Victim Responses to Stalking:

A Temporal Approach to Factors Affecting the Duration and Intensity of Being Stalked

Matthew D Raj

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Abstract

An estimated 19 per cent of women in Australia will be stalked at some stage in their lives (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Research has shown that the greater the victimisation a person experiences, the more he or she will resort to a variety of attempts to manage the stalking behaviour. Very few empirical studies of victim responses exist, and even fewer have yielded evidence showing how a particular intervention affects an instance of stalking. Should a victim respond to stalking? What is the best method of response? Is there any benefit to acting early? This doctoral project examined the relationship between the duration and intensity of stalking, and the way in which victims respond to and exercise agency over being stalked. It draws on Routine Activity Theory to highlight the ways in which behaviours impact upon offending and victimisation. Respondents (N=143) completed a self-report questionnaire, derived from an instrument used by Sheridan and Blaauw (2004). The study examined, among other things, responses to stalking and the temporal dimension in employing responses. Broadly, findings showed that an early response (i.e., within two weeks) was associated with a shorter duration of stalking (i.e., less than one year) for the following responses: personally informing the stalking that their behaviour was unwanted; informing the police; and informing a boss. Ultimately, the thesis contributes to the fields of crime prevention and victimology and aims to inform best practice in the strategic intervention of stalking.
Statement of Original Authorship

I certify that this is my own work and that the use of material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged in the text. The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at Bond University or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: __________________________

MATTHEW D RAJ

Date: __________________________ 24 March 2017
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Preface

‘If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’
~ Sir Isaac Newton in a letter to Robert Hooke dated 15 February 1676

This thesis was conceived while I was volunteering with The National Centre for Domestic Violence (‘NCDV’) in the United Kingdom to support victims of domestic violence. The NCDV provides legal assistance to those partners who have, typically, exhausted all hope that their abusive experiences will end. At this point, such victims sought injunctive relief against their partners and, invariably, the NCDV assisted them with their applications. As part of drafting witness statements, victims would be asked to describe the first, worst and last instance of domestic violence they had experienced. In nearly all of the matters in which I became involved, the delay between the first and last instance was significant; indeed, often years had lapsed between them. Generally, those instances involved serious acts of violence and/or prominent aggression toward the applicant.

When asked why they refrained from previously seeking legal help, victims provided a variety of responses. Some feared their partner too much. Others had, in fact, sought legal redress or police intervention, but such initiatives had simply failed. Concerningly, a vast majority of applicants had delayed in seeking any form of help. It seemed that for many victims, no matter what measures they took, they feared they were ‘too late’. This experience led me to question the effectiveness of responses and to consider whether an early, robust constellation of victim interventions could be capable of avoiding or minimising acts of domestic violence. The experience of working alongside victims of domestic violence was invaluable, and I developed a strong interest in the field of criminology, particularly the areas of crime prevention and victimology. As an offence, domestic
violence, like stalking, can be considered incendiary. The sustained, slow-burn effect of the offence causes further victimisation.

It is easy to understand why authors have described stalking as both intriguing and complex (O’Connor & Rosenfeld, 2004, p.8). In one anecdotal instance, a former colleague mentioned that, for several months, she had been pursued by her ex-boyfriend, who had resorted to eliciting information about her from a mutual friend by pretending that he was suffering from cancer. He had also managed to persuade a travel agent to cancel an airline booking that she had made to travel overseas. Such an account illustrates properties that are unique to the offence of stalking and demonstrates that effective prevention strategies to avoid pursuit or harassment can, for many, appear beyond reach. Moreover, such accounts can serve to undermine conventional policing and legal remedies.

This research objectively charts the responses of victims. To borrow and substantially paraphrase Isaac Newton’s Third Law of Motion — ‘for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction’ — it is the exploration of that opposite reaction, behaviourally, that forms the primary focus of this study. At a young age, many of us are told, usually by parents or guardians, to ignore bullies, and not to react to hurtful words or threats. Some of us may have been told that escalating a matter, by informing a teacher or employer that another person is harassing us, is not acceptable — because no one likes a ‘snitch’. Yet, there is a curious lacuna of research in relation to victim responses to specific offences. The aim here, consistent with other research, is to advance our understanding of victim behaviour and its capacity to control crimes, for such an advancement could serve to encourage specifically measured responses to stalking, thereby reducing crime and/or victim impact. As part of this research project I have come to know of many individuals
within the community who make it their vocation to promote awareness, safety and prevention against interpersonal violence. From liaising with some of them, it is encouraging to learn that research is relied on to inform their advice and services.

Much is owed to the victims who took part in the current study. Throughout this thesis, wherever the word ‘victim’ appears, it does not imply passivity or, unless otherwise stated, acceptance of one’s circumstances as a casualty. It is recognised that the term ‘survivor’ is often preferred over that of ‘victim’, as the former connotes an individual’s resilience and resourcefulness. The word ‘victim’ is used here, however, to represent those who are currently experiencing, and/or who have experienced, harm, injury or any other detriment as a result of another person’s actions, and this includes ‘survivors’.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iv  
Preface .............................................................................................................................. vii  
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................ x  
List of Tables .................................................................................................................... xiii  
List of Figures ................................................................................................................... xiv  
List of Abbreviations .................................................................................................... xv  

**Chapter One: Introduction** ......................................................................................... 1  
An Overview of Current Knowledge .............................................................................. 1  
Context of this Research ............................................................................................... 3  
Rationale for this Thesis ............................................................................................... 6  
An Overview of the Theoretical Framework .................................................................. 16  
The Purposes of this Thesis ......................................................................................... 19  
The Scope of this Thesis ............................................................................................. 21  
The Structure of this Thesis ....................................................................................... 23  

**Chapter Two: An Overview of the Stalking Problem** ............................................... 25  
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 25  
The Offence of Stalking ............................................................................................... 25  
Perceptions of Stalking ................................................................................................. 35  
A Gender-Based Offence ............................................................................................. 45  
Evolutionary Explanations of Stalking ......................................................................... 47  
Online Harassment (Cyberstalking) ............................................................................ 49  
Typologies of Stalkers ................................................................................................. 53  
Stalking and the Law .................................................................................................... 61  
Overview of Stalking Legislation in Queensland ....................................................... 69  
Restraining Orders and Other Civil Remedies ............................................................ 76  
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 83  

**Chapter Three: The Harmful Effects of Stalking** ...................................................... 85  
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 85  
A ‘Public Health Issue’ ............................................................................................... 85  
Harm, Threats and Violence Associated with Stalking ................................................ 94
The Economic Toll of Stalking ................................................................. 102
Stalking, Trauma and Comorbidity ....................................................... 106
The Duration of Stalking Episodes ....................................................... 112
Frequency ............................................................................................. 125
Summary ............................................................................................... 132

Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework ................................................. 135
Introduction .......................................................................................... 135
Routine Activity Theory and Life-style Exposure ................................. 137
Situational Crime Prevention ............................................................... 144
Rational Choice Perspective ............................................................... 147
A Victimological Perspective ............................................................... 149
Just World Hypothesis ......................................................................... 156
Summary ............................................................................................... 159

Chapter Five: A Victimological Approach to Stalking ....................... 161
Introduction .......................................................................................... 161
Common Victim Responses to Stalking .............................................. 163
Effectiveness of Victim Responses to Stalking ................................... 173
Summary and Implications ................................................................. 184

Chapter Six: Research Design and Methods ....................................... 186
Introduction .......................................................................................... 186
Research Design .................................................................................. 187
Recruitment .......................................................................................... 189
Instruments ........................................................................................... 190
Analysis ................................................................................................. 201
Conclusion ........................................................................................... 203

Chapter Seven: Quantitative Data Results ......................................... 204
Introduction .......................................................................................... 204
Characteristics of Sample Participants .............................................. 205
Descriptions of the Stalker and the Stalking ....................................... 207
Responses from Victims and Others .................................................. 212
Consequences of Victimisation ......................................................... 219
Responses, Delay and Duration ......................................................... 221
## Table of Contents

Statistical Analyses ................................................................. 228
Summary and Key Findings ......................................................... 231

**Chapter Eight: Qualitative Data Results** ................................... 234
Introduction ................................................................................ 234
Awareness Relates to Response, Delay and Duration .................... 235
Responses by Others ................................................................... 238
Responses to Stalking ................................................................. 241
Effects of Stalking ..................................................................... 246
Personal Advice and Recommendations ..................................... 247
Conclusion .................................................................................. 251

**Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusion** ................................. 252
Introduction ................................................................................ 252
Victim Responses to Stalking ...................................................... 253
Factors Related to Duration and Intensity of Stalking ................. 263
Implications for Theory and Practice ....................................... 267
Limitations .................................................................................. 273
Conclusion ................................................................................... 278

**References** .............................................................................. 283

**Appendices** ............................................................................ 307
Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire ............................................. 307
Appendix 2: Survey Codebook ..................................................... 339
Appendix 3: Bond University Human Research Ethics Materials .... 394
Appendix 4: Recruitment Media Sources ................................... 400
Appendix 5: List of Victim Support Organisations Across Australia ... 411
List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of stalking legislation across Australian jurisdictions (based on Ogilvie, 2000, p.6).................................................................................................................................65
Table 2: Comparison of the Sheridan and Blaauw (2004) instrument measuring stalking victimisation with that of the present study measuring responses to stalking......194
Table 3: Examples of questionnaire items contained in Section Three, ‘About the stalking’, which were developed to capture data on the duration and timing of the stalking episode..................................................................................................................................................197
Table 4: Examples of newly developed questionnaire items in Section Five — Your responses to stalking. ..................................................................................................................................................................................199
Table 5: Demographic characteristics of the sample. ..........................................................................................................................206
Table 6: Characteristics of stalkers as described by respondents. ................................................................................................................208
Table 7: Responses of participants when asked how their instance of stalking ended.......210
Table 8: Number of respondents who deployed a particular response, the delay in deploying the response and the perceived helpfulness, by duration of stalking (i.e., less or more than 12 months). ........................................................................................................................................................................................................215
Table 9: Victim responses (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001) by the duration of stalking (<12 months, >12 months)...................................................................................................................................................................................................221
Table 10: Mean responses by the duration of stalking (<1 month, 1-12 months, 12-60 months, >60 months). ..................................................................................................................................................................................................223
Table 11: Victim responses by the duration of stalking for personally informing the stalker that their behaviour is unwanted, ignoring the stalker, and applying for a restraining order. ..................................................................................................................................................................................................224
Table 12: Coping behaviours among respondents (N=112). ..................................................................................................................227
List of Figures

**Figure 1:** Establishing stalker type on the basis of limited information from the victim (Mullen, et al., 2006, p.443). .......................................................... 56

**Figure 2:** Edited copy of a Harassment Warning Letter. .................................................. 82

**Figure 3:** Graphical representation of Cohen and Felson’s (1979) Routine Activity Theory or ‘Felson’s Crime Triangle’ (Sutton, et al., 2014, p.18). ................................. 138

**Figure 4:** Typology of coping tactics (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001)................................. 175

**Figure 5:** Typology of coping tactics (drawn from Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001)............... 214

**Figure 6:** Average ($M$) number of response types (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001) by the duration of stalking. .................................................................................. 222

**Figure 7:** Average timing of victim responses by the duration of stalking ..................... 225

**Figure 8:** Timing of the response strategy and perceived utility in helping to stop the stalking. .............................................................................................................. 226

**Figure 9:** Concept model of victim responses drawn from the present research. .......... 266
List of Abbreviations

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{M} \quad \text{Mean average}
\item \textit{n} \quad \text{Number of cases (generally in a subsample)}
\item \textit{N} \quad \text{Total number of cases}
\item \textit{p} \quad \text{p-value (probability value)}
\item \textit{SD} \quad \text{Standard deviation}
\end{itemize}