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Charming or alarming? A study into the relationship between propensity
for stalking, abusiveness and Theory of Mind

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Research proposal

Project Title: Charming or alarming? A study into the relationship between propensity for stalking, abusiveness and Theory of Mind.

Background research and rationale

Stalking is a type of behaviour characterised by intrusive and harassing activities (such as monitoring or unwanted and repeated attempts at contact) which causes social, psychological, and emotional distress to the victims. Previously prosecuted as a form of harassment, as part of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, it was only enshrined into law as a distinct, separate crime in 2012. There were 2,878 police-recorded stalking crimes recorded in the first 12 months of it becoming illegal (Crime in England & Wales, 2015); over the course of a year in the USA, approximately 3.4 million adults were thought to be victims of stalking (Baum, Catalano, Rand & Rose, 2009). Stalking is becoming increasingly prominent in the public eye, with mainstream media sources publishing stories about stalking cases pertaining to famous and non-famous persons (BBC News, 2016; The Independent, 2016).

Research has been conducted over the years to study the psychological basis and motivations of stalking. The motivations and risk factors for stalking are varied. Previous romantic relationships have been shown to be a significant factor in perpetrating stalking behaviour, with a meta-analysis showing stalkers with a previous relationship with the victim to be the largest group type (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Stalkers with a previous romantic relationship with the victim have been found to be persistent in stalking if they believed their intentions to be romantic and if they had continuously reflected and ruminated

on the previous relationship. The degree of persistence in stalking exhibited by the sample was also influenced by the experience of negative emotions, such as anger or sadness (Johnson & Thompson, 2016).

Gender is a factor to consider in both victimisation and perpetration. More males are thought to engage in stalking behaviour than females (Mohandie, Meloy, McGowan & Williams, 2006), but research has demonstrated there to be fewer differences between genders in terms of stalking perpetration than originally perceived (Lyndon *et al*, 2011; Purcell, Pathé & Mullen, 2010). Further research has indicated that females can also be more aggressive when stalking compared to males – they also commit more moderate violence than males (Thompson, Dennison & Stewart, 2012). Age has also been implicated in stalking persistence, with people over age 30 identified as a risk factor for persistent stalking (McEwan, Mullen & MacKenzie, 2009).

Abusive behaviour and violence have also been strongly linked to stalking behaviours. Whilst not always resulting in aggressive or physically abusive acts, greater stalking levels have been demonstrated in men arrested for physical assault against a partner, as well as sexual and emotional abuse (Basile & Hall, 2010). This indicates not only a link between abuse and stalking, but also highlights key areas for assessment and measurement. McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie & Ogloff (2009) noted in their study of risk factors for stalking after a failed relationship that the offenders frequently had a history of violence. This was also the case with stalkers whose motivations and relationships to the victim were different.

In December 2016, The UK Home Office announced new police powers to impose stalking orders on people with no stalking charge or conviction, but who are suspected of stalking. These orders can have conditions attached to them, such as keeping away from the victim or being required to attend therapeutic sessions; if these orders are breached, those subject to them could face a custodial sentence of up to five years (Watts, 2016). This shows the government is attempting to address stalking as a more serious crime within the legal system, but there are still questions and complexities that need addressing, such as do people have a propensity for stalking behaviour and to what extent do they realise, or understand, the mental distress caused to the victim?

Theory of Mind (ToM) is the ability to infer the mental states of other people, such as emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and plans (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). It is a significant tool in social functioning and communication, as it is a mechanism through which we interpret another person's behaviour. It has been researched across a range of contexts, including offending behaviour. ToM research can have useful applications in an offender context: if offenders do not have the capacity to infer or understand what their victims may be feeling or thinking, it could potentially impact their offending behaviour, and how they respond to psychological interventions and rehabilitation.

ToM research around offenders shows mixed results. Young offenders have shown comparably poorer ToM ability against non-offender controls (Spenser, Betts & Das Gupta, 2015) – conversely, in some cases offenders with intellectual disabilities have demonstrated better ToM abilities than non-offender controls

(Proctor & Beail, 2007). Research with sex offenders has shown that there is evidence of impairment in emotional state recognition, however, offenders against children showed no more deficits in relation to children than to adults (Hudson *et al*, 1993), despite demonstrating poor ToM overall. This suggests that sex offenders against children do not have the degree of deficit in ToM relating to their victims as previously thought. This research has been corroborated and expanded upon: those who offend against children have been shown to struggle to infer the mental states of adults, but not of children (Elsegood & Duff, 2007).

Stalking is a relatively new offence within the legal system, and therefore further research is needed to improve the knowledge base for both offender treatment and victim support services. Although ToM has been researched in relation to a few different types of offence, there is a gap in the literature in relation to stalking. Researching the role of theory of mind in stalking could pave the way for better understanding of the crime, the perpetrators, and improved paths for individual risk management.

Research aims

The aim of the current study is to establish whether there is a relationship between ToM ability and propensity for stalking and abusive attitudes and behaviours. The research will be looking to answer the questions: is there a relationship between ToM, propensity for stalking and propensity for abusiveness; does ToM capability impact on stalking propensity, and does a propensity for abusiveness affect stalking propensity?

Method

Participants

Participants in the general population, aged 18 and upwards, will be sampled opportunistically and via snowball sampling online through social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter). As the study will be distributed through two personal Facebook and Twitter accounts, it is likely the study will be completed by people of similar age, however there is no specific target age or demographic group for this study. GPower analysis estimates a sample size of 107 participants ($\alpha=0.05$, critical $F=3.08$, effect size=0.15) needed to obtain a valid significant result.

Design

The study will use a within-participants questionnaire design. Data will be collected through the Bristol Online Surveys system. Participants will be assessed with the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Task (RMET) (Baron-Cohen, Jolliffe, Mortimore & Robertson, 1997), the Stalking Propensity Scale (SPS) (Palmieri & Giannini, 2010) and the Propensity for Abusiveness Scale (PAS) (Dutton, 1995). The primary factor being studied is whether people differ in their propensity for stalking, and if this is affected by ToM and propensity for abuse. Other factors that will be considered in the data analyses are age and gender and how these may impact on stalking and abusiveness propensity.

Materials

The study requires the RMET, the SPS and the PAS. SPSS is needed for data analysis.

Procedure

Participants will access the study through an online link advertised on social media. They will then read the participant information detailing the purpose and focus of the study, their ethical rights, my contact details as well as those of my supervisor and independent support services should they have any queries or concerns, followed by a participant consent form. Once participants have agreed to proceed, they will answer all questions on the PAS and the SPS as accurately as possible. They will then answer all items on the RMET. Participants will be provided with definitions for the terms used in the RMET. Once these tasks are completed, they will receive a debrief explaining what the study is hoping to find, reiterating the contact details, and signposting the independent professional services, should they have any more questions or concerns.

Data analysis

The SPS and PAS will be scored by calculating the score of each answer given on the scales and obtaining the total. A score of 40 or more on the SPS indicates a propensity for stalking. The RMET will be scored by assigning a value of 1 to correct answers and a value of 0 to incorrect answers. The study will be using the mean for demographic data on age and sex to obtain an overview of the sample population. Pearson's correlation will be used to determine any relationship between the three tests, and any potential links between the demographic information. The data will then be analysed with a linear multiple regression to assess any effects of ToM and propensity for abuse on propensity for stalking behaviours.

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Title of study: Charming or alarming: a study of the
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abusiveness and Theory of Mind.

Duration of study: Until September 2017

Ethics reference number: 234

Tuesday 6th June 2017

A favourable opinion is given to the above named study on the understanding that the applicants conduct their research as described in the above numbered application, and adhere to all conditions under which the ethical approval has been granted and use only materials and documentation that have been approved. If any amendments to the study are required, an amendment should be submitted to the committee for approval.

David Daley (Professor)

Co-Chair of DPAP Ethics Subcommittee

Amanda Griffiths (Professor)

Co-Chair of DPAP Ethics Subcommittee

Executive summary

This executive summary is for a target audience of forensic psychologists with an interest in stalking research, and psychologists working in offender rehabilitation and victim support in the community.

Background

Stalking is a crime defined by unwanted, intrusive and persistent harassing behaviours such as repeated, unsolicited and unwanted contact, monitoring and intimidation, which leaves victims emotionally and psychologically distraught. Stalking has been linked to various factors, but one of the most salient is having a prior relationship with the victim. Meta-analysis showed the largest group type of stalking offenders to be current or prior intimate partners of the victims (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007); a sample of cyber-stalkers showed 75% had a previous relationship with the victim, and 47% of offline stalkers (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). Abusive behaviour has also been significantly linked to stalking, with perpetrators having a history of violence (Roberts, 2002; McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie & Ogloff, 2009). In some cases, it is unclear if stalking offenders who commit violent and abusive acts are aware of, or understand, the harm caused to the victim (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen & Rohling, 2000). Such lack of awareness could be a significant issue in attempting to understand an individual's propensity for stalking.

Theory of mind (ToM) is the ability to infer the mental states (such as thoughts, beliefs, and emotions) of others. It is considered as a significant aspect of social reasoning and functioning. ToM has been researched in relation to offenders, with mixed results. Some offenders have demonstrated a reduced capacity for ToM compared to non-offending controls (Spenser, Betts & Das Gupta, 2015),

whereas others have indicated they possess deficits in relation to adults, but not children (Elsegood & Duff, 2010). An offender's ToM ability could have a significant impact on their responsiveness to treatment and rehabilitation efforts.

Rationale and aims

With stalking becoming more prominent in public awareness, through news reports of both celebrity and non-celebrity cases (The Independent, 2017; ITV News, 2017), it is prudent to research potential factors involved in stalking behaviour. The role of ToM has been demonstrated within different offence types, but there is a deficit in the literature regarding ToM and stalking. This study aimed to identify the presence of a relationship between ToM ability, propensity for stalking and propensity for abusiveness.

Data collection and analysis

Participants aged 18 and upwards were sampled opportunistically via Facebook and Twitter. The present study sample comprised 121 participants (27 male, 94 female) with a mean age of $M = 31.85$, $SD = 12.31$. The within-participants design assessed participants on their propensity for stalking, their propensity for abusiveness and ToM capability, using the Stalking Propensity Scale (SPS) (Palmieri & Giannini, 2010), the Propensity for Abusiveness Scale (Dutton, 1995) and the Reading the Mind in the Eyes task (RMET) (Baron-Cohen, Jolliffe, Mortimore & Robertson, 1997). Participants were required to answer all items on the three measures as accurately as possible.

Data was collected online through the Bristol Online Survey system and advertised through social media. The SPS and PAS were scored by the value of each answer given on the Likert-type scale; the RMET was scored by assigning a

correct answer a value of 1. Incorrect answers were assigned a value of 0. The total scores for the SPS, PAS and RMET were calculated for each participant.

The dataset was analysed through Pearson's correlation, to identify any initial relationship, and then through linear multiple regression.

Key findings and implications

The mean score obtained on the SPS was $M = 26.75$, $SD = 6.473$; the mean PAS score was $M = 65.13$, $SD = 18.472$; the mean score for the RMET was $M = 25.82$, $SD = 5.220$. 6 participants met the criteria for propensity for stalking, with a score of 40 or more on the SPS. The linear multiple regression analysis showed that with all participants in the sample, RMET scores had no effect on SPS scores. However, SPS and PAS scores showed a very significant relationship at $p < 0.001$, both with Pearson's correlation and with the linear multiple regression. The report finds that neither gender nor marital status had a significant relationship with any of the three variables.

The sample results demonstrate that ToM does not appear have a significant effect on stalking propensity ($p = 0.696$), but that stalking propensity and abusiveness propensity are significantly associated ($p < 0.001$). That ToM does not have a relationship, either positive or negative, with stalking propensity is somewhat inconsistent with previous ToM research in different offence types (Hudson, 1993; Elsegood & Duff, 2010). The study suggests this may be because people with sufficient or average ToM are capable of understanding the harm that stalking and abuse can cause to a person and so are less likely to perpetrate such behaviours. The average score obtained on the RMET was over half the total item, suggesting that the sample can sufficiently infer the mental states of others and are quite competent in social communication.

The key finding of a significant relationship between stalking and abusiveness propensity reinforces earlier research (Farnham, James & Cantrell, 2000; McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie & Ogloff, 2009). The report suggests that abusiveness should be considered as a significant factor when investigating stalking.

Recommendations

To conclude, this study found no significant relationship between ToM and a person's propensity for stalking. There was a significant relationship between propensities for stalking and abusiveness, supporting previous literature and suggesting that abusive propensities and behaviour are a key area to address in management of stalking offenders. These findings can be applied to rehabilitation work, as treating potential propensity for abuse may help in therapeutic work for stalking behaviour. The report recommends that further research should be undertaken with a forensic population with stalking convictions, to further establish the relationship between stalking and abusiveness, but also whether the relationship between ToM, stalking and abusiveness propensity may differ in a forensic sample compared to the general population. Future research could also extend to examining these behaviours in a sample of online and offline stalking offenders.

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Abstract

Stalking is a form of harassment characterised by repeated and unwanted intrusive behaviours, resulting in victims becoming fearful and significantly emotionally and psychologically distressed. Factors noted to have been implicated in stalking behaviour are prior relationships - intimate or otherwise - with the victim, and violence and abusiveness. Research suggests that in some cases, stalkers are not aware of how their victims are feeling. Theory of mind (ToM) is the ability to infer the mental states of others, and research into this area with offenders shows that offenders possess some ToM deficits, but not in all cases. The present study aims to identify the presence of a relationship between ToM, propensity for stalking and propensity for abuse. 121 participants completed scales pertaining to propensity for stalking and abusiveness, and completed a ToM task. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation and linear multiple regression. It was found there was no significant effect of ToM ability on stalking propensity, but there was a significant relationship found between propensity for stalking and propensity for abuse. Further avenues for research include conducting the test on a forensic population, or comparing different stalking contexts such as cyberstalking.

Introduction

Stalking is a type of harassment, directed towards a specific person, which is characterised by repeated intrusive behaviours, such as physical or online monitoring, and/or unwanted, persistent attempts for contact. There is no single concise or agreed definition of stalking either within academic literature or the legal system. However, most descriptions follow a theme of persistence, intrusion and harassment towards a person or persons, with a resulting negative affective impact on the victim. Stalking can result in prolonged emotional distress for the victims, who often feel unable to live their daily lives without fear of harassment. Within the first 12 months of stalking becoming an official distinct crime in the UK, there were 2,878 police-recorded stalking offences (Crime in England & Wales, 2015). In the

USA, 34 million adults over the course of a year were thought to be victims of stalking (Baum, Catalano, Rand & Rose, 2009).

Stalking has become much more prominent in the public eye with the exponential growth of internet usage: apps such as Snapchat have prompted fears about making certain forms of stalking and harassment significantly easier to engage in, with location maps features allowing people to see exactly where another person is at a given time (The Guardian, 2017); Paladin, a stalking advocacy and victim support service, uses social media platforms such as Twitter to raise awareness of stalking. There are also numerous reports of stalking in the news of celebrity figures, such as the imprisonment of a man stalking radio DJ Sara Cox (The Telegraph, 2017), and non-celebrity figures such as Helen Pearson, a stalking victim who was stabbed repeatedly by her neighbour after five years of harassment and 125 complaints to the police (The Independent, 2017), and Alice Ruggles, who was subjected to months of stalking before being murdered by her ex-partner (ITV News, 2017).

There is still relatively little known about stalkers as offenders: researchers have attempted to address the psychological basis of stalking, but there are still discrepancies within the literature. Research needs to further address who has a propensity for such behaviour, and why.

Theoretical approach

To understand both the commencement and the continuation of stalking behaviour from the offender's perspective, researchers have attempted to conceptualise stalking within a theoretical framework.

Relational Goal Pursuit (RGP) theory postulates that stalking can develop out of a person's desire for a romantic relationship, usually with a previous partner. There are four primary aspects of RGP: linking, self-efficacy, rumination and negative affect. 'Linking' posits that

lower-order life goals such as a relationship become linked with higher-order goals such as happiness and welfare, and thus itself becomes a key aspiration. This ‘linking’ can produce changes in behaviours and routines, causing the person to ruminate on the relationship and its feasibility – they have persistent thoughts, reflections and worries about achieving their goal. This in turn can lead to negative affective issues such as emotional ‘flooding’, where the inability to attain the goal triggers negative emotions such as anger and frustration. Flooding and rumination act as reinforcers for one another, and can cause the person to become trapped within a cycle, causing them to pursue the relationship more zealously. Self-efficacy refers to the confidence the person has in achieving their goal of the relationship, and acts as a reinforcer for the behaviour (Cupach, Spitzberg & Carson, 2000).

RGP has useful applications when accounting for persistent attempts at romantic reconciliation. A study investigated whether four RGP factors could encourage persistence when attempting to restart a prior romantic relationship: linking the relationship to life goals, rumination about the ex-partner and relationship, believing the pursuit attempt to be successful and emotional distress if failed. It found that RGP accurately accounted for persistence within reconciliation attempts, with the strongest predictors being linking, self-efficacy and rumination (Cupach, Spitzberg, Bolingbroke & Tellitocci, 2011). It is very probable that these results can be generalised to stalking situations: the greater the negative affect, linking, rumination or self-efficacy, the more likely the person is to exhibit stalking and harassing behaviours.

Factors implicated in stalking

Stalking, its persistence and outcomes, can be influenced by numerous contributing factors:

Prior romantic relationships

A key issue in identifying stalking is to distinguish it from the development of a normal relationship, as some pursuit behaviours are considered normal aspects of establishing and maintaining intimate relationships. RGP posits that stalking occurs when normal relationship behaviours become too heavily linked with higher-order life goals and thus become the focus of obsession, leading to stalking.

Stalking has been noted to have a strong relationship with the offender having a previous intimate relationship with the victim. Meta-analysis of groups of stalkers showed that the largest group type comprised current or former romantic partners of victims. These were followed by professional relationships, acquaintances, friends and relatives (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). This suggests that having a relationship with the victim is a significant factor when considering stalking, as even platonic victims such as friends or relatives still possess some sort of relationship with the offender; however, the intimate relationship appears to be the strongest factor in this research. This may be because the stalker feels a chance of reconciliation, or feels the victim has done them wrong and wish to exact revenge.

In a sample of cyber-stalkers compared to off-line stalkers, cyber-stalkers' victims were more likely to be an ex-partner, at 75% compared to 47% (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). Whilst a greater proportion of cyber-stalkers were ex-intimate partners of the victims, the percentage for off-line stalkers is also significantly high. Researchers found the primary motivation in both groups was resuming a romantic relationship with the victim, or seeking revenge for the failure of the relationship. This suggests ex-romantic relationships should be considered as a

risk factor in propensity for stalking. Stalking motivations should also be considered as potential risk factors in conjunction with this.

Ex-intimate relationships as a primary risk factor has been corroborated by further research: ex-intimate partners were more likely to be moderately persistent in their attempts if their motives were romantically-based, if they ruminated consistently about the relationship and the victim, and experienced some negative affect. The research also found evidence for attachment problems contributing towards moderate persistence in ex-romantic stalkers. High persistence was linked with being over the age of 30, negative affect such as anger, and having malicious motivation for stalking (Johnson & Thompson, 2016). This negative affect has been noted in RGP theory, suggesting that the greater the negative emotions experienced, the more likely the offender is to persist.

Gender differences

Gender is a prominent factor in both victimisation and perpetration, but the literature is varied. A common assumption is that males are much more likely to stalk than females: one meta-analysis indicated 8.94% of females in the studies committed some form of stalking behaviour, compared to 14.75% of males (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004).

Some studies and figures note that more males engage in stalking behaviour than females (Mohandie, Meloy, McGowan & Williams, 2006). This is a common perception among the public, along with the perception that men are much less likely to be victims of stalking than perpetrators. However, this is not always the case.

Further research has indicated that there are fewer differences between genders for stalking perpetration than previously thought. Whilst the prevalence rate appears to be higher in men than women (Spitzberg, Cupach & Ciceraro, 2010), there are little differences between males and females in perpetration.

There has also been research that indicates that females can be more aggressive in their stalking behaviours than men, and sometimes perpetrate more moderate violence than men (Dutton & Winstead, 2006; Thompson, Dennison & Stewart, 2012). This highlights an aspect of stalking behaviour that is extremely significant: violence and abuse.

Stalking and abusiveness

A recent joint report conducted by Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) aimed to examine how the UK justice system deals with stalking cases and victims. The HMIC and HMCPSI (2017) report indicated that when examining domestic violence cases, 40 out of 82 cases were only asked basic enhanced risk assessment questions that did not extend to stalking and harassment. This is a significant oversight for victim safety and offender management, as violence and abusiveness have been strongly linked as factors in stalking behaviours.

Greater levels of stalking have been demonstrated in men who were arrested for physical assault against an intimate partner (Basile & Hall, 2010). This indicates there is a relationship between stalking and abuse, but it also suggests areas for risk assessment and management.

Violence and abuse can be predictive of stalking and of further violence to the victim, but it also appears to be linked somewhat to having a prior relationship with the victim: when examining risk factors for stalking following the breakdown of a relationship, the perpetrators had a history of violence (McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie & Ogloff, 2009; Roberts, 2002). In one sample, 70% of stalking victims who had a prior relationship with the offender were physically assaulted compared to 27% who had no such relationship (Farnham, James & Cantrell, 2000). Stalkers who present an increased risk of violence and abuse can also be identified by investigating their previous connection to the victim, as well as their motivations for stalking (McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie & Ogloff, 2009).

Abusiveness perpetrated by stalkers has demonstrated some evidence of gender differences: if a female stalking offender had a prior intimate relationship with the victim, then they were more likely to commit violence (Carabellese *et al.*, 2013). In a sample of people classed as relational stalkers, females showed a greater likelihood of committing moderate violence than men. There was no significant difference between genders for rates of severe violence, however both males and females were inclined to find justifications for abuse by females much more acceptable than justifications for abuse by men (Thompson, Dennison & Stewart, 2012).

The apparently greater sociocultural acceptability of female-to-male violence raises the question of whether stalking and abuse figures pertaining to male victims may be incorrect, as – from this perspective – a male may be less likely to perceive himself as a victim than a female in the same situation; it may also be that even if he did recognise himself as victims of such offences, males may be less likely to report the offences to the police because of the difference in cultural acceptance. These attitudes may have far-reaching consequences for offenders and victims – physical abuse has been shown to have a significant effect on judgement about stalking situations regarding the levels of gravity, accountability and outcomes (Sheridan & Scott, 2010). Verbal abuse and threats has some impact on participants' views of the criminality of the situation, but to a lesser extent. The researchers warn that it encompasses a wide range of behaviours that are open to interpretation.

It is unclear in some cases whether stalking offenders who commit violence are aware of or understand the harm they are causing to the victim (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen & Rohling, 2000). This potential awareness, or lack thereof, may be a key issue in understanding a person's propensity for initiating and maintaining stalking behaviour.

Stalking within the legal system

Despite the severity of harm that stalking can cause, it has not been recognised as a distinct crime until recently. This is the case on an international scale: the first stalking legislation was brought by California in 1990. Other countries such as the UK have since followed suit, but the legislation and its enforcement are still in early development stages within the criminal justice system.

In the UK, the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 incorporated stalking as an aspect of harassment, but not as a distinct offence in itself. The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 enshrines stalking as a separate offence into law, with the aim of affording better protection to victims. However, the implementation and interpretation of the legislation is still in debate within the CPS and the criminal justice system, causing issues in offence identification and risk management.

The HMIC and HMCPSI (2017) report took a sample of 112 stalking cases: they found only just over half had had an initial risk assessment. The report also found that a high number of stalking victims they spoke to were also victims of domestic abuse. Victims of stalking and domestic violence were treated on an incident-by-incident basis, which the report condemned as police and the CPS frequently failed to look at the context or history of the offence.

Enhanced risk assessments were also not routinely conducted for victims of stalking or harassment, despite being designed for such offences (HMCPSI & HMIC, 2017).

The lack of an agreed definition of stalking was a significant point of contention within the report and its recommendations, concluding that the confusion in criteria is in issue when investigating, prosecuting or even recording stalking offences: a significant amount of stalking offences that were reported were either mis-recorded or not recorded at all. There has been a steady increase in the number of reported offence from 2014 to 2017, but figures vary

between police forces, and given that some offences have gone unrecorded the figure is likely to be somewhat higher.

Measures have been taken in recent months to deal more effectively with allegations of stalking. Stalking Protection Orders were announced in late 2016: they are intended to prevent someone suspected, yet not charged, with stalking. Courts can impose requirements, such as ordering suspects to refrain from contacting or physically monitoring the victim, restricting internet use or requiring them to undergo a rehabilitation programme (Watts, 2016). These orders are intended to increase protection for victims whilst police collect evidence to build a case.

Such precautions are a stepping-stone towards taking stalking more seriously as a crime, but more needs to be done to understand a person's propensity for stalking and what can influence it. A question that is essential in understanding stalking factors and what motivates offenders to persist, is to what extent are the offenders aware of, and capable of understanding, the emotional impact they have on their victims?

Theory of mind

Theory of mind (ToM) refers to a person's ability to infer the mental state of another person – attributing beliefs, emotions and points of view to oneself and others, understanding that they can be different from one's own (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). ToM is thought to be how people interpret another person's behaviour, and is a significantly useful tool in social functioning.

ToM research has largely focused on people with autism: studies indicate quite consistently that people with autism possess less ToM capability than neurotypical counterparts (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith, 1985; Baron-Cohen, 1989b). These studies have allowed researchers to more effectively assess the importance and impact of being able to understand and

interpret the mental states of others, as well as the role of language and communication skills in ToM (Happé, 1995).

ToM research has extended to offenders and criminal behaviour. Studies have indicated that some offenders may possess some form of theory of mind deficit and may struggle with perspective-taking (Keenan & Ward, 2000). The applications of ToM studies can be very beneficial in understanding an offender's actions: if the offender does not possess the capacity to understand what the victim may be feeling and perceiving, it could impact their offending behaviour and their responsiveness to treatment and rehabilitation options.

Nevertheless, literature pertaining to ToM and offenders is mixed. ToM capabilities in young offenders, in comparison to a non-offender control sample, performed significantly poorer in ToM tests (Spenser, Betts & Das Gupta, 2015). However, offenders with intellectual disabilities (ID) have been shown to have more ToM capability than non-offender counterparts (Proctor & Beail, 2007).

Sex offenders against adults and children have displayed difficulties in emotional state recognition of others; conversely, although offenders against children have displayed relatively poor ToM overall compared to controls, they did not indicate more ToM deficits in relation to children than to adults (Hudson *et al*, 1993). Other research has expanded upon this: whilst sex offenders against children struggled with ToM in relation to adults, there was no such impairment for ToM in relation to children (Elsegood & Duff, 2010). This indicates that in some cases, offenders are aware of the mental state of their victims and can accurately perceive and attribute the emotions and thoughts they may be experiencing. However, Keenan and Ward (2000) suggest that while some offenders may possess ToM capabilities and knowledge, they may not actively apply these to a situation. This suggests that some

offenders may purposefully disregard the emotions and thoughts of their victims in order to commit the offence.

It is not a requisite to have a global ToM deficit when not understanding the mental states of others. Specific theory deficits, as suggested by Ward, Keenan and Hudson (1999) are shortfalls in one particular area, rather than a comprehensive failure of ToM. With regards to stalking, one may not possess a theory about mental states in certain relationships, such as intimate relationships. If a person is deficient in this regard, they may not consider their actions to be stalking.

The implications of ToM research in offending suggest a range of different experiences and abilities within offenders, but this research has not extended to stalking offenders. The results could be wide-ranging for both victim and offender treatment, as well as further understanding motives and decision-making of offenders perpetrating stalking behaviour.

The recent increase in public interest, awareness and reports surrounding stalking indicates a greater need to understand the mechanisms and influential factors behind propensities for such behaviour. The relationship with abuse is particularly significant as many studies indicate it to be a strong factor in stalking and further violence. While efforts have been made over the past two decades within academic research to study different aspects of stalking, it is a relatively new offence in legal systems, and further research is needed to provide both offender treatment and victim support services with a deeper knowledge of the crime, its factors and predictors. ToM has been researched in relation to a few different types of offence, but there is deficit in the literature with regards to stalking. Researching the role of theory of mind and stalking could pave the way for better understanding of the crime and the behaviours of the perpetrators, and indicate areas for development for individual risk management.

Research aim: The study aims to establish if there is a relationship, whether positive or negative, between a person's theory of mind capabilities, propensity for stalking, and propensity for abusiveness.

Methods

Participants

Participants of ages 18 and upwards were sampled opportunistically and via snowball sampling online through social media sites (Facebook and Twitter). GPower analysis estimated a minimum sample size of 107 participants ($\alpha=0.05$, critical $F=3.08$, effect size=0.15). The study comprises 121 people (27 males and 94 females) with an average age of $M = 31.85$, $SD = 12.31$, ranging from 18 to 68.

Design

The study used a within-participants design, assessing participants on propensity for stalking, propensity for abusiveness and ToM capabilities. These factors were assessed with the Stalking Propensity Scale (SPS) (Palmieri & Giannini, 2010), the Propensity for Abuse Scale (PAS) (Dutton, 1995) and the revised Reading the Mind in the Eyes Task (RMET) (Baron-Cohen, Joliffe, Mortimore & Robertson, 1997). The presentations of the measures were adapted for the online setting.

The primary factor that was studied is whether people differ in their propensity for stalking, and if this is affected by ToM ability and propensity for abuse. Other factors considered in the data analyses were age and gender, and if these affected a person's propensity for stalking and abuse.

Materials

The RMET (Appendix A) contains 36 images. It assesses ToM capabilities in emotional perception, pertaining to adults' emotional states. It requires participants to ascribe an emotional state to a picture of eyes. It has an internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.605$, and a test-retest reliability of 0.833 (Vellante *et al*, 2013). The RMET is also significantly correlated with abstract and verbal reasoning (Miguel, Caramanico, Huss & Zuanazzi, 2017).

The SPS (Appendix B) comprises 15 items, and are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The SPS explores inclinations for stalking behaviour in three primary areas as identified by exploratory factor analysis: behaviours such as following a person and harassment, impulsivity and aggressiveness, and intimacy needs. These areas are key aspects within stalking, having been highlighted as prominent factors. The SPS focuses on feelings towards an ex-partner. The scale shows internal consistency, with a total Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.87$.

The PAS (Appendix C) contains 29 items with three sections: anger, negative childhood experiences with the person's mother and father, or equivalent guardians, and recent personal experiences of phenomena such as anxiety attacks or trouble breathing. The PAS was sourced from components of the Self-Report Instrument for Borderline Personality Organisation (Oldham *et al*, 1985), the Multidimensional Anger Inventory (Siegel, 1986) and the Trauma Symptom Checklist (Briere & Runtz, 1989). The PAS measures on a 5-point Likert-type scale for the first section, and a 4-point Likert-type scale for the latter two, and has a 2-year test-retest reliability of $r = 0.851$ and $r = 0.629$ for females and males respectively, with a combined reliability coefficient of $r = 0.774$ (Clift, Thomas & Dutton, 2005).

SPSS version 23 was required for data analysis.

Procedure

Participants accessed the study through an online link. Before starting the study, participants were required to read the participant information and the consent form.

After agreeing to proceed, participants were asked to complete all items on the SPS, PAS and RMET. Definitions were provided if participants did not know the meaning of any of the words in the RMET. After completing the tasks, they received a debrief explaining the research aims, reiterating the contact details for the researchers, and to independent professional services should they have any more concerns.

Data analysis

The study used calculated the mean for demographic data on age and gender, to obtain an overview of the sample population. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to evaluate the normality of the data.

The total scores for the SPS, the PAS and the RMET were calculated for each participant. The SPS was scored by the answers given on the Likert-type scale – a score of 40 or more indicated a propensity for stalking. The same scoring method was used for the PAS – the mean score calculated by Dutton (1995) was 49.3, $SD = 16.8$. Correct answers on the RMET were assigned a value of 1; incorrect answers were assigned a value of 0.

Pearson's correlation was used to determine any relationship between the three tests, and to examine any effects of age and gender on scores obtained on the RMET, the PAS and SPS.

The data were then analysed with a linear multiple regression to assess the relationship between ToM, propensity for abuse and propensity for stalking behaviours.

Results

A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the data were normally distributed, at $p < 0.05$.

Gender, age and marital status

Gender did not show significant relationships with any of the scores on the SPS, RMET and PAS, with $r = -0.067, p = 0.48$, $r = 0.084, p = 0.36$, and $r = -0.039, p = 0.67$, respectively.

Marital status showed no significant correlations with any of the measures, with $r = -0.12, p = 0.20$, $r = -0.087, p = 0.34$, and $r = -0.16, p = 0.077$, respectively. The mean scores obtained by males on the SPS, PAS and RMET were $M = 27.56$, $M = 66.48$ and $M = 25.00$, respectively; females averaged $M = 26.52$, $M = 64.74$ and $M = 26.05$, respectively.

Regression analysis showed that gender did not contribute to SPS scores, with $p = 0.49$

Pearson's correlation found that age did not have a significant relationship with scores on the SPS, RMET and PAS, with $r = -0.13, p = 0.16$, $r = -0.10, p = 0.26$, and $r = -0.17, p = 0.068$, respectively.

Participants who selected their marital status as 'with partner' and 'cohabiting' exhibited the highest mean SPS score, $M = 33.00$, and, along with people of 'separated' status, the highest mean RMET score, $M = 28.00$. The lowest mean SPS score was obtained by 'divorced' participants, at $M = 23.40$ – this group also had the lowest RMET score, $M = 23.00$. The highest PAS score was shown by the 'single' category, with $M = 68.08$

SPS, PAS and RMET scores

The mean score obtained for the RMET was $M = 25.82, SD = 5.22$; the mean score for the SPS was $M = 26.75, SD = 6.47$; the mean score for the PAS was $M = 65.13, SD = 18.472$. A total of 6 participants scored 40 or more on the SPS.

Table 1 shows the Pearson's correlations between scores obtained on the RMET, SPS and PAS for all participants.

Table 1. Correlations between RMET, SPS and PAS scores

		SPS score	RMET score	PAS score
SPS score	Pearson's correlation	1.000	-0.036	0.424
	Significance (2-tailed)	-	0.696	0.000
RMET score	Pearson's correlation	-0.036	1.000	-0.097
	Significance (2-tailed)	0.696	-	0.288
PAS score	Pearson's correlation	0.424	-0.097	1.000
	Significance (2-tailed)	0.000	0.288	-

Table 1 shows there was no significant relationship found between SPS scores and RMET scores, indicating that ToM does not have a significant effect on stalking propensity. There was also no significant relationship found between PAS scores and RMET. A significant relationship, at $p < 0.001$, was found between SPS scores and PAS scores, suggesting that stalking propensity and abusiveness propensity are strongly linked.

Regression analysis

Table 2 shows the linear multiple regression values of SPS as the dependent variable, with ToM entered as a first predictor and PAS as the second.

Table 2. Multiple regression values for SPS with RMET scores and PAS scores as predictors

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard error of the estimate	R Square change	F Change	Significant F change	Durbin-Watson
RMET	0.036	0.001	-0.007	6.496	0.001	0.153	0.696	-
RMET and PAS	0.424	0.180	0.166	5.913	0.178	25.632	0.000	1.928

The R Square value for the RMET in relation to SPS scores is very low, meaning it does not explain the variability in the data and is not a significant predictor. The F change was not significant at $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.696$). The R Square value increased when PAS scores were included in the regression, suggesting PAS explains some of the data variability. The F change was significant at $p < 0.001$, suggesting a relationship between SPS and PAS scores.

Table 3 shows the regression values with SPS scores as the dependent variable, and PAS scores entered as the first predictor and RMET scores as the second.

Table 3. Multiple regression values for SPS with PAS and RMET as predictors

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard error of the estimate	R Square change	F Change	Significant F change	Durbin-Watson
PAS	0.424	0.179	0.173	5.888	0.179	26.031	0.000	-
PAS and RMET	0.424	0.180	0.166	5.913	0.000	0.004	0.949	1.928

Table 3 shows a larger R Square value for PAS as the first predictor than RMET score. The F change for PAS scores as the first predictor are significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, suggesting a significant relationship between PAS and SPS scores. The R Square value does not significantly change with the addition of RMET scores, and the F-change when RMET is included as a predictor is not significant, with $p = 0.949$.

6 participants met the criteria for propensity for stalking. There were no significant correlations between SPS, PAS and RMET scores for these participants. Linear multiple regression confirmed this - with SPS scores as the dependent variable, RMET as first predictor showed an F change at $p = 0.317$, and PAS as second predictor at $p = 0.211$.

Discussion

The data show a distinct lack of significant relationship between RMET scores and SPS scores: it can be inferred that ToM does not explain propensity for stalking. The F change value was non-significant when RMET scores were included as either as a first or second predictor, with SPS scores as the dependent variable. indicating that this variable did not significantly improve the prediction. This is somewhat inconsistent with the research on ToM and other offences, which have indicated that there is a relationship with ToM, either positive or negative (Hudson *et al*, 1993; Elsegood & Duff, 2010; Spenser, Betts & Das Gupta, 2015).

This may be because people with a satisfactory, but not excellent, theory of mind are sufficiently aware of the harm that stalking and abusive behaviour could cause to a person. However, it is also possible that some participants may not recognise conducting some of the behaviours described in the SPS.

The mean RMET score was over half the total item amount, indicating that the sample possessed a reasonable ToM capability, inferring that most of the participants are quite adept at social communication and functioning.

Gender, age and marital status were not found to account for SPS scores. That gender was not found to be a significant factor is not wholly consistent with previous research, which suggests that a higher proportion of males perpetrate stalking (Mohandie, Meloy, McGowan & Williams, 2006). However, the number of males ($n = 27$) was rather smaller than the number of females ($n = 94$), so further research could attempt to balance this discrepancy. It is of note that the 'divorced' group had a lower mean SPS score ($M = 23.40$) than the other marital status categories. The 'separated' and 'single' groups had respective means of $M = 27.50$ and $M = 27.49$. These were the highest means for SPS, except for the 'with partner/cohabiting' category. Yet, these are still below the threshold for stalking propensity. This does not support literature which suggests that having a prior intimate relationship with the victim is a risk factor in stalking perpetration. However, the 'divorced' and 'separated' group sizes ($n = 5$, $n = 2$) were small, so the results should not be widely extrapolated.

The mean PAS score was $M = 65.18$, which is somewhat higher than the 49.3 averaged in Dutton's (1995) development of the scale. While the mean average of the PAS was greater than the original sample, it is still not beyond half of the total possible score in the PAS.

When testing the 6 participants who met the stalking propensity criteria, there was no significant relationship found between either PAS scores or RMET scores in relation to SPS scores, with an F change value of $p = 0.211$ and $p = 0.317$ respectively. As only 6 participants met the criteria for stalking propensity, this sample size is too small to accurately determine if the ability to infer the mental states of others may play an important role in those who do have a propensity to stalk.

Nevertheless, regression analysis of the whole sample showed the relationship between PAS and SPS scores was highly significant at $p < 0.001$. These results indicate that abusiveness propensity has a strong influence on propensity for stalking, and vice versa. This finding is supported by the literature base, which demonstrates that abusiveness is a significant risk factor in stalking behaviours (Farnham, James & Cantrell, 2000; McEwan, Mullen, MacKenzie & Ogloff, 2009). The link between stalking and abuse propensity may be explained, at least in part, by the prior relationship factor: the SPS questions focused on actions and feelings towards an ex-partner. Motivations for stalking a prior intimate partner have been noted to range from wanting to reconcile the relationship, to a desire to gain revenge on the individual and seek to harm them, either psychologically, emotionally, and/or physically. The findings of the study that stalking and abuse propensity are linked reinforces this, particularly among people who wish to exact some form of harm.

It may also be accounted for by RGP theory, to an extent – if a person experiences negative affect more intensely or for prolonged periods of time, it can lead to ‘emotional flooding’. For example, anger has been associated with abuse such as interpersonal violence (Greene, Coles & Johnson, 1994). It may follow that overwhelming feelings of negative emotions such as anger, as experienced in emotional flooding, could result in some form of abusive behaviour.

The study has some methodological issues that could impact the results. One such potential issue was that the PAS did not account for a lack of male or female role model present in a person’s life. This could have impacted on some of the answers given, as without any such model present at all, the answer given would most likely be ‘never’ for the childhood experiences section and would thus have an influence on the PAS score.

It is also quite likely that participants attempted to answer in a socially desirable manner. The questions were very personal and not all questions were deemed as socially acceptable. It is possible that as a result, people may have been dishonest when recording their answers. There was an attempt to mitigate this by ensuring the anonymity of participants in the study and that no data were identifiable, however it is still a possibility. Given the subject matter, other studies in this subject area using the general population could emphasise the anonymity more strongly and highlight that there will be no repercussions for any answers given.

One other methodological issue is that due to time constraints, the study was conducted on the general population, meaning that the sample was less likely to have engaged, or admitted having engaged in, offending activities such as stalking. This could have impacted both the results pertaining to stalking propensity, and those relating to abusiveness propensity. To date, no other studies appear to have investigated ToM in stalking behaviour, and thus the results should be treated with some caution. This study, whilst not showing significant results for the role of ToM in stalking propensity, lends itself to many further research opportunities.

As it was carried out with a general population sample, future research could conduct the study on a forensic population with stalking convictions, and compare to a control group. Given the use of the internet to perpetrate stalking, it may also be of interest for further research to examine the role of either ToM, abusiveness, or both, between groups of cyber-stalkers and offline stalkers. The motivations and types of stalkers could also be examined in relation to ToM, to see if a relationship exists in this regard.

To conclude, this study provides no evidence of a relationship between theory of mind and propensity for stalking, indicating that the ability to perceive, understand and attribute emotions, beliefs and thoughts to other people is not a significant factor when considering

propensity for stalking and propensity for abusiveness. Conversely, there is strong evidence of a reciprocal relationship between propensity for stalking and propensity for abuse.

The application of the data set is limited in its generalisability to the forensic population and there were potential methodological issues as it is possible that participants may have been dishonest with their answers. Nevertheless, it is a potential aspect of offending behaviour worth further investigation in relation to stalking, and can be used as a stepping stone to future research in this area in a forensic population.

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Appendix A

Reading the Mind in the Eyes Task – images and instructions

playful

comforting



irritated

bored

terrified

upset

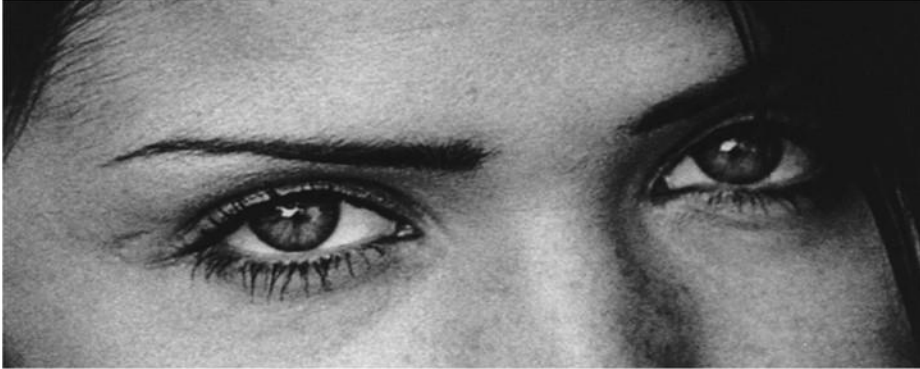


arrogant

annoyed

joking

flustered



desire

convinced

joking

insisting



amused

relaxed

irritated

sarcastic



worried

friendly

aghast

fantasizing



impatient

alarmed

apologetic

friendly



uneasy

dispirited

despondent

relieved



shy

excited

annoyed

hostile



horrified

preoccupied

cautious

insisting



bored

aghast

terrified

amused



regretful

flirtatious

indifferent

embarrassed



sceptical

dispirited

decisive

anticipating



threatening

shy

irritated

disappointed



depressed

accusing

contemplative

flustered



encouraging

amused

irritated

thoughtful



encouraging

sympathetic

doubtful

affectionate



playful

aghast

decisive

amused



aghast

bored

arrogant

grateful



sarcastic

tentative

dominant

friendly



guilty

horrified

embarrassed

fantasizing



confused

panicked

preoccupied

grateful



insisting

imploring

contented

apologetic



defiant

curious

pensive

irritated

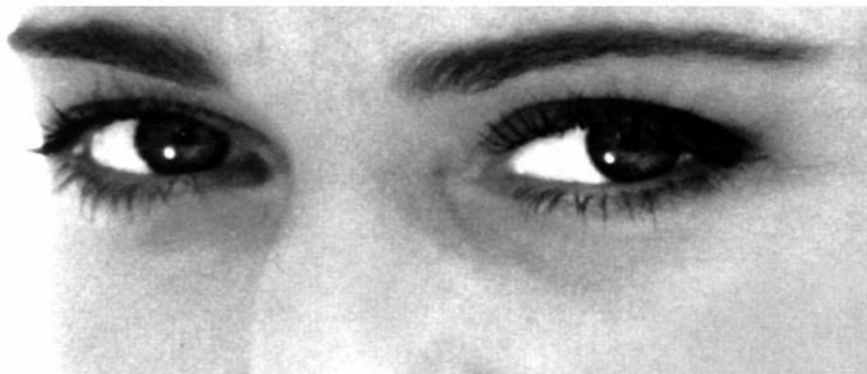


excited

hostile

panicked

incredulous



despondent

interested

alarmed

shy



hostile

anxious

joking

cautious



arrogant

reassuring

interested

joking



affectionate

contented

impatient

aghast



irritated

reflective

grateful

flirtatious



hostile

disappointed

ashamed

confident



joking

dispirited

serious

ashamed



bewildered

alarmed

embarrassed

guilty



fantasizing

concerned

aghast

baffled



distrustful

terrified

puzzled

nervous



insisting

contemplative

ashamed

nervous



suspicious

indecisive

Adult Eyes Instructions

For each set of eyes, choose and circle which word best describes what the person in the picture is thinking or feeling. You may feel that more than one word is applicable but please choose just one word, the word which you consider to be most suitable. Before making your choice, make sure that you have read all 4 words. You should try to do the task as quickly as possible but you will not be timed. If you really don't know what a word means you can look it up in the definition handout.

Appendix B

Stalking Propensity Scale questionnaire and scoring system

Gender M F Age _____ Profession _____

Marital status: Single With partner Cohabiting Married Separated Divorced

Highest level of education: GCSE A Level Bachelor's Degree Doctorate

Based on the descriptions below indicate how often you experience each of the situations by choosing the corresponding number, with 1 indicating 'never' and 5 indicating 'always'

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
1. I cannot do without contact with my ex, either by telephone or email.					
2. I cannot stand the idea of my ex seeing someone else.					
3. I react aggressively if my ex ignores me.					
4. I have difficulty controlling myself when angry.					
5. I have (been known to stalk) stalked my ex.					
6. When I am angry I do things without thinking.					
7. If I am dumped I make every effort to get my ex back.					
8. I cannot cope without a relationship.					
9. I need a partner to go out with.					
10. I act on impulse.					
11. For me it is vital to have a relationship.					
12. I have been known to attack or verbally abuse my ex.					

13. I feel it is necessary to know where my ex is and what s/he is doing.					
14. I am worth nothing without my partner's love.					
15. I have hurt my ex.					

NB: the questionnaire has been converted into a table for convenience and the instructions adapted for online use.

G. Palmieri & M. Giannini (2010).

Scoring system

Tendency towards acts of molestation or persecution: total of items 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 12, 13

Tendency towards acts of impulsiveness or aggression: total of items 4, 6, 10, 15

Tendency towards a need for intimacy: total of items 8, 9, 11, 14

Sum of all items ≥ 40 : propensity for stalking.

Appendix C

Propensity for Abusiveness Scale questionnaire

Abusiveness Scale

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APPENDIX A

Propensity for Abusiveness Scale (PAS)

Anger

If the statement is *completely undescriptive* of you: circle the '1'

If the statement is *mostly undescriptive* of you: circle the '2'

If the statement is *partly undescriptive* and *partly descriptive* of you: circle the '3'

If the statement is *mostly descriptive* of you: circle the '4'

If the statement is *completely descriptive* of you: circle the '5'

1. (MAI18). I can make myself angry about something in the past just by thinking about it. 1 2 3 4 5
2. (MAI26). I get so angry, I feel that I might lose control. 1 2 3 4 5
3. (MAI27). If I let people see the way I feel, I'd be considered a hard person to get along with. 1 2 3 4 5
4. (BPO5). I see myself in totally different ways at different times.
5. (BPO10). I feel empty inside.
6. (BPO11). I tend to feel things in a somewhat extreme way, experiencing either great joy or intense despair.
7. (BPO12). It is hard for me to be sure about what others think of me, even people who have known me very well.

8. (BPO18). I feel people don't give me the respect I deserve unless I put pressure on them.
9. (BPO30). Somehow, I never know quite how to conduct myself with people.
10. (RSQ1). I find it difficult to depend on other people.
11. (RSQ5). I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.
12. (RSQ24). I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.

Beside each statement, please write in the number of the response listed below (1-4) that best describes how often the experience happened to you with your mother (or female guardian) and father (or male guardian). If you had more than one mother/father figure, please answer for the persons who you feel played the most important role in your upbringing.

1	2	3	4
never occurred	occasionally occurred	often occurred	always occurred

Father/Mother
Guardian Guardian

- ___ ___ 13 (EMBU3). My parent punished me even for small offenses.
- ___ ___ 14 (EMBU8). As a child I was physically punished or scolded in the presence of others.
- ___ ___ 15 (EMBU10). My parent gave me more corporal punishment than I deserved.
- ___ ___ 16 (EMBU18). I felt my parent thought it was *my* fault when he/she was unhappy.
- ___ ___ 17 (EMBU22). I think my parent was mean and grudging toward me.

- ___ ___ 18 (EMBU26). I was punished by my parent with out having done anything.
- ___ ___ 19 (EMBU29). My parent criticized me and told me how lazy and useless I was in front of others.
- ___ ___ 20 (EMBU32). My parent would punish me hard, even for trifles.
- ___ ___ 21 (EMBU35). My parent treated me in such a way that I felt ashamed.
- ___ ___ 22 (EMBU37). I was beaten by my parent.

How often have you experienced each of the following in the *last two months*? Please circle the appropriate number.

- | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-------------|-------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| | never | occasionally | fairly often | very often |
| 23 (TSC1). | | | | |
| | | | | |
| 24 (TSC2). | | | | |
| | | | | |
| 25 (TSC3). | | | | |
| | | | | |
| 26 (TSC15). | | | | |
| | | | | |
| 27 (TSC25). | | | | |
| | | | | |
| 28 (TSC32). | | | | |
| | | | | |
| 29 (TSC33). | | | | |

Appendix D

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Division of Psychiatry & Applied Psychology
School of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences

Researcher: Martha Perkins email: msxmkp@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Simon Duff email: Simon.Duff@nottingham.ac.uk

Ethics Reference Number: 234

Project title: Investigating relationships between understanding emotional states of others, and persistent interactions and social and emotional intrusions.

This is an invitation to take part in a research study about persistent interactions in relationships, social and emotional intrusions, and the ability to infer the mental states and emotions of others.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may change your mind about being involved. You are free to withdraw at any point before or during the study. Withdrawal does not require a reason. As the data are anonymous, once you have completed and submitted the questionnaire it is not possible to withdraw the data because we won't know who you are.

What is the project about?

This study is investigating the relationship between theory of mind (the ability to understand that others have emotions, beliefs and perspectives different to yourself), and tendencies and attitudes towards persistent interactions in a previous relationship, and social and emotional intrusions. The projects aims to see if one affects the likelihood of another. Persistent interactions and social and emotional intrusions can range from repeated attempts at contacting someone, to harmful acts such as stalking and abusive behaviours.

Who is being asked to take part, and why?

This research is open to everyone aged 18 and upwards who have an ex-romantic partner.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked for demographic information such as age and gender. No identifiable information such as name and address will be required. Next, you will be asked to complete two questionnaires about propensity for persistent interactions you may have done and social and emotional intrusions, with the latter focusing around emotional experiences, and childhood experiences. You will then be asked to look at pictures of eyes and identify what state you believe the person to be in. This should take no longer than 20 minutes.

Participation is entirely voluntary and your data will be anonymous. Data can be withdrawn at any point before and during the study. No reason is required for withdrawal from the study.

Are there any risks?

There are questions that focus on emotions such as anger and fear, parental childhood experiences, and persistent behaviours you may have done that may have been harmful or distressing. If you feel these may be upsetting in any way then please do not proceed with the study, and do not hesitate to contact either the researchers or any of the services listed at the end of this information.

Will the research be of any personal benefit to me?

The research will not be of personal benefit to you, but it may help contribute to further understanding of the roles of theory of mind and social and emotional intrusions play in persistent behaviours.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Any data you provide will be kept confidential between the primary researchers. The information given is anonymous, with no identifying information required. For anonymous studies, it is not possible to withdraw the data once the study has been completed. Data will be kept secure, and destroyed after a period of time.

What will you do with the data?

The data will be used as part of a Master's project. If you wish to know the outcome of the study, please email the address at the top of this information sheet. At the end of the project, all raw data will be kept securely by the University under the terms of the Data Protection Act. The data will not be kept elsewhere.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to ask us at the given email addresses. We can be contacted before and after your participation at the above address.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

If you have any queries or complaints about this study, please contact myself or my supervisor. If this does not resolve the query to your satisfaction, please write to the Administrator to the Division of Psychiatry & Applied Psychology's Research Ethics Sub-Committee (MS-DPAPEthics@nottingham.ac.uk, +44 (0)115 8232214) who will pass your query to the Chair of the Committee.

We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any online related activity the risk of a breach is always possible. We will do everything possible to ensure your answers in this study will remain anonymous. We will minimize any risks by storing any data on a password-protected computer.

Victim Support: <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/supportline/email-supportline> / Phone no: [08 08 16 89 111](tel:08081689111)

[Samaritans: jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) / Phone no: 116 123

Appendix E - Acknowledgements

I would like to give my sincere thanks to the Seaford Italian Group for translating the Stalking Propensity Scale into English.

To Mum, Dad, and Hannah, thank you for putting up with me this year and for being so supportive throughout.

Thank you to my grandparents, without whom I would not have been able to do this Master's.

Powerpoint presentation

Charming or alarming?

A study into the relationship between propensity for stalking, abusiveness and Theory of Mind

Martha Kate Perkins
msxmkp@nottingham.ac.uk

Research, rationale and aims

- Stalking is a form of harassment, involving persistent and unwanted attempts at contact, resulting in emotional, psychological and sometimes physical harm to the victim.
- Key factors implicated in stalking are previous intimate relationships and violence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Farnham, James & Cantrell, 2000).
- Theory of mind (ToM) (the ability to attribute emotions, beliefs and thoughts to others) is a significant part of social communication (Premack & Woodruff, 1973)
- Research has demonstrated a varied relationship between ToM and offending, showing that some offenders do not possess a good ToM, whereas others demonstrate good capability (Eisegood & Duff, 2010; Spenser, Betts & Das Gupta, 2015)
- Theory of mind has been researched with different offence types, but gap in the literature for ToM in relation to stalking
- Aim: to establish if a relationship is present between ToM, propensity for stalking and propensity for abusiveness

Methodology

- **Participants:** Sample comprised 121 participants (27 male, 94 female), average age of $M = 31.85$, $SD = 12.31$
- **Design:** Within-participants questionnaire, distributed online through social media accounts. Primary factor studied was stalking propensity, and if it is impacted by ToM ability and propensity for abusiveness
- **Materials:** Reading the Mind in the Eyes Task (RMET), Stalking Propensity Scale (SPS), the Propensity for Abusiveness Scale and SPSS software
- **Procedure:** Participants completed demographic information (e.g. age, gender), and were asked to answer all questions on the SPS, PAS and RMET as accurately as possible
- **Data analysis:**
 - Mean averages were calculated for demographic data
 - Questionnaire results were analysed using Pearson's correlation and linear multiple regression.

Results

- The data indicate no significant relationship between stalking propensity and ToM, with a non-significant F-change of $p = 0.696$
- There was a significant relationship between scores on the SPS and the PAS, with $r = 0.424$, $p < 0.001$ in the correlation and regression analyses
- Gender had no significant relationship with SPS scores, with regression showing $p = 0.49$
- 6 participants met the criteria for stalking propensity, but no significant relationship between ToM, SPS and PAS was found

Discussion – implications of results

- The results indicate that RMET scores do not interact significantly with SPS scores – this suggests that the ability to infer mental states of others has no bearing on a person's propensity to stalk
- Stalking and abusiveness propensity significantly influence each other, highlighting the role of abuse in stalking (Farnham, James & Cantrell, 2000)
- The study was conducted on the general population rather than a forensic one, which may have caused the disparity in stalking and abusiveness propensity.
- Participants may have also attempted to answer in a socially desirable manner, and so may have been dishonest on some questions

Future research opportunities

- Different population – the current study examined the general population, so further research could be conducted on a forensic population with stalking convictions
- Different contexts – comparison of ToM between cyberstalking and offline and how this affects perceptions and/or perpetration of stalking behaviour.
- Different motivations – how could different stalking motivations and typologies interact with ToM?

References

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Reflective Report

This reflective report follows the Gibbs (1988) reflective practice model: description of the experience, feelings towards the experience, evaluation and analysis, and any conclusions drawn.

Conceptualisation

I began thinking about possible areas for the research project before the beginning of the course. My first concept was researching grooming methods of sex offenders against children in the context of Theory of Mind (ToM). During my first supervision meeting, my supervisor and I discussed the feasibility of conducting the study. The project would require external ethics approval from the National Offender Management Service and the deadline was less than a year away. There would be no guarantee how quickly they would respond to an ethics request, as it would not be a priority. Given that time restraints were going to be a significant issue, I decided to change the project to stalking and ToM within the general population.

I enjoyed the project conceptualisation, although it was a little difficult narrowing down a research area that I felt competent in researching. Changing the project gave me more confidence about completing it within the time frame, whilst still being pleased with the core concept.

I found the whole conceptualisation process positive, even though I had to change my original idea. Having free reign over the research area allowed me to pursue something I felt interested in and confident about

doing. My supervisor's objective comments gave me a more realistic approach to time constraints on my project.

With future research projects, I would consider the time constraints of the course earlier, to ensure sufficient time to address other aspects of the project. This is something I will apply to areas of forensic psychological work I may undertake in the future.

Preparation

My initial preparation was to do background research on stalking and ToM. I read numerous relevant articles in preparation for the proposal formulation and study design.

I felt quite confident about this, as I can summarise key points from texts effectively. However, not starting the preparation as soon as I should have left me a bit anxious about the time frame I had.

Although it was challenging to keep sorting through articles for relevant information, I also enjoyed pulling the framework together. It helped me clarify the direction of my dissertation, and what to include in the design and proposal.

On reflection, I recognised that I should have started the preparation process earlier than I did, as this subsequently impacted writing and submitting the proposal. In future, I would leave more time for this aspect.

Design

I started by identifying a measure of stalking propensity. Having discussed the inclusion of a second scale with my supervisor, I included the propensity for abuse scale in the design. I decided on an online, within-participants design. Following this, I started writing the research proposal.

I submitted the proposal and the ethics application later than originally planned. I was upset with myself as I had not intended to do this; I did not feel overly confident about my proposal as a result.

The experience was a useful learning curve, highlighting that I need to prepare earlier for projects and manage my time more efficiently. A negative aspect was the lack of direct communication from the ethics committee: I was not included in correspondence after the application submission, and I had to go through my supervisor to get the application back to make required changes. I found this very frustrating.

Designing the study itself was the simplest part of the process for me: having done an online study for my undergraduate degree, it was the quickest way to access a relatively large number of participants, and I felt confident in my ability. The proposal and ethics process took much longer than anticipated, as I found it more difficult than expected: the ethics form allows two pages for the proposal. I attempted to write it as two pages thinking it would be more time-efficient, but in hindsight I realise

that it would have been better to write it in full first and then edit. Consequently, I applied this approach to the rest of the research portfolio. Designing my project has highlighted my need to be significantly more efficient with my time management by prioritising tasks and estimating how long each is likely to take. I would certainly begin the whole process earlier, leaving myself more time to reflect more fully before editing.

Data collection

On receipt of the ethics confirmation I uploaded my study to the Bristol Online Survey system and posted advertisements for the study on social media, which were further shared by other people. The study remained open for 4 weeks.

As I posted the study quite late in the year, I felt anxious that I wouldn't collect the required number of participants. However, I reached the target in two weeks, which was a great relief. Whilst it was gratifying to see people completing the study, I found I was a bit disappointed when the number of participants levelled off after the initial spike in numbers.

I enjoyed this part of the research process and was excited to have data to analyse and to be able to begin writing up the results. There wasn't a significantly negative part to the data collection, apart from being anxious about the number of respondents, but it was time consuming putting the study online and proof-reading the questions.

The process of putting the study up was challenging. Apart from uploading a significant number of items, the images had to be uploaded separately to the system, and then copied to the related question. This became quite wearing after a while.

Once online, collecting the data was very straightforward, and meant I could start writing up the rest of the research paper while people were completing the study. I would certainly use the online study method again as it was effective in reaching and collecting participants.

Data analysis

When I attempted to start the analysis, the software ran very slowly, or at times did not work at all. However, once SPSS began responding reliably, the process was straightforward to begin with. I ran statistical tests and interpreted the data.

I found myself getting really irritated. I don't feel that statistical analysis is one of my strengths: the software issues compounded my feelings of frustration and lack of competence. However, once it began working and I could run the analyses, I felt a bit more positive about obtaining and understanding the results.

Knowing that I lack confidence when analysing data, I was aware of being quite negative when conducting this process. Focussing on the fact that I had run statistical tests when doing my undergraduate degree and successfully analysed data helped me to make sense of the situation.

Analysing the data enabled me to see how it tied in to previous research, which was satisfying. I recognise that my lack of confidence impacted on my anxiety levels, and consequently my initial approach to the task. If done differently, revising statistical analysis methods, alongside the data collection process would have helped to reassure me and increase my confidence.

Write up

I began the write up soon after putting the study online. The introduction consisted of a literature review of aspects applicable to my study. I spent several weeks researching relevant studies and trying to decide how to incorporate them cohesively. Once I had analysed the data, I collated the information to write the results and discussion sections.

Initially I enjoyed putting the introduction together, as I enjoy background reading and expanding my knowledge base. As I progressed, I felt more unsatisfied with the content I'd written. The subject area is quite broad and I felt confused as to what to include. I was quite pleased with the rest of the paper; however, I ran into a few issues with the results section. I was not aware the research proposal must be 1500 words, so it was frustrating having to add more literature to meet the minimum word count. The method was straightforward to write up, and there were many points for the discussion.

I found writing this reflective report quite challenging, as it required me to really examine my approaches and experiences – both positive and

negative throughout the research project, identifying areas I feel I need to develop. Writing other aspects of the portfolio also required me to learn new skills – I had never previously written an executive summary, so it was a useful opportunity.

I reasoned that although I couldn't do the full write-up as I was still collecting data, it would be prudent to begin the sections that I was able to do sooner rather than later. Upon reflection, I found myself unhappy with the introduction. I think I was too familiar with it to recognise what was good and what needed improving. Although hesitant about giving my work to someone else to read, in case my worries were justified, giving a draft to my supervisor resulted in objective critiques which helped me complete it.

Though stressful, I enjoyed writing up my research overall. By attempting to be more efficient by starting the write up alongside data collection, which gave me time to properly analyse, reflect upon and edit my work. If done differently, I would devote more time to the results section.

Supervision

I had my first supervision meeting quite soon after writing the draft idea and my supervisor had been allocated. It was really helpful getting a realistic perspective on my ideas and having the positive aspects highlighted, as well as identifying practical constraints. At subsequent supervision meetings we discussed what measurements to include and the research proposal. I also emailed throughout the year with various

questions about the ethics application and sending drafts of the research proposal. My supervisor was always very quick to respond to any questions and provided useful feedback on my work.

I felt more reassured after supervision meetings – they provided space for me to discuss concerns, ask questions and to clarify the focus and direction of my research.

The supervision was very helpful – I do not feel there was any negative aspect to my supervision, as my supervisor was always very quick to respond to any questions and provided useful feedback to carry into my work. I should have been more punctual in keeping my supervisor up-to-date with where I was in the project development.

Overall, discussing the project and the research process allowed me to make more sense of the project. If done differently, I would try to keep my supervisor more informed.

Summary

The most significant problem for me throughout the research has been managing my time. It is something I have found difficult throughout the year. Though the workload was theoretically manageable, I still felt somewhat overwhelmed with the prospect of doing reading for the course, writing the coursework and managing my external voluntary work commitments. My initial response was one of avoidance, telling myself there was plenty of time and finding reasons for not starting the work. However, starting later than I should have impacted significantly on the

rest of the process and increased my anxiety levels. Recognising that I have a tendency to underestimate how long some tasks take, alongside avoiding starting something that feels overwhelming, has been a useful learning curve and one I will now be much more aware of in future. I also recognise that I need to be more confident about my own ability. I felt my areas of strength lay in the project conceptualisation, reviewing the literature and the write-up.

If I were to do this process again, I would begin the proposal and ethics process earlier, and set realistic timeframes for each component.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the research process and whilst at times I felt slightly incompetent, and frustrated by the ethics process and the data analysis, it was an invaluable experience. It has highlighted key personal strengths, and areas for development and improvement for future work both within, and outside, forensic psychology.

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