

SafeLives Insights factsheet

Victims of stalking and harassment

Background information

Stalking and harassment is a very common feature of domestic abuse. It occurs in isolation or as a component of the wider profile of abuse. High severity stalking and harassment can include behaviours such as constant communication, uninvited visits, loitering and threats to kill.

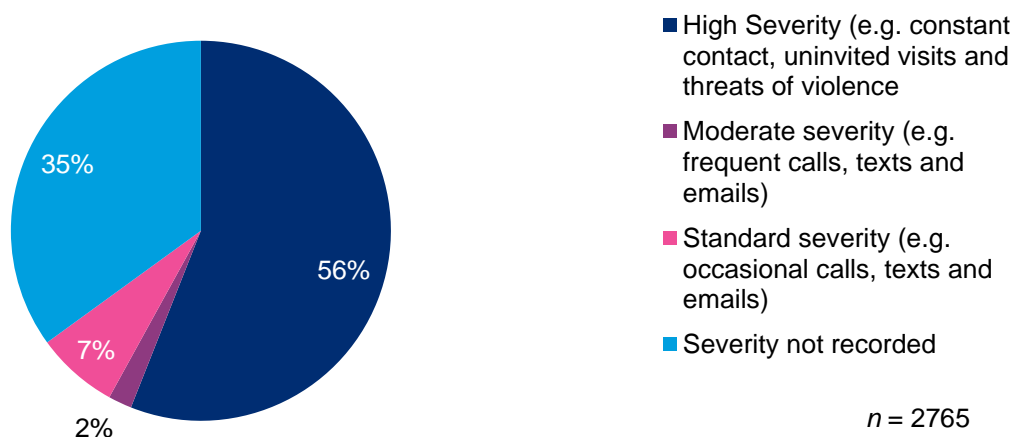
New specific criminal offences of ‘stalking’ and ‘stalking where there is a fear of violence or serious alarm and distress’ came into effect on 25 November 2012. These supplement the offences of harassment contained in the Protection of Harassment Act 1997 (PHA). In addition to the new offences, the police have been given new powers of entry so that they can fully investigate cases of stalking.

The sample

A sample of 4951 victims of domestic abuse supported by 21 specialist services across England and Wales was assessed using the SafeLives Insights outcomes measurement tool.¹ This sample contained cases of all risk levels (standard, medium and high). The dataset was collected between April 1st 2011 and March 31st 2012, therefore it reflects the pre-2012 laws around harassment and stalking.

Of these, 56% (n = 2765) reported experiencing some level of harassment and stalking. Professionals who recorded this information were invited to categorise the severity of abuse experienced by each victim, using a severity of abuse grid² and their professional judgement as a guide. Figure 1 shows the severity of harassment and stalking abuse experienced by these victims. Notably 31% of our total sample or 56% of those who reported experiencing harassment and stalking reported this as high severity.

Figure 1: severity of harassment and stalking



¹ SafeLives Insights is an outcomes measurement tool for specialist domestic violence services. For more information please contact David Dutchman 0117 317 8750 / Insights@safelives.org.uk or visit www.safelives.org.uk

² Caseworkers use the SafeLives Dash (domestic abuse, stalking and ‘honour’-based violence) risk checklist to identify victim risk – that is, those deemed to be at risk of serious harm or death.

Victims of high severity harassment and stalking and the legal system

34% (n = 516) of victims of high severity harassment and stalking made a report to the police. Criminal charges were brought in 20% (n = 303) of cases and 17% (n = 264) of these cases proceeded.³

These cases resulted in the following outcomes (this list has been limited to outcomes relevant to harassment and stalking):

- Restraining order imposed under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 = 9%
- Threat to kill, charge = .6% and conviction = .2%
- Non-molestation order, charge = 1.5% and conviction = 1.2%
- Harassment, charge = 4.3% and conviction = 2.9%
- Trespassing, charge and conviction = 0%
- Telecommunications Act offences charge = .5% and conviction = .4%

The number of civil orders granted under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 was also extremely low at .1%.

High severity harassment and stalking in the absence of high severity sexual and physical abuse

Increasingly, it is recognised that harassment and stalking may occur alone and be the only type of abuse that is experienced at a high severity level. Of our total sample (n = 4951), 705 (14%) victims of domestic abuse only reported severe harassment and stalking.

30% (n = 213) of these victims made a report to the police. Charges were brought in 16% (n = 113) of cases and 13.9% of these cases proceeded.

These cases resulted in the following penalties (again, this list has been limited to outcomes relevant to harassment and stalking):

- Restraining order imposed under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 = 8%
- Threat to kill, charge = .6% and conviction = .6%
- Non-molestation order, charge = 2.4% and conviction = .4%
- Harassment, charge = 5.8% and conviction = 3.8%
- Trespassing, charge and conviction = 0%
- Telecommunications Act offences charge = .4% and conviction = .4%

The number of civil orders granted under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 was also extremely low at .1%.

For more information on this research or the dataset which supports it, please contact the SafeLives Insights team via insights@safelives.org.uk

³ These charges did not necessarily relate to harassment and stalking alone.