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Effects of and coping strategies for stalking victimisation in Spain: Consequences for its criminalisation

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Abstract

A well-developed understanding of how stalking affects victims and of the coping strategies they use can be useful in the current context of its incrimination in several western European countries. To explore these themes a study was conducted with a subsample of 152 young adult victims obtained from a sample of 1,162 Spanish university students. The current study examines the psychological consequences of stalking behaviours for victims and the strategies they used to stop stalking. These findings show that the most prevalent emotional responses in victims, strongly influenced by the previous victim-offender relationship, were anger (71.1%), annoyance (71.1%) and fear (51.3%). The majority of self-identified victims had also experienced some sort of adverse psychological consequence (81.6%), albeit of lower intensity and significantly related to the victim's sex. Besides, virtually all the victims (97.4%) took some coping measures, although reporting the incident was not usual, as only 19.1% of the cases of stalking were brought to the attention of the police.

Keywords

Stalking, victimisation, effects, emotional responses, coping strategies

1. Introduction

Although there is no one way to define stalking, when analysing the definitions offered by some authors (Meloy and Gothard, 1995; Pathé and Mullen, 1997; Westrup, 1998; Royakkers, 2000), despite their differences, it can be concluded that there are three common elements in all of them. Firstly, this phenomenon is described as a series of intrusive acts constituting a pattern of conduct, which can consist of a wide variety of behaviours (ranging from telephone calls to street persecution, among other possibilities). However, there is no consensus as to their duration or frequency. The second element indicates that this conduct must have been undertaken without the consent of the victim. Finally, the behaviour must be of sufficient entity to produce some sort of alteration in the victim, such as the feeling of fear or at least a certain

restlessness. In accordance with what has been said, stalking can be defined as an ‘insidious and unwanted course of conduct that can cause certain effects in the victim, such as fear or unease’ (Villacampa, 2009).

Stalking was criminalised in Spain as part of the 2015 reform of the Criminal Code, which included it as a crime against the freedom to act. By classifying stalking as a crime, Spain fulfilled the mandate of criminalisation contained in the 2011 Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe and became one of the last western European countries to include it in its criminal code, following Italy (2009), Sweden (2011), the United Kingdom (2012) and Portugal (2015). Unlike in some of the countries that criminalised stalking before, this process was not preceded by an empirical analysis to determine the prevalence of stalking victimisation in Spain. The 1998 British Crime Survey (Budd and Mattinson, 1998; Office for National Statistics, 2015) provided data on stalking in England and Wales, as did similar national studies conducted prior to its criminalisation in Germany (Hoffmann, 2006), Italy (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2007), Austria (Freidl et al., 2011), the Netherlands (Van der Aa, 2010), Sweden (Dovelius, Öberg and Holmberg, 2006), Norway (Narud, Friestad and Dahl 2014) and Portugal (Matos et al., 2011). In Spain, except for one study on the prevalence and characteristics of stalking in a sample of female university students (Bodelón, Igareda and Casas, 2012; Feltes et al., 2012), data on the prevalence of stalking amongst women in the country did not become available until the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) conducted its Violence Against Women survey in 2015 (FRA, 2015).

It should be noted that such studies among the general population report a prevalence of victimisation of between 7% and 16% in women and between 2% and 6% in men (Baum, et al., 2009; Matos et al., 2011; Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998). Specifically, in relation to the Spanish sample analysed by the FRA, the victimisation rate is 11% (FRA, 2014). These studies also show that the population group most victimized by the phenomenon is women under the age of 30 (Baum et al., 2009; FRA, 2014; Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998). As a result of this higher incidence of stalking in young people, numerous studies have analysed both the prevalence and the dynamics of these behaviours in samples consisting only of university students, resulting in notably higher rates of victimisation than those perceived in the general population. Specifically, in research with samples of university students, these percentages are

between 9.2% and 35.2% in women and 2% and 35% in men (Bjerregaard, 2000; Feltes et al., 2012; National Union of Students, 2011), with no substantial difference in the incidence of gender-based victimisation, contrary to the general population studies.

Determining the prevalence of stalking victimisation can offer insight into the incidence of the phenomenon and the adequacy of its inclusion in the Criminal Code as a criminal behaviour. However, a greater understanding of how being targeted by such behaviours affects victims and how they cope with these situations is also an appropriate approach, both to determine the merits of punishment in these processes and to provide guidelines for their proper classification. Aside from the findings of the FRA survey regarding the sample of women in Spain and those of the study also conducted with a sample consisting exclusively of female university students (Bodelón, Igareda and Casas, 2012), there are no data on this issue in Spain.

Where quantitative empirical studies on stalking have been conducted more systematically, they show that stalking victims suffer negative consequences on a physical, psychological, social and financial level (e.g. Brewster, 2003; Korkodeilou, 2017; Logan et al., 2007). However, focusing on psychological effects, quantitative empirical studies on stalking in the general population have shown that most stalking victims are emotionally affected by stalking behaviours (e.g. Baum et al., 2009; Budd and Mattinson, 2000; Dovelius, Öberg and Holmberg, 2006; FRA, 2014; Matos et al., 2011; Podaná and Imříšková, 2016; Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998), a finding replicated by studies conducted with university students (e.g. Amar, 2007; Bjerregaard, 2000; Bodelón, Igareda and Casas, 2012; Feltes et al., 2012; National Union of Students, 2011; Spitzberg et al., 1998; Westrup et al., 1999).

In that sense, specific emerging literature reports negative impacts in mental health and well-being of stalking victims such as heightened anxiety levels, vivid flashbacks, persistent nausea (Pathé and Mullen, 1997), post-traumatic stress symptomatology (Purcell, Pathé and Mullen, 2005) and global well-being consequences (Worsley et al., 2017). In a similar sense, Khuener et al. (2007) report some mental health problems among stalking victims such as depression or panic disorders, highlighting that stalking involves a serious threat for the health of the victim. However, the degree to which victims are affected depending on variables such as their relationship with the offender, the type of behaviour experienced or the stalking dynamic has not yet been determined.

As for coping strategies, to date, both general population studies (e.g. Baum et al. 2009; Budd and Mattinson, 2000; Dovelius, Öberg and Holmberg, 2006; FRA, 2014; Matos et al., 2011; Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998) and studies with university students (e.g. Amar and Alexy, 2010; Buhi, Clayton and Surrency, 2008; Fisher et al., 2000; Fremouw, Westrup and Pennypacker, 1997; Spitzberg et al., 1998) have shown that a wide range of coping strategies are used to deter perpetrators and manage the negative effects of unwanted pursuit. Some authors have separated coping strategies into five categories: moving inward, moving outward, moving away, moving toward and moving against (Cupach and Spitzberg, 2004). However, recent studies have divided coping strategies into formal responses and informal responses (Geistman et al., 2013), into internal responses and external responses (Johansen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, 2016) or into restrictive behavioural approaches (e.g. avoiding and ignoring the perpetrator) and non-restrictive approaches (e.g. confrontational coping, support-seeking, and cognitive reframing) (Worsley et al., 2017). These coping strategies mainly consist in the making of minor changes to the victim's daily life in order to make it harder for the stalker to continue the stalking behaviours and avoidance manoeuvres, followed by asking family and friends for help. More drastic coping measures, such as moving, were used only in the most serious cases. These studies have also found that, although the victims of these behaviours do tend to tell third parties about them, the situation is less likely to be reported to the police and that the low incidence of such reports is clearly higher in the general population than amongst young adults or university students (e.g. Baum et al., 2009; Bodelón, Igareda and Casas, 2012; Budd and Mattinson, 2000; Dutton and Winstead, 2011; Feltes et al., 2012; FRA, 2014; National Union of Students, 2011; Stenning, Mitra-Kahn and Gunby, 2012; Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998).

Finally, moving onto cyberstalking literature, it can be said that there are strong similarities between traditional stalking victims and individuals stalked by electronic means in terms of their psychological and emotional responses (Sheridan and Grant, 2007). However, some studies reported that individuals stalked by electronic means employed more self-protective coping strategies, such as changing their e-mail address or their usual activities (Nobles et al., 2014).

Given the virtual lack of quantitative analyses of these issues with mixed population samples in Spain, especially amongst young people, the group most likely to be victimised by stalking, the present study was undertaken with a mixed sample of

university students, consistent with the samples used by earlier studies, which facilitates comparisons with studies from other countries. The aim was twofold: first, to determine the effects of stalking behaviours on the victims, in terms of both their emotional responses and the psychological consequences; and, second, to determine what coping strategies the victims had used to deal with the situation, placing special emphasis on telling someone about the stalking and reporting it to the police as two specific manifestations thereof. All of the above with the aim of drawing certain conclusions regarding the configuration of the Spanish crime of stalking.

2. Methodology

2.1 Description of the method

The sample consisted of 1,162 university students who, at the time the data were collected, were pursuing degrees in law, criminology or private investigation. To obtain a representative sample, the participants were selected from 8 Catalan ($n=626$) and Valencian ($n=536$) universities, yielding a sample that, for a total university student population of 237,426 and 140,171 students respectively, ensured a level of confidence of 95% and a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$.

The data-gathering process, carried out between January and April 2015, was conducted in person at the respondents' universities. Participation was voluntary for all respondents and students were not rewarded for taking part in the survey. The day the questionnaire was completed at each of the selected universities, the researchers administering the paper survey explained the content and purpose of the research to the university students, clearly informing them of its voluntary, anonymous and confidential nature. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with an oral and written definition of stalking matching that indicated at the beginning of this paper. The surveys were handed out to all students attending the lecture. Students were then informed that anyone not wishing to complete the survey could hand it in blank to the researchers at the end of the session. Students were supervised by the researchers themselves to ensure that they completed the questionnaires individually and that anyone unwilling to complete it could do something else. The data were processed using SPSS v. 20 software.

The instrument used in the study consisted of 32 questions divided into two parts. The first part was designed to be answered solely by respondents who self-identified as victims, whilst the second was designed to be answered by the rest of the respondents, whether victims of stalking behaviours who did not self-identify as such or people who had never been targeted by such behaviours.

The first part of the questionnaire, for self-identified victims, included Questions 1 to 16 and was designed to gather data related to the characterisation of the victim's experience (types of stalking behaviours experienced, characteristics of the stalker, duration, frequency, psychological consequences, and coping measures). This part of the questionnaire was based on the content of section H of the *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey* (FRA, 2014), incorporating questions about the effectiveness of both the coping measures in general and the reporting measures in particular. However, one of the most important changes was the decision to distinguish between self-identified victims (respondents who considered themselves to be stalking victims) and researcher-identified victims (respondents who repeatedly suffered at least 1 of the 10 behaviours included on the questionnaire as stalking behaviours, but did not consider themselves victims). To do this, a new question was added to the original version of the questionnaire directly asking participants whether they had been victimised in this way at any point in their life. A second change consisted of the inclusion of two more behaviours on the list of those considered to be forms of stalking by the researchers (buying products or goods or contracting services on the victim's behalf without his or her consent, and inducing a third party to contact the victim without his or her consent), due to their criminalisation as stalking under the Spanish Criminal Code.

In contrast, the second part of the questionnaire, for both researcher-identified victims and non-victims, included the remaining questions (17 to 32) and primarily focused on students' perceptions of two hypothetical stalking scenarios based on research published by Scott, et al., 2014. The results presented here pertain to the processing of the questions in the first part of the survey, on the effects of the victimisation and the coping strategies used by the victims.

2.2 Measurements

As already indicated, this paper presents research results deduced exclusively from people who self-identified as victims, stating that they had suffered some of the

behaviours considered as stalking. In the first part of the questionnaire, the victims' emotional responses were determined based on the following question: 'Thinking about these incidents, have you ever felt any of the following ways?' The respondents could choose one or more of the following options (i.e. multiple responses were allowed): (1) angry, (2) scared, (3) embarrassed/ashamed, (4) guilty, (5) annoyed, (6) other, (7) none of the above.

The psychological consequences were determined based on the victims' own perception through the following question: 'Have you ever experienced any of the following psychological consequences as a result of the incidents?' The multiple-response options were: (1) depression, (2) anxiety, (3) panic attacks, (4) loss of self-confidence, (5) feeling vulnerable, (6) insomnia or difficulties sleeping, (7) difficulties concentrating, (8) difficulties in relationships, (9) other, (10) none of the above.

The victims were also asked what coping measures they had taken to stop the situation through the following question: 'Have you ever done any of the following to put an end to the situation?' The multiple-response options were: (1) taking more precautions, (2) asking family and/or friends for help, (3) taking self-defence measures, (4) moving somewhere else in the same town or city, (5) moving to another town or city, (6) avoiding the offender, (7) talking to a lawyer, (8) interacting with the offender, (9) stopping going to work or school, (10) changing jobs or schools, (11) changing phone number, (12) changing e-mail addresses, (13) reporting the situation to the authorities, (14) none of the above. In addition, the victims were asked whether they believed the measures had been effective in that regard (based on 4 possible responses ranging from 'very' to 'not at all').

With regard to telling others about the situation, the victims were asked whether they had ever talked with anyone about it. If so, they were also asked what type of relationship they had with the recipient of that information and how effective the disclosure had been in terms of putting an end to the stalking (based on 4 possible answers ranging from 'very' to 'not at all').

Finally, the respondents were explicitly asked whether the police had been aware of the situation. If so, they were further asked whether they had reported it themselves, a third party had reported it, or the police had learned of it on their own. In those cases where the police had been aware of the situation, the victims were also asked about the

effectiveness of the police response (based on 4 possible responses ranging from ‘very’ to ‘not at all’).

2.3 Sample characteristics

The total sample consisted of 1,162 university students – 417 men (35.9%) and 741 women (63.8%) – between the ages of 18 and 54 (\bar{X} = 20.89; SD = 4.026). In all, 92.9% (n = 1,080) were Spanish nationals. A total of 53.9% lived in Catalonia, whilst the remainder (46.1%) lived in the Valencian Community. However, the questions analysed in the present paper were posed solely to those people who self-identified as stalking victims. The sub-sample of self-identified victims consisted of a total of 152 subjects – 122 women and 30 men – with an average age of 21.58 years. In all, 87.5% of the respondents included in this sub-sample were Spanish nationals, and most were studying law (48.7%). The main characteristics of these respondents, as well as some features of the nature of their victimisation, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 here

3. Results

3.1 Emotional responses

With regard to the first aim of the research, in terms of the number of emotional responses experienced by the victims, most victims (66.4%) indicated that they had experienced 2 or 3 emotions as a result of the stalking. The most common emotional responses were anger (71.1%), annoyance (71.1%) and fear (51.3%). In this regard, this study confirmed the findings of previous studies in the general population (Baum et al., 2009; Budd and Mattinson, 2000; FRA, 2014; Matos et al., 2011) and with university students (Feltes et al., 2012) notwithstanding certain differences in the exact percentage of victims experiencing each response.

Although no statistically significant relationship was found between the victim’s sex and emotional responses, contrary to what some studies have indicated (Bjerregaard, 2000; Dovelius, Öberg and Holmberg, 2006), fear and embarrassment and/or shame were more frequently reported by women than men (Figure 1).

Figure 1 here

In contrast, the stalker's sex was not significant in explaining the emotional responses, as previous research has shown (Aucoin, 2005).

The relationship between the victim and the offender was influential in this respect. Fear was clearly correlated with the perpetration of the stalking behaviours by strangers (70.4%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.77$; $\rho = .029$, $\Phi = .177$) or people whose identity the victim could not ascertain (100%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.91$; $\rho = .027$, $\Phi = .180$). The present findings contradict those of other studies that have found that the level of fear increases as the relationship between the victim and offender grows closer (Aucoin, 2005; Dovelius, Öberg and Holmberg, 2006).

The type of behaviour the victim was targeted by was also relevant in explaining the emotional response. Anger was strongly related to behaviours such as damaging property (85% of the people victimised by this behaviour reported feeling angry) and having a third party contact the victim (81.8%), although the relationship between these variables was not statistically significant. Annoyance was associated with behaviours such as communication between a third party and the victim (88.6%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 9.31$; $\rho = .002$, $\Phi = .247$), the posting of offensive or threatening comments on the Internet (86%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.55$; $\rho = .010$, $\Phi = .208$) or the making of offensive, threatening or silent phone calls (80.4%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 3.73$; $\rho = .050$, $\Phi = .157$). Guilt was not associated with any particular behaviour.

Fear, in contrast, was significantly associated with behaviours involving physical proximity to the victim ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 15.17$; $\rho < .001$, $\Phi = .316$). Specifically, more than two thirds (67.1%) of those victims whose stalkers had waited for them outside their home, workplace or school reported feeling fear. Likewise, 66.7% of victims who were deliberately followed around reported having this response ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.62$; $\rho = .010$, $\Phi = .209$). Victims who had been targeted by behaviours involving the physical presence of the stalker were 4.62 times more likely to experience fear than those who had not, which would confirm the findings of previous studies with university students (Bjerregaard, 2000).

Although cyberstalking behaviours – i.e. sending offensive or threatening e-mails, text messages or instant messages; posting offensive comments on the Internet; or sharing private photos or videos on the Internet or by mobile phone – were the most prevalent types, they did not elicit fear. Victims who had been cyberstalked but had not been targeted by behaviours involving the stalker’s physical presence were significantly less likely to experience fear ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 15.59; \rho < .000, \Phi = -.320$), with the percentage falling to 30.4% in such cases. In keeping with the findings of previous research (Podaná and Imříšková, 2016), the duration of the stalking behaviours was also a determinant factor in explaining fear ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 19.48; \rho = .003, \Phi = .358$). When the stalking lasted between 6 months and 1 year, 85.7% of the victims experienced fear, whilst only 33.3% did when it lasted a few days.

3.2 Psychological consequences

Most of the victims (81.6%) reported having suffered psychological consequences. Although the most common consequences were low-intensity (Figure 2), in 17.1% of the cases the consequences were severe (11.8% of the victims suffered depression and 6.6% experienced panic attacks). The number of victims who reported not having suffered psychological consequences was smaller in the present study than in the FRA survey (18.4% vs 43%) (FRA, 2014), although in both cases these consequences were generally mild. The present findings are consistent with those of other studies conducted with university students, according to which the percentage of victims not suffering psychological consequences was between 15% and 19% of the sample (Czapska et al., 2012; Stenning, Mitra-Kahn and Gunby, 2012), suggesting a higher psychological incidence in young adults than in the general population.

Figure 2 here

The psychological consequences were significantly related to the victim’s sex. Whilst 33.3% of the men reported no psychological consequences, only 14.8% of the women did ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 5.63; \rho = .019, \Phi = .191$). The victim’s sex was also linked to the types of psychological consequences experienced. Women were significantly more likely than men to feel vulnerable (38.5% vs 16.7%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 5.11; \rho = .024, \Phi =$

.183) and to lose self-confidence (36.1% vs 16.7%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.15; \rho = .042, \Phi = .165$). Additionally, 100% of those victims who suffered panic attacks were women.

Significant differences were also found based on the stalker's sex. Contrary to what one might expect, those people who had been stalked by a woman were significantly more likely to experience psychological consequences than those stalked by a man or people of both sexes (97.1% = female stalker, 87.5% = stalkers of both sexes, 74.2% = male stalker) ($\chi^2_{(2, N=152)} = 9.58; \rho = .008, \Phi = .251$). However, although it was not statistically significant, the majority of severe psychological consequences occurred with male stalkers (57.7%). In fact, 100% of the victims who suffered panic attacks were stalked by men ($\chi^2_{(2, N=152)} = 6.79; \rho = .034, \Phi = .211$).

The previous relationship between the victim and offender was also a determinant factor in predicting psychological consequences. Victims who had been stalked by people who were very close to them (partners or family members) were significantly more likely to have suffered adverse psychological consequences (89.4%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.74; \rho = .029, \Phi = -.177$). In contrast, only 66.7% of those stalked by strangers suffered such consequences, making them significantly less likely to experience them ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.86; \rho = .028, \Phi = -.179$). Those victims who had been stalked by people very close to them were 2.72 times more likely to have suffered psychological consequences. Furthermore, when there was a close relationship between the victim and the offender, the psychological consequences were more likely to be severe (depression or panic attacks). Thus, such consequences were reported in 45.5% of the cases in which the stalker was a partner ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.72; \rho = .010, \Phi = .210$) and in 50% of the cases in which the stalker was a family member ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.77; \rho = .029, \Phi = .177$).

With regard to the relationship with the type of behaviour the victim was targeted by, behaviours involving physical proximity to the stalker were associated with a greater likelihood of suffering adverse psychological consequences (86.8% of cases) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.13; \rho = .042, \Phi = .165$). Those who had experienced behaviours involving the stalker's physical presence were significantly more likely to suffer panic attacks (90%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.05; \rho = .044, \Phi = .163$). Insomnia was associated with receiving phone calls (50% of victims who received calls suffered it) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.32; \rho = .038, \Phi = .169$). On the other hand, those who had suffered property damage were

significantly more likely to have difficulties concentrating (60%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.86; \rho = .028, \Phi = .179$), anxiety (55%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.25; \rho = .012, \Phi = .203$) and insomnia (50%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 5.76; \rho = .016, \Phi = .195$).

3.3 Coping measures

As for the second objective of the research, regarding coping measures, virtually all victims (97.4%) adopted some strategy to stop the stalking. Specifically, victims took an average of 2.35 measures. In keeping with previous studies (Spitzberg, Nicastro and Cousins, 1998), the more coping strategies the victim had employed, the worse the psychological consequences had been ($\chi^2_{(8, N=152)} = 16.13; \rho = .041, \Phi = .326$). The most frequently used coping strategies were avoiding the stalker, asking family and/or friends for help and engaging the stalker (asking the stalker to stop, confronting him or her, threatening him or her, etc.) (Figure 3). Those entailing considerable changes to the victim's life, such as changing jobs or transferring to another school, ceasing to go to work or school, moving to another town or city, or moving somewhere else in the same city, were less prevalent. This is consistent with previous research amongst university students (Dutton and Winstead, 2011; Fisher, Cullen and Turner, 2000), which has also found that the most frequently used strategies are avoidance, confrontation and seeking support, whilst coping strategies such as moving are used in less than 5% of all cases.

Figure 3 here

The victim's sex was also decisive in this regard. Women were significantly more likely to take more precautions (e.g. take a different route home, change their schedules, etc.) (33.1%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 5.47; \rho = .019, \Phi = .190$) and to ask family and/or friends for help (50.8%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 7.34; \rho = .007, \Phi = .220$), which was consistent with the findings of previous studies with university students (Bjerregaard, 2000). Although the stalker's sex was not relevant, the relationship between the victim and the offender was. Those victims who had been stalked by a former partner did not take self-defence measures in any case ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 3.90; \rho = .048, \Phi = -.160$). These victims were more likely to adopt strategies such as moving to another town or city (8.6%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.25; \rho = .012, \Phi = .203$) or changing their telephone number (17.1%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.68; \rho = .010, \Phi = .209$). When the stalker was a fellow student, the victims were more

likely to transfer to another school (16.3%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 7.02; \rho = .007, \Phi = .219$). In contrast, when the stalker was a stranger, the victim was more likely to take self-defence measures (22.2%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 9.27; \rho = .002, \Phi = .247$) and to stop going to work or school (14.8%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 10.23; \rho = .001, \Phi = .259$). Furthermore, 100% of the victims who had been stalked by more than one stalker had adopted some strategy to end the stalking.

The type of stalking behaviour to which the victim was subjected was also related to the coping strategies used. Victims who had been cyberstalked were significantly more likely to change their e-mail address or stop using the social network used to perpetrate the stalking ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.89; \rho = .009, \Phi = .213$). Victims who had been targeted by behaviours involving the stalker's physical presence were significantly more likely to have taken more decisive measures to end the situation. Those whose stalkers had waited for them outside their homes, workplaces or schools were more likely to ask their family or friends for help (65.2%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 11.71; \rho = .001, \Phi = .277$), take more precautions (35.5%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 5.64; \rho = .018, \Phi = .193$) and report the situation to the authorities (21.1%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.15; \rho = .042, \Phi = .165$). Moreover, 100% of those victims who moved to another town or city ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.11; \rho = .043, \Phi = .164$) and 81.8% of those who changed jobs or schools ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.81; \rho = .028, \Phi = .178$) had been targeted by this type of behaviour. Similarly, victims whose stalkers had deliberately followed them around were more likely to ask friends or family for help (60.4%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.39; \rho = .011, \Phi = .205$), take more precautions (41.7%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 7.67; \rho = .006, \Phi = .225$) and report the situation to the authorities (33.3%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 18.10; \rho < .001, \Phi = .345$).

Emotional responses were a determinant factor in terms of which coping measures were taken. A full 100% of people who moved to another town or city ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 3.90; \rho = .048, \Phi = .160$) and/or stopped going to work or school ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 5.93; \rho = .015, \Phi = .197$) acknowledged having felt scared ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.36; \rho = .037, \Phi = .169$). Moreover, 25.6% of those victims who felt scared reported the situation ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 13.78; \rho < .001, \Phi = .301$). On the other hand, those who felt embarrassed and/or ashamed were significantly more likely to engage the stalker (37.3%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.50; \rho = .011, \Phi = .207$).

The psychological consequences were also a determinant factor in the taking of certain measures. Victims who had suffered depression were significantly more likely to have moved (16.7%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 15.70; \rho < .001, \Phi = .321$), stopped going to work or class (22.2%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 17.99; \rho < .001, \Phi = .344$) or changed their e-mail address or stopped using the social network used to perpetrate the stalking (22.2%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 9.74; \rho = .002, \Phi = .253$). Having suffered insomnia also had a significant influence on the likelihood of reporting the situation (33.3%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 14.97; \rho < .001, \Phi = .314$) and of moving to another town or city (9.5%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 10.76; \rho = .001, \Phi = .266$). Those who had suffered panic attacks were more likely to take precautions (60%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 5.93; \rho = .015, \Phi = .197$), report the situation to the authorities (50%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 10.13; \rho = .001, \Phi = .258$) and take self-defence measures (30%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 7.19; \rho = .007, \Phi = .218$).

3.4 Effectiveness of the coping measures

With regard to the effectiveness of the coping strategies adopted to end the stalking, up to 62.5% of the victims stated they had been somewhat or very effective. The measures perceived to be most effective were asking family and/or friends for help (69.5%) and engaging the stalker (65.7%), in keeping with previous findings (Baum et al., 2009). At the opposite end of the spectrum, taking self-defence measures was only considered to have been effective in 33.3% of the cases.

The perceived effectiveness of the measures was strongly related to the type of relationship between the victim and the offender, but not to the sex of the stalker or the victim. Whilst in virtually all other cases the perceived effectiveness was around 60%, this figure fell to 33.3% in cases where the stalker was a family member, indicating a much lower likelihood of perceived effectiveness in such cases ($\chi^2_{(5, N=152)} = 13.72; \rho = .017, \Phi = -.300$).

3.5 Telling someone about the situation

With regard to telling a third party about the stalking as a specific coping strategy, nearly all victims told someone about it (93.4%). This finding is consistent with those of studies with both the general population (Baum et al., 2009; Budd and Mattinson, 2000;

FRA, 2014) and university students (National Union of Students, 2011; Czapska et al., 2012), which have found that around 80% of victims tell someone about the stalking and, in some cases, percentages as high as that found in the present study (Fisher, Cullen and Turner, 2000; Haugaard and Seri, 2003).

Neither the victim's sex nor the offender's, nor the previous relationship between them, was relevant in explaining the decision to tell someone about the situation. This finding is contrary to those of other studies that have found that women are more likely to explain it (Union of Students in Ireland, 2013). On the other hand, the specific behaviours perpetrated by the stalker were correlated with whether or not the victim told someone about the situation. Victims who had been targeted by behaviours involving the stalker's physical presence were significantly more likely to tell someone about the situation. Some 97.4% of the people whose stalkers had waited for them outside their home, workplace or school ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 3.85; \rho = .050, \Phi = .159$) and 100% of the people who had been deliberately followed around ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.94; \rho = .026, \Phi = .180$) told someone about the stalking. When asked whom they had told about the situation, most victims said they had told friends and/or their parents (Figure 4), corroborating the findings of previous studies with university students (Buhi et al., 2008; Haugaard and Seri, 2003).

Figure 4 here

Although neither the victim's sex nor the stalker's were determinant factors in explaining whom the victim had told about the situation, the previous relationship between them was. In general, the victim talked about the situation with people whose role in relation to the victim was similar to that of the stalker's. When the stalker was a family member, the victims told a parent (83.3%) and/or siblings (83.3%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 12.30; \rho < .001, \Phi = .284$). In 75% of the cases in which the stalker was a friend, the victim told another friend. When the stalker was a former partner, the victims also told their family about it, usually a sibling (37.1%) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 4.56; \rho = .033, \Phi = .173$). On the contrary, when the stalker was a fellow student, the victims did not tell other classmates, but rather their parents (65.1%) or partner (27.9%) ($\chi^2_{(6, N=152)} = 4.22; \rho = .040, \Phi = .167$).

3.6 Effectiveness of telling someone about the situation

Telling someone about the situation was considered somewhat or very effective in ending the situation in more than half the cases (56.6%). The person whom the victim told about the situation influenced the effectiveness of the disclosure. The closer the relationship between that person and the victim, the more effective the disclosure was. It was more effective to tell someone from the victim's inner circle, such as a parent (70.6%) or partner (70.3%), than people with whom the victim's relationship was not as close, such as friends (58.4%), other family members (57.1%), or fellow students or colleagues (50%). However, no further relationship could be established between the effectiveness of telling someone about the situation and the other variables considered in the survey.

3.7 Reporting the situation

As for reporting the situation as a coping strategy, only 19.1% of the cases of stalking were brought to the attention of the police. In those cases that were, it was usually the victim him or herself who reported it (57.3%) (Figure 5). Although the reporting rate was lower than that found for the general population – 26% in Spain (FRA, 2014) – the rate found for the analysed sample was consistent with that found in other studies with university students (Fisher, Cullen and Turner, 2000; National Union of Students, 2011). The literature further confirms that the victim him or herself is the party most likely to report the situation (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998).

Figure 5 here

Neither the victim's sex (male = 16.7%; female = 19.7%) nor the stalker's (male = 19.4%; female = 20%; both = 16.7%) explained the decision to report the situation. However, it was related to the previous relationship between them, as previous research has shown (Dovelius, Öberg and Holmberg, 2006). The cases most likely to be reported were those in which the stalker was the victim's partner (45.5%), followed by those in which it was not known who was carrying out the behaviours (40%), strangers (25.9%) and former partners (22.9%). In contrast, the situation was less likely to be reported when the stalker was a family member (16.7%), an acquaintance (12.9%), a fellow

student (11.6%) or a friend (5%). The number of offenders was also related to the reporting rate. Some 25.6% of cases involving more than one stalker were reported, compared to 15.1% of cases involving only one stalker. Similarly, consistently with previous findings (Scottish Government Social Research, 2014), there was a statistically significant relationship between behaviours involving the stalker's physical presence and reporting the situation ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 5.64; \rho = .018, \Phi = .193$). Thus, 25.3% of victims who had been targeted by such behaviours had decided to report them.

Once again, the duration of the stalking behaviours should be taken into account. The percentage of cases reported increased the longer the stalking lasted. Whilst only 7.4% of those stalked for a few days reported the situation, this figure rose to 33.3% in cases in which the stalking lasted between 6 months and a year. Emotional responses also significantly influenced the decision to report the situation. Victims who experienced fear reported the situation in 29.5% of the cases ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 11.24; \rho = .001, \Phi = .272$). Similarly, those who had suffered panic attacks reported the situation 50% of the time, indicating a significantly higher likelihood of filing a report ($\chi^2_{(1, N=152)} = 6.63; \rho = .010, \Phi = .209$).

3.8 Effectiveness of reporting the situation

Reporting the events was perceived to be very or somewhat effective in almost half the cases (48.5%). However, 21.2% of the victims felt that reporting the stalking had not been effective at all. The effectiveness of reporting the situation was linked to the previous relationship between the victim and the offender. When the offender was the victim's partner or former partner, reporting it was deemed to be effective in 61.3% of the cases. This percentage fell when the stalker was an acquaintance (50%), fellow student (42.8%), stranger (22.2%), friend (0%) or family member (0%). The effectiveness of reporting the situation was also related to the behaviour. Reporting it was considered more effective with behaviours involving the stalker's physical presence ($\chi^2_{(6, N=152)} = 12.36; \rho = .030, \Phi = .285$). In such cases, it was considered somewhat or very effective 50% of the time.

4. Discussion and conclusions: some guidelines for the criminalisation of stalking

The first aim of this research was to determine how being targeted by stalking behaviours affected victims by looking at both their emotional responses to these behaviours and the psychological consequences. In this regard, the findings show that the most prevalent emotional responses in victims are, in descending order of importance, anger, annoyance and fear. Fear was the response that can be considered most indicative of how stalking behaviours actually affect the victim's freedom to act, which is the legal right harmed by the crime of stalking, according to its regulatory position in the different European criminal codes (Centro de Estudos Judiciários, 2013; Fiandaca and Musco, 2010; Villacampa, 2013). This response was triggered in victims based on who the stalker was and the specific stalking behaviour experienced. First, the victims who experienced fear most frequently were those whose stalkers were strangers or people whose identity they were unable to ascertain. Second, the victims most likely to experience fear were those who were targeted by behaviours involving the physical presence of the stalker, not cyberstalking victims, despite the high prevalence of cyberstalking behaviours amongst young people. Although the victim's sex was not statistically significant in explaining the experiencing of fear, women were more likely to experience it – along with embarrassment and/or shame – than men.

As for the psychological consequences of these behaviours for the victims as an indication of how they were affected, this study found that the majority of self-identified victims had experienced some sort of adverse consequence, albeit of lower intensity. It further found that women were, once again, more likely than men to experience such consequences, whether mild or severe. Behaviours involving the physical proximity of the stalker, particularly when they took place over a prolonged period of time, were again the most likely to cause these types of psychological consequences. Likewise, the relationship between the victim and the stalker was once again a determinant factor in explaining such consequences. However, unlike with fear, in this case, it was the existence of a previous close relationship – whether familial or intimate – between the victim and the stalker that explained the stronger impact.

Based on the above, in terms of the effect the stalking behaviours have on the victims, when both the emotional responses and psychological consequences are taken into account, two behavioural models emerge as the most impactful, with women being more sensitive in any case. The first model involves a stalker from the victim's inner circle seeking physical proximity to the victim. In this case, the most harmful cases of

stalking would resemble processes occurring in the context of close family or intimate relationships, which would confirm the relationship, already established in the literature (Burgess et al., 1997; Douglas and Dutton, 2001; Villacampa, 2009), between stalking and gender-based violence in the context of couples and domestic violence. In the second model, the stalker is someone the victim does not know, also seeking physical proximity to him or her, such that the most harmful cases of stalking would correspond to the pattern of a stranger pursuing the victim, in accordance with the earliest conceptualisations of the phenomenon (Finch, 2001; Hoffmann, 2006; Nicol, 2006).

Given that, in general terms, being targeted by stalking behaviours – including cyberstalking – does not entail a relevant impairment of the victims' rights, at least in the analysed population segment, outside of the aforementioned cases, strictly in terms of just deserts, consideration should be given to whether only those two cases, as opposed to all forms of stalking, should have criminal relevance. This could also be linked to the inadequacy of the legislative technique used in Germany or Spain, whose Criminal Codes include, amongst the elements constituting the crime, a list of specific behaviours that the stalking can take the form of. This approach places at the same punitive level behaviours that, as the empirical analysis has shown, entail unequal attacks on the legal right the law seeks to protect. In this regard, it might be preferable to use a general clause containing a generic description of the crime, as the British, Italian or Portuguese legal systems do, which, in turn, emphasises the criminal outcome of the behaviour, linked to the objective impact on the victim.

In fact, the present research has shown that female victims are more deeply impacted by these behaviours. However, rather than being translated to sexed criminal laws, this might be better expressed at the technical level through the definition of gender-neutral criminal offences that sufficiently emphasise the unlawful outcome of these behaviours, insofar as they effectively infringe on a person's freedom to act. This could include, for instance, an aggravated offence when the behaviours are indicative of domestic or gender-based violence, as the Italian or Spanish Criminal Codes already do. The next question is whether the criminal relevance of the behaviour should be explicitly circumscribed to those means of commission entailing the physical presence of the stalker, which were found to have greater psychological consequences for the victims. In this regard, although such an option would be appropriate for the reality, in light of the findings reported here, in order to avoid the risk of an overly narrow

definition of the crime omitting forms of stalking that could potentially be equally harmful to the victim's freedom to act, the circle of criminally relevant behaviours should be delimited based on the determination of their unlawful outcomes. To this end, characterising the result of the crime as serious harm to the victim's vital development (§238 StGB), as serious interference with the victim's ability to go about his or her daily life (Art. 172 ter, Spanish CC) or as forcing the victim to change his or her habits (Art. 612 bis, Italian CC) may not be sufficiently expressive of this unlawfulness.

The second aim of the present research was to identify the coping strategies victims used to deal with the situation, placing special emphasis on telling someone else about the situation and reporting it to the authorities as two specific manifestations of such strategies. In this regard, virtually all the victims took some coping measures, in most cases consisting of avoidance, asking family or friends for help or, more proactively, engaging the offender. Coping strategies entailing a more substantial impact on the victim's daily life, such as moving, changing jobs, or transferring to another school, were used more significantly with behaviours involving the stalker's physical presence, in keeping with the clearer impact on the victims targeted by such behaviours. Likewise, when the stalker was a former partner, not only did the victims take fewer self-defence measures, they also took avoidance measures that sometimes entailed major life changes, such as moving to another home. Similarly, in keeping with the greater impact of stalking behaviours on women than men, the research showed that women take more coping strategies than men.

Telling a third party about the experience can also be considered a coping strategy, which this research specifically asked about. The high rate of disclosure found in the research is consistent with the fact that asking family and friends for help is one of the coping strategies most commonly chosen by the victims, who tend to talk about the situation, first, with friends and, second, with their parents. Again, aspects such as the fact that the stalking cases most often reported to third parties were those that lasted longest and those involving the physical proximity of the stalker confirm the more intense nature of the two models of stalking highlighted above, i.e. strangers seeking physical proximity and cases occurring in contexts of domestic and gender-based violence. The high rate of disclosure stands in contrast with the low reporting rate found in the study, which also confirmed that stalking cases affecting the most victimised population segment, i.e. young adults, are the least likely to be reported.

Notwithstanding the low percentage of reported cases, it was once again factors related to the two aforementioned stalking models that largely explain the decision to report the situation insofar as the stalking was more often reported when the stalker was the victim's partner or a stranger and in cases involving the stalker's physical presence.

This study did not ask the victims why they had not reported the situation. In those studies in which it has been asked, the majority of victims adduce reasons such as lack of seriousness of the situation, the ineffectiveness of the police to resolve the situation, or the desire not to involve public authorities in a private matter (Baum et al., 2009; Bjerregaard, 2000; Feltes et al., 2012; FRA, 2014). However, the fact that reporting the situation ranked last in terms of effectiveness as a coping measure suggests that, for victims, regardless of the seriousness of the process they were targeted by, the criminal justice system's ability to resolve such situations may not be so obvious. This is especially true given that in this case, even in those stalking episodes shown to have the greatest impact on the victims, fewer than 50% of the victims perceived reporting the situation to be effective, compared to more than 60% in the case of the other strategies or, in any case, 55% in the case of telling someone else about the situation. This is in addition to the not insignificant percentage of victims in this study who directly rejected the effectiveness of reporting the situation.

Finally, given that the findings of the research regarding the second objective coupled with the hegemony of asking people from the victim's inner circle for help and adopting strategies based on avoidance of the stalker reveal the low incidence of reporting stalking to the police, it is worth considering whether, in future, protection against stalking should be exclusively provided for, even in the most insidious cases, through recourse to criminal proceedings. Perhaps the limited recourse made by victims to reporting the situation to the police, as opposed to more informal requests for help, masks a lack of confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to provide adequate protection. Thus, in future, it may be necessary to consider whether other types of protective processes should be designed for victims that do not entail a criminal conviction for the offender. Such processes could consist of administrative warnings or protective measures taken by the civil courts, as provided for in the legal systems of neighbouring countries, such as the United Kingdom (Ashworth and Redmayne, 2010) or Italy (Fiandaca and Musco, 2010).

With regard to the limitations of the study, it has to be stressed that one of its major limits is that the sample is only formed by university students, so the conclusions presented here should be viewed with caution. In addition, the severity of individual cases was not assessed and the study does not include a question about the reasons why victims did not report the facts to the police. This would have been adequate to explain the low rate of reports and the arguments put forward by the victims for not reporting the facts.

Given the differences found in the literature between general population and university students regarding stalking victimisation, it would be advisable to reproduce the study among Spanish citizens. Furthermore, in future studies on this subject it would be interesting to explore in greater depth the possibility of establishing alternative mechanisms to the criminal jurisdiction in Spain, similar to those existing in other European countries. Undeniably, stalking is a social problem that must be addressed, so it is necessary to find a legislative formula that would allow a satisfactory response to these behaviours, especially taking into account the interests of the victims.

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Table 1. Characteristics of self-identified victims and nature of the victimisation ($n=152$)

		n	Percentage (%)
Sex of the victim (*)	Male	30	19.7
	Female	122	80.3
Autonomous community	Catalonia	106	69.7
	Valencian Community	46	30.3
Behaviours repeatedly experienced by the victim(**)	Sent the victim offensive or threatening e-mails, text messages (SMS) or instant messages	87	57.2
	Sent the victim offensive or threatening letters or cards	5	3.3
	Made offensive, threatening or silent phone calls to the victim	56	36.8
	Posted offensive comments about the victim on the Internet	43	28.3
	Shared private photos or videos of the victim on the Internet or by mobile phone	10	6.6
	Loitered or waited outside the victim's home, workplace or school	76	50
	Deliberately followed the victim around		
	Purchased products or goods or contracted services for the victim	48	31.6
	Had a third party contact the victim	1	0.7
	Had a third party contact the victim	44	28.9
	Damaged the victim's property or material goods	20	13.1
Frequency of the behaviours (*)	Fewer than 2 times a week	7	4.6
	2-5 times a week	82	53.9
	6 or more times a week	63	41.4
Duration of the behaviours (*)	A few days	27	17.8
	Between a few days and 1 month	20	13.2
	More than 1 month but less than 3 months	20	12.2
	More than 3 months but less than 6 months	21	13.8
	More than 6 months but less than 1 year	21	13.8
	Between 1 and 3 years	29	19.1
	More than 3 years	14	9.2
Sex of the stalker	Male	93	61.2
	Female	35	23
	Both male and female	24	15.8
Previous victim-offender relationship (**)	Spouse	0	0
	Partner	11	7.2
	Former spouse	0	0
	Former partner	35	23
	Boss	1	0.7
	Colleague	1	0.7
	Client, customer or patient	0	0
	Teacher, trainer or coach	3	2
	Fellow student	43	28.3
	Doctor or healthcare worker	0	0
	Other family member	6	3.9
	Someone they just met	17	11.2
	Friend	20	13.2
	Acquaintance	31	20.4
Someone they did not know	27	17.8	
They do not know who it was	5	3.3	
Number of stalkers	1	93	61.2
	2	13	8.6
	3 or more	25	16.4

(*) Some categories do not add up to 100% due to rounding or the failure of some participants to respond.

(**) Multiple-response questions

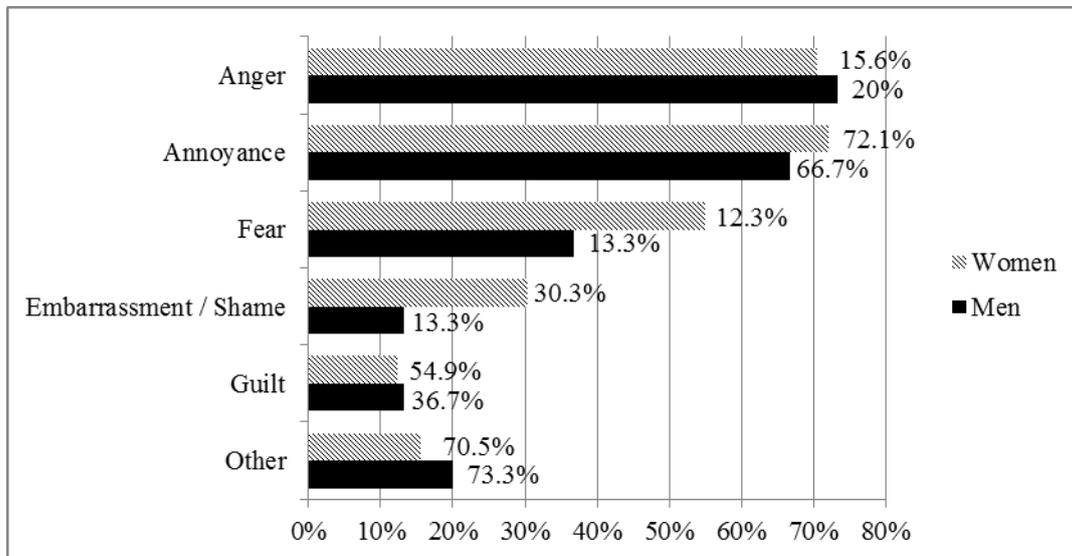


Figure 1. Emotional responses to victimisation, by sex.

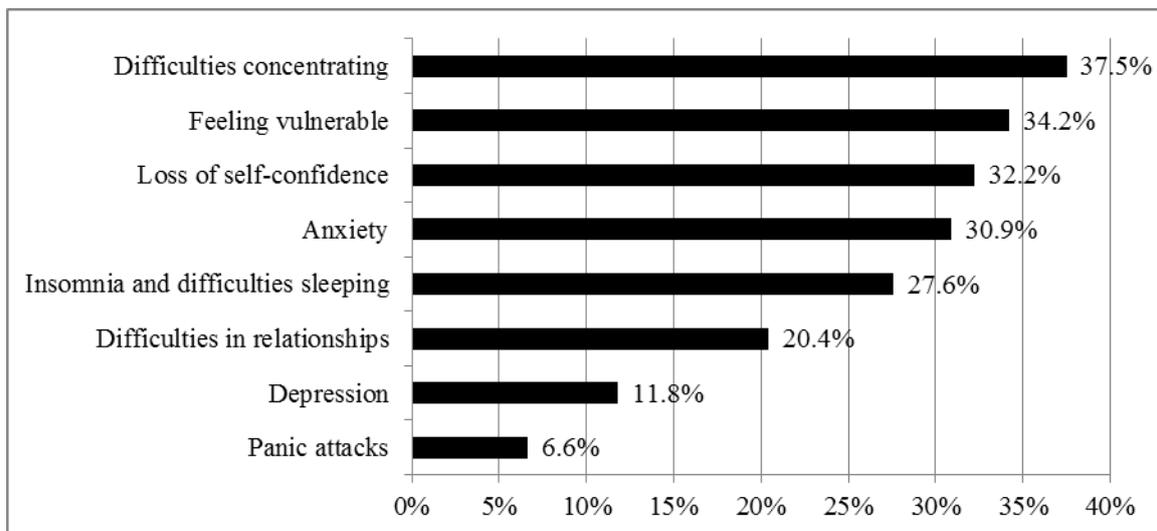


Figure 2. Psychological consequences of the victimisation.

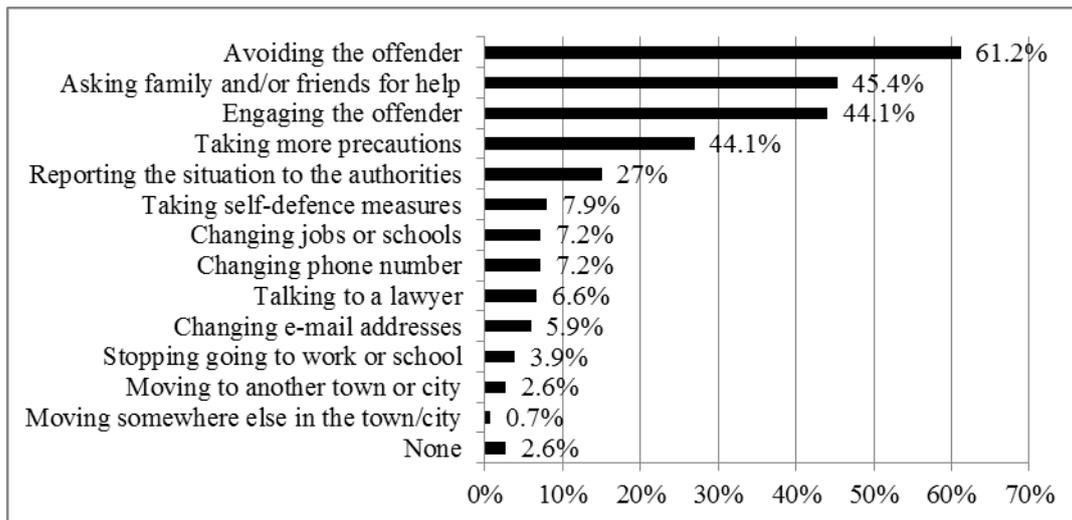


Figure 3. Coping strategies used by the victims.

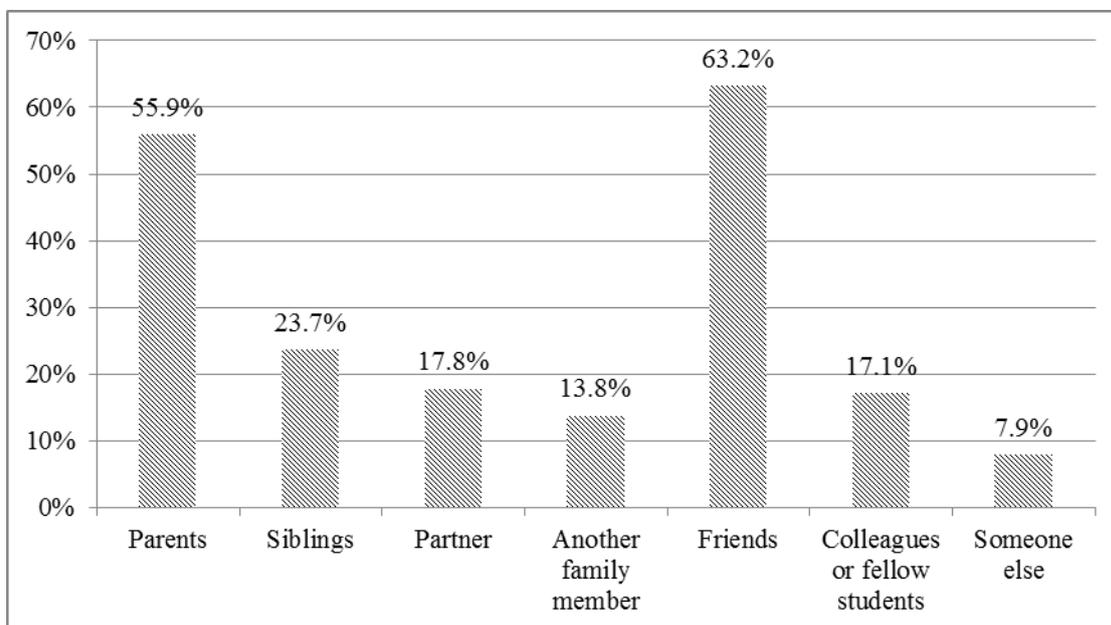


Figure 4. People the victim told about the situation.

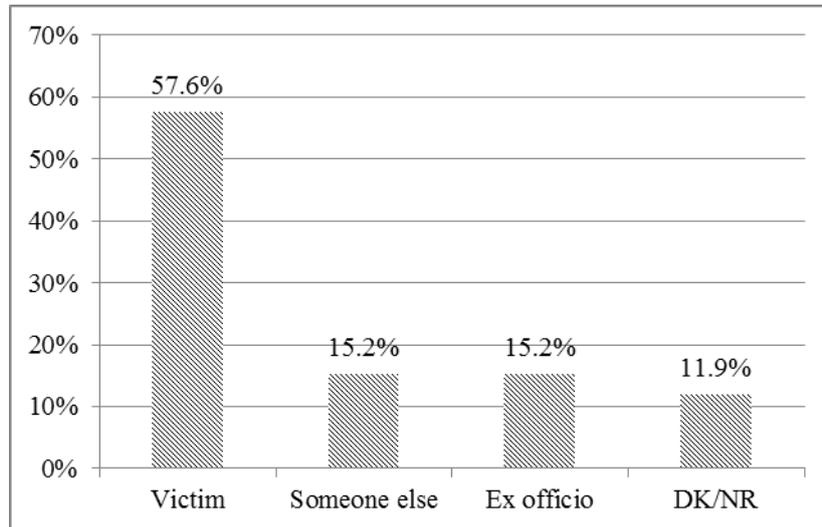


Figure 5. Person reporting the stalking.