^2
1	Perceived Negative Affect	0.54	0.09	0.41	0.53*	0.53*
2	Batterer/Domestic Abuse	1.91	0.33	0.38*	0.64*	0.11*
3	Degree of Obsession/Fixation	0.38	0.10	0.24*	0.69*	0.05*

* $p < .05$.

($R^2 = .66, p < .05$). In addition, Table 8b shows that when the variables perceived negative affect and degree of obsession/fixation are combined with batterer/nonbatterer status of the stalker, a similar degree of variance in the dependent measure is accounted for by the regression ($R^2 = .69, p < .05$).

Discussion

This preliminary study into the predictors of aggressive and violent behavior in stalkers brought to light several interesting findings. First, the typical profile of a simple obsessional type of stalker in this study was a middle-aged male, single or separated/estranged, with a history of emotional and/or anger management problems who tends to harass their victim most often using unwanted verbal contacts or threats and unwelcome visits rather than violent actions.

The stalker's typical victim was female and was either previously married to or dated the stalker for a period of less than four years and tended to be stalked for a period of less than one year usually at the victim's home and/or work environment. This profile is consistent with other research (4).

Although it is important to note that while a general profile of a stalker may be somewhat advantageous in examining the nature of stalking, stalkers are not a homogeneous group and unique case characteristics can be significant in predicting aggressive or violent behavior in stalkers.

Secondly, the most common initial strategies used by the victims, as a group, in this study to cope with the stalkers were more oriented towards legal resources compared with research on younger victims of stalking on campus—whose main strategies included ignoring or confronting the stalker (35). This may be due to the fact that victims of college age may be less fearful in general and less knowledgeable regarding legal resources available to them.

A major concern to victims of stalking is whether their legal remedies will inhibit the stalker's activities. One of these legal remedies, court orders or police warnings, seems to be ineffective as a strategy to stop stalking given that most stalkers in this study chose to ignore police warnings or court orders. Other research has also found that a large percentage of stalkers did not obey restraining or intervention orders (16,18,36).

The inherent difficulty in enforcing a no contact order may be one of the major reasons why stalkers appear so willing to violate them. In addition, aggressive or violent stalkers who are bent on maintaining contact with their victim against their will will most likely not let a piece of paper get in their way. Thus, obtaining a

protective order should not be viewed by most victims as a reliable method to stop a stalker. Indeed, obtaining a restraining order may actually escalate stalker behavior in some cases or evoke more aggressive actions by the stalker (34,37).

However, despite the notion that most stalkers will tend to disobey the order, obtaining a no contact order can still benefit the victim. By engaging law enforcement and making them acutely aware of a potentially threatening situation, they may be more likely to press charges. Also, in initiating a so-called paper trail, the victim can then use this material against the stalker in any future legal proceedings.

Thirdly, it is notable that over one-third of the victims in this study chose to confront the stalker. Victims who choose to cope with stalking by confrontation may inadvertently be contributing to further stalking behavior. In initiating contact with the stalker, even when the response is negative and intermittent, any response can still serve as a reinforcement for the stalking behavior and thus is not recommended (14,38,39). Furthermore, the nature of the prototypical stalker and their obsessive and persistent nature is such that no degree of logic or reason will be sufficient to satisfy their need to pursue their victim.

Fourthly, this study provides partial support for the hypotheses employed in a preliminary model of factors related to the prediction of violent/aggressive stalkers. It appears that law enforcement and victims of stalkers should seek to identify any history of previous aggressive or violent acts including domestic abuse or anger management problems. In addition, it is important that these individuals analyze the stalker's degree of perceived negative affect/emotion towards the victims and the degree of likely obsession or fixation with the victim given that these appear to be the most effective predictors of violent/aggressive behavior in stalkers.

Thus, a stalker with a known history of violent and aggressive behavior who is deeply fixated with the victim and feels a tremendous sense of rage and negative affect towards the victim may be most at risk of future violent and aggressive acts. Victims who are stalked by someone without a violent past or an intense anger towards the victim may be less likely to be physically harmed by their stalker.

However, uncovering the stalker's history of aggressive acts may be somewhat easier than reviewing their personal emotions towards the victim and degree of obsession with the victim. These factors, understandably difficult to measure, may have to be inferred by conversations between law enforcement and other third parties and the stalker as well as examining the actual actions of the stalker towards the victim and any verbal contacts.

Furthermore, this study also appears to show that while most stalkers will tend to threaten their victim, these threats may not be the most accurate predictors of future violent behavior. Similarly, indications of a likely mental or personality disorder may also not be an effective predictor of violent stalker behavior. Thus, results suggest that while any threat to a victim should be taken seriously, these conditions should be analyzed within the context of the stalker's emotional mindset and previous aggression towards the victim. Also, implying that mental imbalances of a stalker are direct evidence for future physical harm to the victim may not be accurate.

Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

Several limitations of this study need to be observed. First, given that cases were selected from a convenience sample of two databases available, caution is necessary in generalizing conclusions from this analysis to the population as a whole. Instead, this

study and the hypothesized model will hopefully serve as a guide for further research in the area of stalker behavior.

Also, the correlational design does not allow for any causal relationships to be determined from the analysis. Moreover, confounding variables, not accounted for in the study, may impact observed relationships between variables in this research. The author was also constrained in the analysis by the degree of detailed information contained in the cases and to the extent that the facts of the case are as presented.

In addition, though this preliminary study does reveal some insight into important predictors of violent/aggressive stalkers, there is still a significant portion of variance left unaccounted. Given the known influence of situational, environmental, and social determinants of human aggression and their interactions with individual determinants (40,41), future research may wish to incorporate a more detailed assessment of these factors. This could include examining the stalker's support system and its role in supporting or discouraging aggressive behavior, the stalker's work environment, and the availability of weapons and/or the victim to the stalker (23).

More study of the causes of simple obsessional stalking behavior including the notion that stalking stems from developmental attachment problems during early childhood and adolescence (42), as well as borderline and narcissistic personality disorders (16,43). Along this line, it is proposed that some simple obsessional stalkers may view their victims as having certain desirable characteristics or traits which may be perceived as lacking by the stalker. Thus, through an association with the victim, the stalker may strengthen their own feelings of worthiness and competence which after the relationship ends, these feelings then become threatened.

Moreover, an important element of all stalking incidents is the psychological harm done to victims of this crime. While this study focused on potential for physical harm to the stalking victim, more study is needed to underscore the psychological element that can be devastating to victims of this crime.

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Following correspondence from Laurentian University, it has come to the attention of the Journal that Kimberley A. Morrison is not associated with the University in any capacity.

The Journal regrets this error. Note: Any and all future citation of the above-referenced paper should read: Morrison KA. Predict-

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