

CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE STALKING REPORTS

L. P. SHERIDAN

University of Leicester

E. BLAAUW

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Very little research exists on false reports of stalking. The current work analyzed questionnaires completed by 357 respondents who presented as stalking victims at antistalking charities in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. After eight uncertain cases were excluded, the false reporting rate was judged to be 11.5%, with the majority of false victims suffering delusions (70%). Those making false reports differed from genuine victims on several characteristics. For instance, they tended to be older and were less likely to report physical assaults against themselves and third parties than were genuine victims. However, such differences were not significant and did not represent mutually exclusive groupings. Current knowledge suggests that investigating authorities and support groups should judge the veracity of stalking accounts on a case-by-case basis, particularly given the well-documented difficulties related to defining stalking behavior.

Keywords: *stalking; false reports; defining stalking; delusional beliefs*

Studies based on representative samples have yielded fairly stable lifetime prevalence rates of stalking victimization—approximately 12% to 16% among women and 4% to 7% among men. The British Crime Survey, sampling almost 10,000 inhabitants of England and Wales in 1998, revealed a lifetime prevalence of 16% among women and 7% among men (Budd & Mattinson, 2000). A study of 16,000

AUTHOR NOTE: *Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr Lorraine Sheridan, School of Psychology, University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester LE1 7RH, England. Phone: +44 (0)116 223 1012, Fax: +44 (0)116 252 2067; e-mail: lph1@leicester.ac.uk.*

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND BEHAVIOR, Vol. 31 No. 1, February 2004 55-72

DOI: 10.1177/0093854803259235

© 2004 American Association for Correctional Psychology

citizens in the United States revealed that 12% of women and 4% of men reported experiences of stalking (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Studies in specialized samples have, however, produced more variable estimates. Lifetime prevalence rates were found to be as high as 24% among 348 female public service workers in England and Wales (Sheridan, Davies, & Boon, 2001b), 31% among females and 17% among males in a sample of 299 college undergraduates in the United States (Fremouw, Westrup, & Pennypacker, 1997), 33% among 105 politicians and other public figures in the Netherlands (Malsch, Visscher, & Blaauw, 2002), and 76% among 141 women who had been killed by their partner (McFarlane et al., 1999). Conversely, rates of stalking were found to be as low as 5.6% among 178 university counseling center staff members in the United States (Romans, Hays, & White, 1996) and 5.1% among 721 teachers in British Columbia (Lyon & Douglas, in press). These findings indicate that many people at one point in their lives became the victim of a stalker, but they also demonstrate that actual prevalence rates of stalking victimization remain unknown.

Given that stalking may often constitute no more than the targeted repetition of ostensibly ordinary or routine behavior, stalking is inherently difficult to define (Sheridan & Davies, 2001). Mullen, Pathé, and Purcell (2000) rightly point out that “the epidemiology of stalking in practice is the epidemiology of the *reporting* [italics added] of having been stalked” (p. 27). Such estimates are affected by the definition that is employed, the selection and composition of the sample, the way questions are framed, the minimum numbers of behaviors that are required to constitute an incident of stalking, the minimum number of episodes that are required, and whether the stalking behaviors must have induced certain levels of fear (see also Mullen et al., 2000). For instance, in the study by Tjaden and Thoennes (1998), lifetime prevalence rates for stalking increased from 2% to 4% among men and from 8% to 12% among women when respondents were required to feel “only somewhat frightened” or “a little frightened” instead of “significantly frightened.” In the Sheridan et al. (2001b) study, 54.3% of all victims reported an intrusive experience, but as some of these were judged to be marginal or indicative of other forms of harassment, just 24% of the sample were said to have actually been stalked. Thus, prevalence rates of stalking have to be regarded as only rough estimations.

Prevalence rates of stalking victimization may also be obscured by false reports; these reports are the focus of the current work.

Two studies and a literature review have examined false reports of stalking. The first study, based on analyses of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) database, suggests that around 2% of all stalking cases involve stalkers who present themselves as victims of stalking because of a conscious or unconscious desire to be placed in the victim's role (Zona, Lane, & Moore, 1996). In the Zona et al. (1996) study, it is unknown how many cases reported to the LAPD represented false allegations of stalking that had been filed by individuals with alternative motivations or those with erroneous perceptions. Following a literature review, Mohandie, Hatcher, and Raymond (1998) identified seven types of false victimization syndrome. Three of these types involved victims reporting about physical symptoms without a known physical cause, and two types involved victims reporting about single-crime events, such as rape and assaults. The remaining two types were applied to stalking—false victimization syndrome with multiple events over time with a known perpetrator and false victimization syndrome with multiple events over time with an unknown perpetrator.

A typology devoted specifically to stalking has been developed by Pathé, Mullen, and Purcell (1999; see also Mullen et al., 2000). The Pathé et al. (1999) categorization was based on 12 individuals who falsely claimed that they had been stalked or were being stalked and who had been referred to the authors' clinic. The Mullen et al. (2000) study included the same 12 cases, adding six more false victims that had attended the clinic since the first publication. Five broad contexts were identified in which false claims of stalking may emerge. The first context is when stalkers claim to be victims themselves (cf. Zona et al., 1996)—for instance, in cases where the ending of a relationship provokes intense feelings of rage and retaliation. The second is when those with severe mental disorders have persecutory or erotomanic delusions that encompass stalking. The third is when those who have previously been stalked have become hypersensitive to perfectly innocent actions of others because of fear of recurrence. The fourth includes factitious victims who seek gratification of dependency needs through adopting victim status (factitious disorder). The fifth group consists of malingers who consciously fabricate or exaggerate claims of victimization for understandable external incentives,

such as financial rewards. Mullen et al. (2000) reported that a sample of 18 false victims of stalking consisted of three stalker-victim reversals (17%), nine delusional cases (50%), four false revictimizations (22%), one factitious victim (6%), and one malingerer (6%). Victim accounts were judged to be false when they were clearly and repeatedly at odds with the available objective information or when the accounts were inherently unlikely, if not impossible. Mullen et al. did not make use of different raters for establishing whether accounts were likely to be true or false, whereas the current work employs the judgments of several raters to assess whether cases represent genuine or false experiences.

What constitutes those features of stalking by which we may distinguish false from genuine stalking victims? Pathé et al.'s (1999) findings showed that when they were compared to the genuine victims, false claimants did not differ in terms of age, gender, or socioeconomic status. Thus, basic demographic variables did not help differentiate this Australian sample. Differences were found, however, between genuine and false victims in terms of intimate relationships. One third of the authentic victims were either married or in de facto relationships, whereas none of the false victims was in a stable relationship. Pathé et al.'s original 12 false victims had reported significantly shorter stalking episodes (mean of 17.4 months compared to a mean of 40.5 months for the genuine victims), although this difference was no longer significant when Mullen et al. reported data on 18 cases.

Mullen et al. (2000) found the accounts provided by false victims, when compared with those of authentic victims, were more likely to be inconsistent and lacking in detail. False claimants were less likely to complain of receiving letters, whereas similar rates of unwanted telephone calls, following, and property damage were reported for the two groups. False accusers were also less likely to report threats or attacks against third parties but were more likely than genuine victims to insist that they were telling the truth. These findings have a logical appeal, given that the handwriting in letters may be forensically analyzed, and relevant third parties are likely to be interviewed by investigators, thereby unsubstantiating the false claims. Property damage, on the other hand, may be easily perpetrated by the "victim," and the existence of activities such as following can be difficult to confirm. The final significant difference reported by Mullen et al. concerned sui-

cidental rumination, with 11 (61%) of the 18 false victims making it known that they had contemplated committing suicide as opposed to 24 (24%) of the 100 genuine claimants.

According to Mohandie et al. (1998), false victims of stalking are quicker to acknowledge themselves as victims than are genuine victims and will enlist the help of others, including the police, at an earlier stage. Authentic victims, by contrast, try not to draw attention to themselves and generally do not admit that they are being stalked until much later in the process. False claimants are also more likely to report incidents following a significant life stressor or after hearing about a similar crime that has received major media publicity. Again, the authors suggest that false victims are unable to provide detail that may be substantiated or which can offer sound investigative leads. That is, although they may describe what the stalker was wearing or what type of car he or she drove, they cannot describe the stalker's physical features or the car license plate.

The current article seeks to identify the nature and extent of false reports found within two samples of stalking victims. One sample of stalking victims had identified themselves as such to a London-based charity that provides support and advice on matters of personal safety in the United Kingdom, and the other sample of self-proclaimed victims had identified themselves to a similar foundation in the Netherlands. The present work investigates whether the subtypes of false stalking victims described by Pathé et al. (1999) may be identified within these nonclinical samples. In addition, it will be examined whether our genuine and false reports differ in respect of reported stalker and victim demographic characteristics, the alleged relationship between stalker and victim, the duration of stalking, the stalking behaviors described, reported threats or attacks, and accounts of contemplated or attempted suicide.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The original sample consisted of 357 participants who perceived themselves as stalking victims and who had contacted the Dutch Anti-Stalking Foundation or the London-based Suzy Lamplugh Trust. All

respondents came from a wide cross-section of the Dutch, British, and Northern Irish communities, but it cannot be assumed that they were representative of all stalking victims in the population, as all 357 were self-defined victims of stalking. In the Dutch sample, 23 out of 262 cases were considered to be false reports of stalking (9%). In the U.K. sample, 17 out of 95 stalking cases were considered to be false reports of stalking (18%). Eight cases were deleted from the analyses because it could not be established whether they were true or false reports. Thus, the final sample consisted of 40 determined false reports of stalking and 309 determined genuine reports of stalking.

MATERIALS

In the Dutch study, features of stalking behavior were explored using a questionnaire that was constructed on the basis of questionnaires developed by Pathé and Mullen (1997) and Wright et al. (1996). The U.K. survey questionnaire consisted of specifically constructed questions about stalking behaviors. The 46-item U.K. survey questionnaire explored basic epidemiological data for the victim and, when known, for the stalker; any prior relationship between victim and stalker; the duration and frequency of the harassment; the nature and course of the stalking; physical locations of contact; possible stalker motives; specific behavior of the stalking offender; the reaction of the victim; the response of the authorities and its perceived impact, and finally, sources of support available for victims. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were provided with several blank sheets and were invited to add any further information not included in the questionnaire. It was constructed to examine the experiences of British stalking victims in a previous investigation.

Both questionnaires contained closed-ended questions concerning whether victims had been subjected to unwanted telephone calls, letters, watching, following, destruction or theft of property, direct unwanted approaches, and/or assaults. In addition, both questionnaires contained questions on the frequency of stalking, the duration of stalking, cessation of stalking, changes in frequency of stalking over time, contacts with the police, and the previous relationship between the victim and his or her stalker. Furthermore, both questionnaires contained questions about the victim's present age and employment

and questions about the victim's knowledge of the stalker's age and employment. In addition to these shared variables, the U.K. questionnaire investigated whether or not familial and other associates of both victim and stalker had been involved. The Dutch questionnaire contained a question about whether the victim had sought any help or advice from a health care professional (the reason for seeking help was not stated) as well as the General Health Questionnaire 28-item version (GHQ-28) (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979), which included a question about suicidal thoughts ("Have you recently found that the idea of taking your own life kept coming into your mind?"). For a fuller description of the Dutch questionnaire and the scoring method for the GHQ-28, see Blaauw, Winkel, Arensman, Sheridan, and Freeve (2002); and for more details on the U.K. instrument, see Sheridan, Davies, and Boon (2001a).

PROCEDURE

By mediation of the Dutch Anti Stalking Foundation (SAS), a Dutch victim sample was obtained by contacting all 470 persons who were registered as victims at this foundation. The SAS strived toward a public recognition of stalking as a public health issue and the criminalization of stalking behaviors by means of providing victim support and presenting information to the public. A self-report questionnaire was sent to the victims in March 1998. A total of 266 victims returned the questionnaire by mail to the researchers (57% response rate). Four of these questionnaires were excluded from the sample because of too many missing data on the variables of interest.

A U.K. victim sample was obtained from the London-based Suzy Lamplugh Trust, a charity concerned with the promotion of personal safety. When persons approached the Trust during 1998 to complain of being stalked, the Trust staff sent them a questionnaire to complete. A total of 95 individuals returned the questionnaire to the researchers. Because it is unknown how many persons approached the Trust during 1998 and whether all of them received a questionnaire, the response rate is unknown.

Both the U.K. and Dutch completed questionnaires were examined by three external raters, all chartered psychologists, who were asked to independently judge whether any of the cases constituted false

reports of stalking. No predefined instructions were given concerning what the raters should pay attention to; judgments were independent and subjective. After all judgments were obtained, final decisions were made about the veracity of the cases. Cases were considered false reports of stalking when they were independently considered to be false by all three raters. Cases that were considered to be false by none of the three raters were considered to be genuine claims of stalking. Eight cases were excluded from the sample because raters did not unanimously consider them to be false (four from the Dutch sample and four from the U.K. sample). After all cases were categorized as true or false reports, the U.K. and Dutch datasets were collapsed into one dataset, and the content of the false cases was assessed in terms of Pathé et al.'s (1999) taxonomy of false claimants. All cases were placed into one of Pathé et al.'s subcategories—stalker-victim reversal, delusional, previously stalked, factitious, and malingerer.

IDENTIFYING SUBTYPES OF FALSE REPORTS OF STALKING

Of the 40 determined false reports of stalking, 28 (70%) were partitioned as delusional cases, eight (20%) as factitious victims, three (7.5%) as cases of false revictimization, and one (2.5%) as a victim reversal. Although Pathé et al. (1999) constructed a five-fold false-victim typology, the current work only identified four of their subtypes and found no malingerers. Four examples of our cases will be described below to illustrate both the subtypes themselves (see also Mullen et al., 2000) and also the variety of false stalking reports that may be encountered.

Delusional subtype. Ms. P, a 41-year-old disabled female, claimed that she had been stalked by a local restaurant owner and his associates over the preceding 4 years. She said that her threat of legal action following the restaurant owner's indecent suggestions had triggered the harassment. Ms. P explained that because the restaurant owner was frightened by this threat, he organized at least 50 local families to stalk her around the clock to ensure that she was not defaming him or his restaurant. The restaurant owner was a Muslim, and Ms. P believed that he was being aided by all other Muslims in the world, as well as by most local men, women, and dogs. Furthermore, she claimed to have

proof that the police, security officers, telephone company workers, and many more utility operatives were not as they seemed, but rather, they were associates of her stalker. She felt that the only solution to her problems would be for her to tap the restaurant owner's home telephone line to obtain evidence that he was hiring "millions of followers" to stalk her.

Revictimization subtype. Ms. B, a 49-year-old teacher, lived with her 17-year-old daughter. After Ms. B obtained a divorce from the father of her daughter, she received daily letters and telephone calls from him. He also followed and watched her on a regular basis and was occasionally abusive toward her. The police became involved in the case, and a restraining order was granted. Ms. B did not hear from her ex-husband again. Two years later, however, she noticed that her daughter was receiving letters and telephone calls from her father. The letters arrived approximately once every 2 months, and the telephone calls were less frequent. The content of these communications was friendly and mundane. Ms. B, however, felt that the stalking had resumed and immediately sought a legal solution. She was surprised and upset when the police refused to take action.

Reversal subtype. A 21-year-old female student, Ms. M, made advances toward one of her tutors, a 37-year-old married man. When these were rebuffed, she launched a harassment campaign against him that led to her being arrested on several occasions. Whenever she was arrested, she would make counterallegations of stalking, providing the police with conflicting scenarios and an initially confusing case. Whenever Ms. M saw her tutor in public places, she would make loud rebuttals and beg him to stop harassing her. On one occasion, Ms. M arrived at his home and assaulted her tutor when he answered the door. She then claimed that he had assaulted himself. Throughout, the tutor's wife defended him and provided witness statements. Ms. M was never able to substantiate her allegations, with telephone and other records refuting her claims.

Factitious subtype. Mr. G, an unmarried 66-year-old former nurse, claimed he was being stalked by an unknown male for unknown reasons. He said that he had been damaged both mentally and physically

but had never seen his stalker, because the stalker had pursued his campaign in a subtle manner, and no evidence of any nature had ever been left. Despite claiming that his stalker had targeted him for more than 22 years, Mr. G had never before mentioned it to anyone, saying that he felt he must do so now as he was becoming hysterical. Mr. G was adamant that he was telling the truth, although it has never been suggested otherwise. In an upbeat, 17-line personal statement, Mr. G mentioned five times that he had never been a liar, and he also stated that he did not really mind if no one believed him as he was use to dealing with personal problems by himself.

RESULTS

VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS

In the present sample, no significant difference was found for gender; however, the majority of both false ($n = 35, 88\%$) and genuine ($n = 278, 90\%$) victims were female. There were also no differences found between the reported marital status (including actual and de facto relationships) of false ($n = 10, 25\%$) and genuine ($n = 83, 27\%$) victims. However, those judged to have made false reports were generally older ($M = 49.0$ years, $SD = 10.6$ years) than were genuine victims ($M = 41.3$ years, $SD = 10.8$ years), $t(344) = 4.04, p < .001$. In addition, false claimants ($n = 24, 60\%$) were more often unemployed than were genuine victims ($n = 114, 37\%$), $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 295) = 6.38, p < .05$.

STALKER CHARACTERISTICS

No differences were found between false ($n = 4, 11\%$) and genuine ($n = 33, 10\%$) reports with respect to whether their stalker was described as female ($n = 12, 36\%$) or unemployed ($n = 128, 47\%$), but in 45 cases, the victims stated that they did not know whether or not their stalker was employed. The stalkers in those reports judged as false were, however, reported to be generally older ($M = 50.5$ years, $SD = 12.1$ years) than those described by genuine victims ($M = 43.5$ years, $SD = 11.3$ years), $t(332) = 3.26, p < .001$. Notably, across the entire sample, victim and reported stalker age had a positive relationship, $r = .54, p < .001$. In regard to stalker-victim prior relationship,

false victims ($n = 8$, 21%) more often reported that their stalker was a stranger than did genuine victims ($n = 21$, 6%), $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 344) = 9.75, p < .01$.

FEATURES OF STALKING

With regard to the duration of stalking, false reports of stalking detailed significantly longer stalking episodes ($M = 80.9$ months, $SD = 110.8$ months) than did genuine reports ($M = 44.0$ months, $SD = 54.6$ months), $t(340) = 2.08, p < .05$. False reports ($n = 14$, 35%) were more likely to describe stalking periods lasting more than 5 years than were genuine reports ($n = 68$, 22%), $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 344) = 3.50, p < .05$. As can be seen in Table 1, similar rates of unwanted telephone calls, unwanted letters, following, watching, trespassing, and property damage were reported for the two groups of victims. However, false victims reported physical assaults, unwanted approach, and threats or attacks against friends or family significantly less often than did genuine victims.

SEEKING HELP, PSYCHOPATHOLOGY, AND SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR

As can be seen in Table 2, no differences were found between false ($n = 35$, 88%) and genuine reports ($n = 281$, 91%) with respect to whether the stalking had been reported to the police. In addition, no differences were found between false ($n = 27$, 67%) and genuine ($n = 210$, 68%) reports with respect to whether victims had sought help from a mental health care professional. Furthermore, there was not a significant difference between false ($n = 12$, 30%) and genuine ($n = 80$, 26%) victims with respect to their reports of suicidal rumination and reported symptoms of psychopathology on the GHQ-28 ($M = 12.19, SD = 9.47$ for false victims and $M = 13.75, SD = 9.05$ for genuine victims).

DISCUSSION

In the present study, 11.5% of the cases were considered to be false reports of stalking ($n = 23$, 9% in the Dutch study and $n = 17$,

TABLE 1: Stalking Behaviors Reported by False Claimants and Genuine Victims (%)

	<i>False Claimants</i>	<i>Genuine Victims</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Receiving telephone calls	83	86	<i>ns</i>
Receiving letters	38	50	<i>ns</i>
Assault	25	54	$\chi^2(df = 1, N = 349) = 12.22, p < .001$
Following	79	77	<i>ns</i>
Watching	85	78	<i>ns</i>
Unwanted approach	68	88	$\chi^2(df = 1, N = 336) = 11.02, p < .001$
Trespassing	48	50	<i>ns</i>
Theft/damage of property	63	71	<i>ns</i>
Threats or attacks against third parties	6	49	$\chi^2(df = 1, N = 93) = 10.53, p < .005$

Note. $N = 349$; false claimants, $n = 40$; genuine victims, $n = 309$.

TABLE 2: Additional Measures Employed Solely in the Dutch Sample (%)

	<i>False Claimants ($n = 23$)</i>	<i>Genuine Victims ($n = 239$)</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Reported stalking to the police	88	91	<i>ns</i>
Sought help from a mental health professional	67	68	<i>ns</i>
Reported suicidal thoughts	30	26	<i>ns</i>
Evidence of psychopathology as recorded by the GHQ-28	$M = 12.19,$ $SD = 9.4$	$M = 13.75,$ $SD = 9.05$	<i>ns</i>

Note. GHQ-28 = General Health Questionnaire 28-item version.

19% in the U.K. study). The majority (70%) of these false reports were made by delusional individuals. The next largest group of false reports were made by factitious victims ($n = 8, 20\%$), followed by reports of false revictimization ($n = 3, 7.5\%$). Only one case (2.5%) was a stalker-victim reversal, and there were no malingerers found. These findings are quite similar to those obtained from an Australian victim sample (Mullen et al., 2000) in which delusional cases were also the largest group (50%), and factitious victims and cases of false revictimization formed a similar percentage of all false reports (28%

combined). However, in the Australian study, 3 out of 18 false claimants were stalker-victim reversals, and one was a malingerer. Taken together, results from the present study and the Australian study suggest that delusions are the primary underlying cause of false reports of stalking in victim samples. The majority of false reports found in these works were therefore likely to represent false beliefs or perceptions, rather than asserted attempts to mislead. Similarly, in cases of false revictimization, reports are not initiated by persons who set out to deliberately misinform authorities for personal gain.

Zona et al. (1996) examined cases of stalker-victim reversal that had been reported to the police, finding that these represented 2% of reported allegations. The current work, which is classifying cases on the basis of written statements and questionnaire responses obtained via victim support organizations, found an 11.5% false-reporting rate. It is clear that the various reported methods of identifying both intentionally false stalking claims and false perceptions of stalking victimization cannot adequately provide reliable prevalence rates. Rather, rates of false reporting will likely vary according to the nature of the sample (e.g., clinical, criminal, victim) and the definition of stalking provided, whether it be a legal definition or otherwise. As such, all current estimates of the prevalence of false stalking reports must be treated with extreme caution.

It is more likely that a stalking case will be identified as false when the account offered is comparatively incoherent and inconsistent than when it is coherent and consistent. Hence, on the basis of limited material, it is easier to identify delusional cases than cases involving malingering, victim-reversal, false revictimization, or factitious victims. Mullen et al. (2000) had an enhanced possibility of obtaining additional information from their victim sample as they identified false cases of stalking on the basis of therapeutic sessions. It is not, then, surprising that they found a somewhat lower percentage of delusional cases (50%) and a higher percentage of other types of false claims than did the present study. The police are able to classify cases on the basis of even more extensive information as they can also seek corroborative evidence (via, for instance, footprints under windows, telephone records) and interview potential witnesses or the victim's family. As such, a different distribution of types of false claims may be expected in a sample of police reports. However, the police usually

lack sufficient resources to pay great amounts of attention to individual reports of stalking. Furthermore, even specially trained professionals, such as mental health professionals, have difficulties with the detection of malingering and deception in clinical and forensic cases (e.g., see Shapiro, 1993). When these points are combined with the fact that corroborative evidence is not always present even in genuine stalking cases, it is suggested that the police too will have difficulties in identifying cases involving malingering, victim-reversal, false revictimization, factitious victims, and perhaps even delusional cases.

The current work may be said to carry a flaw concerning the procedure by which false reports were identified as such. After all, the veracity of accounts was based on an inspection of completed questionnaires and written statements provided by victims, and no criteria were given for the categorization of cases. Accounts were also not counterchecked with police reports or with indications that criminal justice responses resulted from complaints lodged with the police. However, police reports are hardly an indication of the veracity of a case because the police have a duty to file all allegations of criminal behavior and because large proportions of genuine victims and false claimants would appear to report to the police. In addition, progress through the criminal justice system is highly dependent on the degree to which evidence can be found against a stalker (leading to the acquittal of many genuine stalking cases), and public prosecutors and judges are also known to make mistakes. As such, the current work's reliance on three raters, who made their judgments independently of each other, and considering a case to be a false report only on the basis of unanimous decisions may be viewed as a reasonably robust procedure. It may also be argued that the police and public prosecutors (and also the general public) make their decisions concerning the veracity of cases on a similar basis. Nonetheless, as outlined above, a sole reliance on statements provided by victims of stalking may have led to an overrepresentation of delusional cases, given that they are the easiest to identify, and to an underrepresentation of malingering and factitious cases, given that they are more difficult to identify. Future studies could make use of corroborative evidence.

The present work found no differences between false and genuine reports with regard to levels of victim psychopathology or claims of suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, no differences were seen between

true and false reports with regard to the victim's gender or marital status and the stalker's gender or employment. Finally, no differences were found with regard to the reporting of unwanted telephone calls, unwanted letters, following, watching, trespassing, and property damage. Conversely, the present study found both false victims and their "stalkers" to be older than genuine victims and stalkers and false victims to be more often unemployed. False claimants were also more likely to report that their stalker was a stranger than were genuine victims. With regard to features of stalking, false claimants reported longer stalking episodes but were less likely to describe physical assaults, unwanted approaches, and threats or attacks against a third party. In the Australian study, Mullen et al. (2000) reported dissimilar findings with regard to the victim's age (no age difference found), the victim's marital status (false claimants were less often married), the victim's employment (no difference found), the relationship with the stalker (no difference reported), the duration of stalking (no difference found), the receipt of unwanted letters (false claimants received fewer), and the reporting of suicidal ruminations (false claimants reported higher levels). These differences between the present study and Mullen et al.'s study can perhaps be understood via sampling differences. Mullen et al.'s sample attended a clinic, and the present sample was obtained from charitable foundations. Furthermore, Mullen et al.'s false victim sample consisted of only 18 false claimants, whereas the present sample comprised 40 false claimants; thus, power issues may provide some explanation for differences in findings. However, in both the present work and Mullen et al.'s study, disparities between true and false victims are rarely significant, and even when they are, they do not fall into mutually exclusive groupings. Hence, it would appear that attempts to identify false claimants solely on the basis of mental health indicators, their demographic characteristics, their relationship with the stalker, described stalker demographics, or via reported characteristics of the stalking process may not be considered as reliable.

What can be concluded? First, it appears that a proportion of stalking claims are false, but the actual proportion is unknown and is likely to vary widely between samples. Prevalence estimates will be further confounded by the myriad difficulties inherent to defining stalking, a nebulous phenomenon. Second, it is evident that many false reports of

stalking are made by individuals with a psychiatric disorder. Given the fact that delusional cases were not included in Zona et al.'s (1996) study, it might appear that the police are quite capable of identifying delusional cases of stalking. There is reason to believe that this is not necessarily true, however. For instance, it is known that the police do not always detect people who, because of mental disorder or disability, confess to crimes they did not commit (e.g., see McMahon, 1995). Of course, deciding about the veracity of stalking cases on the basis of the presence or absence of symptoms of psychopathology in the victim is problematic because many genuine victims of stalking also suffer from psychiatric disorders (see Blaauw et al., 2002; Davis, Coker, & Sanderson, in press; Pathé & Mullen, 1997). What can be concluded is that a proportion of those who make false reports of stalking have various psychiatric needs and should be referred to an appropriate agency by the police and victim support groups. To this end, legal authorities and victim service providers should be made aware that the majority of false stalking reports may be lodged by individuals who require professional support, rather than those who may be viewed as wasting resources.

The third conclusion that may be reached is that it seems impossible to identify false claimants on any basis other than their story. False reports appear to differ from genuine reports on a number of characteristics, but these differences are minor and do not represent mutually exclusive groupings. In addition, there exist cases involving genuine victims where no corroborative evidence is available—for instance, in cases where the stalker is careful and leaves no evidence (e.g., see Boon & Sheridan's [2001] description of the sadistic stalker). Fourth, the present work appears to support the typology of false victims proposed by Pathé et al. (1999). With the exception of the malingerer subtype, the other four categories were identified in two European samples. All these findings lead to the main conclusion that police officers and victim support agencies should be aware not only that some reports of stalking may be false but also that the motivations of those who make false reports may differ. Counterallegations of stalking, for instance, require careful handling so that the real culprit is identified, and delusional and false revictimization cases, in particular, may require supportive intervention. Ultimately, the current knowledge would suggest that it is for investigating authorities to decide whether

a stalking case is true or false on a case-by-case basis. What is more important, however, is the recognition that the vast majority of reports made by stalking victims will be genuine and that stalking can have shattering effects on its victims.

REFERENCES

- Blaauw, E., Winkel, F. W., Arensman, E., Sheridan, L., & Freeve, A. (2002). The toll of stalking: The relationship between features of stalking and psychopathology of victims. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 17*, 50-63.
- Boon, J. C. W., & Sheridan, L. (2001). Stalker typologies: A law enforcement perspective. *Journal of Threat Assessment, 1*, 75-97.
- Budd, T., & Mattinson, J. (2000). *The extent and nature of stalking: Findings from the 1998 British Crime Survey*. London: Home Office.
- Davis, K. E., Coker, A. L., & Sanderson, M. (in press). Physical and mental health effects of being stalked for men and women.
- Fremouw, W. J., Westrup, D., & Pennypacker, J. (1997). Stalking on campus: The prevalence and strategies of coping with stalking. *Journal of Forensic Sciences, 42*, 666-669.
- Goldberg, D. P., & Hillier, V. F. (1979). A scaled version of the General Health Questionnaire. *Psychological Medicine, 9*, 139-145.
- Lyon, D. R., & Douglas, K. S. (in press). *Violence against educators: The British Columbia Teacher's Federal Violence Survey*. Vancouver, Canada: BCTF.
- Malsch, M., Visscher, M., & Blaauw, E. (2002). *Stalking van bekende personen* [Stalking of celebrities]. Den Haag: Boom.
- McFarlane, J. M., Campbell, J. C., Wilt, S., Sachs, C. J., Ulrich, Y., & Xu, X. (1999). Stalking and intimate partner femicide. *Homicide Studies, 3*, 300-316.
- McMahon, M. (1995). False confessions and police deception: The interrogation, incarceration and release of an innocent veteran. *American Journal of Forensic Psychology, 13*, 5-43.
- Mohandie, K., Hatcher, C., & Raymond, D. (1998). False victimization syndromes in stalking. In J. R. Meloy (Ed.), *The psychology of stalking: Clinical and forensic perspectives* (pp. 225-256). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Mullen, P. E., Pathé, M., & Purcell, R. (2000). *Stalkers and their victims*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Pathé, M., & Mullen, P. E. (1997). The impact of stalkers on their victims. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 170*, 12-17.
- Pathé, M., Mullen, P. E., & Purcell, R. (1999). Stalking: False claims of victimisation. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 174*, 170-172.
- Romans, J. S. C., Hays, J. R., & White, T. K. (1996). Stalking and related behaviors experienced by counseling center staff members from current or former clients. *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice, 27*, 595.
- Shapiro, D. L. (1993). Detection of malingering and deception. In L. S. Knapp & T. L. Thomas (Eds.), *Innovations in clinical practice: A source book* (Vol. 12, pp. 5-13). Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press/Professional Resource Exchange.
- Sheridan, L., & Davies, G. M. (2001). Stalking: The elusive crime. *Legal and Criminological Psychology, 6*, 133-147.

- Sheridan, L., Davies, G. M., & Boon, J. C. W. (2001a). The course and nature of stalking: A victim perspective. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, 40*, 215-234.
- Sheridan, L., Davies, G. M., & Boon, J. C. W. (2001b). Stalking: Perceptions and prevalence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 16*, 151-167.
- Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (1998). *Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Wright, J. A., Burgess, A. G., Burgess, A. W., Laszlo, A. T., McCrary, G. O., & Douglas, J. E. (1996). A typology of interpersonal stalking. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 11*, 487-502.
- Zona, M. A., Lane, J., & Moore, M. (1996). *The psychology and behaviour of stalkers*. Unpublished paper presented at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting, Nashville, TN.

Request Permission or Order Reprints Instantly

Interested in copying, sharing, or the repurposing of this article? U.S. copyright law, in most cases, directs you to first get permission from the article's rightsholder before using their content.

To lawfully obtain permission to reuse, or to order reprints of this article quickly and efficiently, click on the "Request Permission/ Order Reprints" link below and follow the instructions. For information on Fair Use limitations of U.S. copyright law, please visit [Stamford University Libraries](#), or for guidelines on Fair Use in the Classroom, please refer to [The Association of American Publishers' \(AAP\)](#).

All information and materials related to SAGE Publications are protected by the copyright laws of the United States and other countries. SAGE Publications and the SAGE logo are registered trademarks of SAGE Publications. Copyright © 2003, Sage Publications, all rights reserved. Mention of other publishers, titles or services may be registered trademarks of their respective companies. Please refer to our user help pages for more details: <http://www.sagepub.com/cc/faq/SageFAQ.htm>

[Request Permissions / Order Reprints](#)