



Review of IOPC cases involving stalking

**An annexed report to the super-
complaint investigation into the
police response to stalking**

September 2024

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Introduction

In November 2022, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust submitted a [super-complaint](#) about the police response to stalking on behalf of the National Stalking Consortium. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), the College of Policing and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) jointly investigated this super-complaint and [published a report](#) setting out our conclusions and recommendations.

The IOPC reviewed 50 cases investigated or reviewed by the IOPC that involved stalking, as part of the super-complaint investigation. The purpose of the IOPC case review was to assess whether the issues raised in the super-complaint were evident as themes across IOPC cases involving stalking. This annex reports on the IOPC's findings.

The IOPC cases reviewed provide evidence that supports many of the issues raised in the super-complaint.

A review of IOPC cases is likely to provide a negative picture of policing as the IOPC only sees the most serious and sensitive cases. Examining IOPC cases provides insight into what happens when policing results in dissatisfaction or involves serious adverse outcomes including death or serious injury. IOPC cases are not representative of the policing response overall. However, reviewing IOPC cases provides an opportunity to consider areas of poor or unsafe practice or mistakes and to draw out learning to drive improvements.

Please be aware that this report includes distressing content. This includes descriptions of cases involving stalking, domestic abuse and other violence, including cases that resulted in serious assaults, murder or suicide.

IOPC cases

The IOPC investigates the most serious and sensitive incidents and allegations involving the police. This includes cases where there was police contact before a death or serious injury. The contact with police can be direct, such as where police have used force. It also includes situations where a person has contacted the police (such as a victim reporting a crime or seeking assistance) before a serious assault, homicide or suicide. Many of the stalking cases investigated by the IOPC are concerned with the police response to reports of stalking and other crimes before the death or suicide of the victim, or sometimes the suspect.

In some cases, the IOPC decides that a case involving death or serious injury (DSI) after police contact should be investigated by the police locally. In these cases, the police force must send the IOPC the investigation report for the IOPC to review at the end of the investigation. These are referred to as 'DSI reviews'.

The IOPC can also investigate complaints made by members of the public and conduct matters where there is an indication that a police officer or staff member has acted in a way that amounts to misconduct or gross misconduct.

The IOPC only investigates the most serious and sensitive matters. Most complaints made by members of the public are dealt with by the police force the complaint is about. However, a complainant can request a review of the handling of the complaint if they are not satisfied with the response they receive from the police. In certain serious cases, the IOPC will assess and decide the outcome of complaint reviews. This is called a 'review' (this was called an 'appeal' before the legislation changed in February 2020).

This report has considered themes arising across IOPC cases involving stalking. The term 'IOPC cases' is used to refer to IOPC investigations and IOPC reviews (including DSI reviews and complaint reviews and appeals).

IOPC cases can result in individual police officers or staff facing criminal, misconduct or performance proceedings. They can also result in individual learning or reflective practice for officers or staff, as well as organisational or national learning recommendations.

Methodology

Fifty IOPC cases involving issues of stalking were selected for inclusion in this case review. This includes 30 independent investigations and 20 reviews. The 50 cases involve 20 different police forces in England and Wales.

All cases included in the review were received by the IOPC between 1 January 2018 and 1 January 2023. Cases were only considered for inclusion where the case was closed and had no ongoing proceedings on 1 January 2024 (such as misconduct proceedings or criminal proceedings). Cases that had high-level restricted access on IOPC systems (because of particularly sensitive content) were not included.

The cases selected are IOPC investigations and reviews where stalking was identified as a key feature of the case and the case involved issues or learning that was relevant to the super-complaint investigation. This includes cases where a stalking crime was recorded, as well as cases involving apparent stalking behaviours (as assessed by the IOPC case reviewers) but where no stalking crime was recorded. These include cases recorded as harassment, malicious communications, or civil disputes. The 50 cases selected for inclusion in the review were most relevant to the issues raised in the super-complaint.

The approach to case selection means that the case sample should not be taken as a comprehensive review or a statistically representative sample of IOPC stalking cases. Where case examples are included throughout this report, these are illustrative of the themes identified through the review. Some cases are included more than once as case examples under different themes.

Overview of cases included in the review

The IOPC stalking cases included in the case review fell broadly into the following categories:

- Cases involving police responses to stalking allegations or behaviours prior to the murder (13 cases) or serious injury (seven cases) of the stalking victim by the suspect.
- Cases involving police responses to stalking allegations or behaviours prior to the suicide of either the stalking victim or suspect (three cases).
- Cases involving investigations into police-perpetrated stalking in the context of police perpetrated domestic abuse (two cases).
- Cases involving investigations into police-perpetrated stalking behaviours in the context of allegations of police abusing their position to establish or try to establish a sexual or improper emotional relationship with a member of the public (12 cases).
- Other cases involving police handling of stalking allegations where a member of the public, who was directly impacted, made a complaint about the police response (13 cases, not including complaints made in cases counted in previous categories).

Context of stalking

In total, 30 of the 50 cases reviewed involved stalking within the context of domestic abuse. Twenty cases involving non-domestic stalking were also reviewed. These included cases involving stalking by a neighbour, friend, or work colleague. They also included cases involving stalking behaviours by police officers or staff who met the victim through their police role, but where there was no intimate relationship.

There were 14 cases which involved reports of police-perpetrated stalking behaviours. Twelve cases involved stalking where police officers or staff had met victims through their policing role and had inappropriately established or tried to establish an intimate relationship with them, and/or had used their policing powers and privileges to access information about victims.

Two further cases involved police officers or staff members who had met their victims outside of their policing role. These cases involved stalking in a domestic abuse context by a police officer or staff member against their former partner.

Profile of victims and suspects

In the IOPC cases considered as part of the review, 47 of the victims were women and 45 of the suspects were men. There were two cases where the victim and the suspects were both women.

Ages ranged between 17 and 54 in the 29 cases where the victim's age was known. The average age was 31. Ages ranged between 21 and 57 in the 28 cases where the suspect's age was known. The average age was 38.

| Victim sex | | Suspect sex | |
|-------------|----|-------------|----|
| Female | 47 | Female | 5 |
| Male | 3 | Male | 45 |
| Victim age | | Suspect age | |
| Average age | 31 | Average age | 38 |

Findings

The IOPC cases reviewed provide evidence that supports many of the issues raised in the super-complaint. The themes identified in this review specifically cover issues relating to:

- misidentification of stalking
- risk assessment and risk management in stalking cases
- quality of investigations into stalking crimes
- police engagement with victims of stalking

Many of the cases included in this review involve horrific and tragic murder, serious injury or suicide of victims. The cases considered as part of this review are a stark reminder of the seriousness of stalking and the devastating impact it can have or lead to for victims.

Misidentification of stalking

The review included a number of cases involving stalking behaviours which had not been correctly identified or responded to by police as stalking. This includes cases involving stalking behaviours which were recorded and dealt with as other types of crime, including malicious communications or criminal damage. There were a number of examples of police treating individual incidents in isolation and not identifying a pattern of behaviour, even where the behaviour was escalating, or threats of violence were made. There was evidence to suggest that in some cases where stalking was identified, it had been dealt with by police as the lower section 2A

stalking offence when it would have been appropriate to investigate as the more serious section 4A offence.

In a number of cases, the misidentification of stalking appeared to have contributed to police not identifying or responding to risk, as the recorded offence did not accurately reflect the risk of further physical or psychological harm to the victim. The case examples below involve reports of stalking from before 2020 when the [Home Office crime recording rules for frontline officers and staff](#) changed. This change means that harassment in a domestic abuse context should now be recorded and responded to as stalking in most cases. This is discussed in the background section of the [super-complaint investigation report](#).

Complaint about the police response to reports of stalking dealt with as harassment

The complainant had made a number of reports of stalking behaviours by her ex-partner to police over three years. The individual reports were not joined up by the police until the third year. The reports were treated as ‘low-level’ harassment. It was later accepted by the police force that the reports should have been investigated as stalking. The complainant said that police failed to record the details of the witnesses to instances of stalking. This aspect of her complaint was upheld.

The complainant felt that, had the police treated the allegations as stalking, this may have prevented the crimes against her escalating. The complainant said this had impacted her life, including that she had moved home, changed her circle of friends and job.

The police force identified a number of learning issues in response to this complaint.

Police response to stalking prior to the murder of the victim – involving police recording the crime as malicious communications

The victim contacted police about unwanted contact and threats made by her former partner. She said that her former partner had been abusive, controlling and had repeatedly threatened to assault her and her family members if she ever left him. She described him as obsessive and told police that she was fearful now she had left the relationship.

The crime report was recorded as a domestic-related malicious communications offence. The investigating officer noted on the crime report that stalking and harassment may be more appropriate crimes for investigation. However, the crime report was never re-categorised. It remained a malicious communications investigation throughout. The former partner had shown a pattern of violent behaviour towards women, particularly when a relationship did not work out. This

information was included on his intelligence profile on the force's computer system.

Further reports were made by the victim. These included increasingly threatening messages and counter-allegations made by her former partner. These did not appear to have been substantiated by the police. They were not treated as a pattern of behaviour that indicated stalking. The incorrect categorisation of the offences on the crime recording system meant that officers who spoke with the victim later did not have an accurate picture of the previous allegations or risk posed.

Following the IOPC investigation into this case, an officer was found to have a case to answer for misconduct. The matter was dealt with through the reflective practice review process (a management process focused on learning and development) and not the misconduct process. This is because the officer was new in service, still a probationary officer, and had not received support throughout the investigation.

Police response to stalking prior to the murder of the victim - where the stalking crime was not recorded

The victim reported her former partner for a number of domestic abuse related offences. These included assault, threats, stealing her phone and using this to find where she was, and turning up unwanted at her place of work and at a friend's home. The police recorded crimes of assault, theft of the phone and malicious communications. They did not record the stalking offences reported.

The victim made two reports about her former partner arriving at her place of work and her home address over the course of three weeks. The attending officers advised that she obtain a protection order herself. The police advised there was nothing they could do to help her because this was a civil matter. The attending officers did not update the risk assessment. There was no evidence the new information about further instances of stalking had been linked to her previous report.

Following the IOPC investigation into this case, three officers were referred to unsatisfactory performance procedures. Two officers received final written warnings for failing to identify the offences alleged and for failing to complete a risk assessment while with the victim.

Identifying stalking in cases of police abuse of position for a sexual purpose

There were 14 cases included in the review where the stalking suspect was a police officer or staff member. In 12 of these cases, the stalking behaviours were investigated as part of a wider investigation into allegations of police abuse of position for a sexual purpose. Abuse of position for a sexual purpose is any behaviour by a police officer or staff member, whether on or off duty, that takes advantage of their position as a member of the police service to misuse their position, authority or powers to pursue a sexual or improper emotional relationship with any member of the public.

A key feature of abuse of position for sexual purposes cases is the power imbalance between the suspect, given their police role, and the victim. Where stalking behaviours were present, this was sometimes enabled by the misuse of police systems to find out information about victims and their family members. Other examples involved the police suspect continuing to insist on contact as part of the police investigation into another matter. Victims felt scared to reject the suspect for fear of the impact this would have on progressing their criminal investigation.

In most of these cases, the police suspect was investigated for serious offences, including misconduct in a public office or misuse of police systems. In many cases, the police officers or staff involved were dismissed for gross misconduct and, sometimes, convicted of serious crimes. However, as in the examples below, it was not common for these cases to be recorded and dealt with specifically as stalking offences by either the IOPC or police force professional standards departments who investigated them.

Police abuse of position for sexual purpose involving stalking behaviours

An officer was assigned to investigate a domestic abuse incident involving an assault. The officer sent numerous messages including sexual content to the victim and met her in person. This was done using his personal phone. The victim explained that many of the conversations would start with the officer saying that he needed to talk to her about the case so could he call or meet up with her.

The behaviour increased in severity and frequency. The officer would often make suggestive requests or comments. When the victim did not respond, the officer would reassert the matter of the police investigation. At one point the officer suggested that if the victim did not provide a statement to him in person, she could be prosecuted for perverting the course of justice.

This had a significant impact on the victim's life. She explained that she would often avoid social media, which caused issues with her friends. But if the officer saw her online, he would immediately contact her.

The officer retired from the force and was charged with the offence of misconduct in a public office.

Police abuse of position for sexual purpose involving stalking behaviours

A police community support officer (PCSO) met the victim through the course of their work. The victim was not a previous victim or suspect in a case. The PCSO attempted to engage in a relationship with the victim. She informed him that his advances made her feel uncomfortable and asked him to stop emailing her. The PCSO continued to send the victim emails and messages. Eventually, the victim's work manager reported the PCSO to the police force professional standards department. He was arrested for misconduct in a public office.

The IOPC investigation revealed that the PCSO had used the police force's system to search for the victim's personal details and those of her friends, family and colleagues. On one occasion he did so more than 60 times in one day.

The PCSO resigned from the force. He was charged and convicted of offences under the Data Protection Act and the Misuse of Communications Act. A restraining order was granted to the victim by the court.

Where stalking is not recognised, victims may not be referred or signposted to appropriate victim support services. They may not be offered appropriate stalking-specific advice or protections, including stalking protection orders. Further, perpetrators may not receive the appropriate criminal justice outcome and interventions.

In response to this super-complaint investigation, the IOPC has taken an action to provide advice to police professional standards departments and IOPC staff. This advice will emphasise the need for the police and the IOPC to consider stalking offences and associated risks to victims and enhanced victim rights where stalking behaviours are identified as part of an investigation into allegations of police abuse of position.

Investigations into stalking crimes

The review looked at whether issues with the investigation of stalking crimes was a theme across the stalking cases considered. This was a common feature of the IOPC cases reviewed, and included:

- Cases where there was evidence of a failure to follow reasonable lines of enquiry, or evidence that the police had not demonstrated professional curiosity when dealing with victims or suspects.
- Cases where the police had not allocated resources or taken action to investigate reports of stalking.
- Cases where there was evidence that there were delays in the investigation or in the police response, including delays in retrieving digital evidence.

Failures to follow lines of enquiry

A recurring theme across the IOPC cases where failures in investigation were identified, concerned the police failing to use professional curiosity or follow all reasonable lines of enquiry. In some cases, this appeared to be linked to allocation decisions, with cases held by frontline officers with less specialist investigation skills and experience.

Police response to stalking prior to the murder of the victim – involving organisational learning for the force

The victim reported an acquaintance to the police. She explained that he had followed her from work after she blocked him on social media. He had also used cameras to watch her while they were together at a location. She stated that he had continually sent her messages despite her asking him not to.

Officers were also told by another person about the man's previous stalking behaviours. However, the police decided to close the investigation with no further action. Further information about the previous stalking behaviour was not obtained and no national database check was conducted. The suspect was spoken to by the investigating officer and warned not to make any further contact with the victim. However, no risk assessment was undertaken and no safeguarding plan was put in place.

Some months later, the victim was found with a number of fatal wounds. The suspect was found nearby, having apparently taken his own life.

The IOPC investigation established that the response officers who dealt with the case were not aware that the investigation should have been allocated to a specialist public protection investigation team, in accordance with force policy.

Following this investigation, organisational learning recommendations were accepted by the police force. In response, the force has issued additional guidance on investigating non-domestic stalking cases to officers, including advice about allocation to specialist teams. The force has also appointed a stalking co-ordinator to advise on stalking investigations.

Police response to stalking prior to the murder of the victim – involving failures to follow lines of enquiry

The victim contacted the police after her former partner would not allow their children to return home with her. The victim told the responding officers that her former partner had followed her that day, leaving their young children alone to do so. She also told them that he had previously stalked and sexually assaulted her and that he was a risk to the children because of this. There was a history of domestic abuse which was known to police, and a previous report of stalking which the victim had withdrawn.

The victim told police that her former partner had convinced her to withdraw her previous allegations. She said he had sent her a number of threatening messages that day and had pushed her. She also told them that he had previously went to her address on multiple occasions.

The suspect was not arrested, and some of the children were allowed to stay with him overnight. He murdered the victim the following day.

There were a number of failings by the responding officers which were identified by the IOPC investigation:

- Failure to investigate a report by the victim that her former partner had left the children (aged seven and under) at home alone to follow her that day. This was later substantiated by the man's neighbours, who heard the children alone in the flat.
- Failure to speak to potential witnesses or challenge the suspect properly while at the scene.
- Failure to properly review evidence presented by the victim, which showed the victim asking her former partner repeatedly to stop contacting her.

Following an IOPC investigation, one officer involved with the case was dismissed from the force, and one received a final written warning.

Lack of response and delays in police response

In some of the stalking cases reviewed, it appeared that the police had not taken appropriate action in response to a report of stalking, or there were delays in the police response. In a number of these cases, resourcing issues appeared to have contributed to delays in the investigation or the deployment of the police in response to a report of stalking.

Police response to stalking prior to the murder of the victim – involving delays in the police response

The victim and her family members reported the victim's partner for a number of domestic incidents over several years. This included reports that the victim's partner had assaulted the victim, on one occasion causing serious injuries.

They reported that he also made threats to kill towards the family member of the victim. On this occasion, it took six days for officers to attend and take a statement about the incident. When the police attended, the family member decided not to give a statement but wanted a record of the incident. This was described on the log as an alcohol-fuelled argument.

The IOPC investigation found that a combination of the complainant's availability and a lack of officers free to attend meant that she was not seen for six days.

On a later occasion and after they had separated, the former partner made threats to kill towards the victim. A family member reported the incident. They told the police that the former partner would be going to the address later that day and the victim was "petrified." The officers did not go to the victim's address for three days due to a lack of resources. During this time, she had been forced to have contact with her former partner due to childcare arrangements.

The former partner killed the victim and took his own life several days later. The IOPC investigation identified that resourcing issues had contributed to delays but found no indication of misconduct for any individual officers.

Cyber-stalking and issues with digital evidence retrieval

Elements of digital communications or cyber-stalking were found to be present in many of the cases reviewed. Most commonly this included repeated text messages, emails, or messages or calls on social media. Some cases included more invasive digital or internet-enabled surveillance methods, such as the use of location applications to find the victim or use of cameras within the homes of victim.

Police officers did not always obtain the relevant digital evidence from the victim or suspect's mobile phones in these cases. In some cases, no attempt was made to collect this type of evidence. Where digital evidence was collected, there were sometimes long waiting periods for the evidence to be downloaded from the devices and analysed.

Police response to stalking prior to the suspect seriously injuring the victim – involving delays in downloading digital evidence

The victim's mother reported her daughter's former partner to the police for making threats to kill against her and her daughter. A second incident was reported in which the former partner went to the victim's workplace. He was arrested for harassment. His phone was seized in order to obtain evidence in relation to the offences against his ex-partner and her mother.

This was not recognised and recorded by police as stalking. The phone was submitted for digital evidence retrieval as a high-risk harassment case. However, the investigating officer was informed that the download of the phone would take around 180 days to complete.

Three weeks later, the victim reported a further incident in which her former partner attacked her and her mother with a weapon. This caused serious head injuries to both women.

Police response to stalking prior to the victim being murdered – involving issues with digital lines of enquiry

The victim reported her ex-partner to police for stalking. The police were aware that there was a history of domestic abuse and controlling behaviour. The victim and her children had previously moved out of the area and into emergency accommodation because of stalking by her ex-partner.

The victim repeatedly contacted police to report stalking. This included reports that she believed her ex-partner had hacked into her phone and found out her new address, phone number and the location of their children's school. She stated that he had also contacted her repeatedly. This was in breach of his bail conditions which prevented him from contacting the victim or visiting the school.

The suspect's phone was seized but was not reviewed by the investigating officer. They also failed to identify that the repeated breaches of bail and allegations of phone hacking could be allegations of stalking or harassment.

The victim was murdered by the suspect some weeks after this. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. Examination of the suspect's mobile phones after his arrest showed he had obtained the victim's new phone number, accessed the victim's messages, and stored the address of the emergency

accommodation where the victim was living with her children. He had also used a 'find my phone' application to track the victim.

Misconduct was found proven against two officers following the IOPC investigation into the prior contact between the victim and the police. They both received a written warning. The investigating officer was also required to undertake further training regarding stalking, risk assessment and domestic abuse.

Organisational learning was identified in relation to safety planning for victims and ownership of investigations when a domestic abuse suspect or victim moved out of the force area.

Risk assessment and management

Risk assessment should underpin the police response in stalking cases. The assessment of risk impacts understanding of the offending, allocation of police resources to the investigation, actions to safeguard the victim and referral to multi-agency safeguarding reviews, such as multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs).

The accuracy of risk assessments and the efficacy of risk management plans were concerns identified in many of the stalking cases reviewed.

Some process had been undertaken by the police to consider risk to the victim in most of the IOPC stalking cases reviewed. In some cases, this was limited to the THRIVE (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement) model used by police officers and staff to assess the right initial response when a report of a crime or incident is initially made.

However, cases often included some type of further risk identification and assessment, using risk assessment tools such as DASH (domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence risk model) or DARA (domestic abuse risk assessment tool), particularly in domestic stalking cases. In some other cases, the S-DASH question set (a list of questions that complement the DASH to help identify stalking risks) or the stalking screening tool were used as part of risk assessments. These risk assessment tools and aides are discussed in more detail in the [super-complaint investigation report](#).

In a small number of cases, there was no evidence that a risk assessment was undertaken at all. These were all cases where there was no domestic abuse context to the stalking, or where the domestic abuse context had not been identified.

The review also identified a concerning lack of risk management plans. Most cases reviewed did not appear to have a risk management plan in place. In many of the

cases with a risk management plan, the IOPC assessment of the case still identified issues with the effectiveness of the safeguarding approach.

Poor assessment of risk

In a number of cases where issues were identified with the risk assessment, officers relied on 'no violence' reported at an individual incident as the basis for assessing the risk as 'standard'. In other cases, risk was assessed as standard because the suspect was not in the immediate proximity of the victim at the time the incident was reported. This did not always reflect accurately the threat posed by the suspect, or the severity of stalking behaviours or fear felt by victims. This would often result in a lack of positive police action because the risk was considered low.

Police response to stalking prior to the murder of the victim - involving concerns about the police assessment and management of risk

The victim reported her former partner to police for stalking. She reported that her former partner had sent hundreds of unwanted messages and calls, went to her house and damaged property, and shared intimate pictures of her. There was a history of domestic abuse which was known to the police. The former partner also had previous convictions for carrying weapons and making threats to kill. He had previously been issued with a warning for harassing another partner.

The IOPC investigation identified a number of issues with the assessment and management of risk throughout the handling of this case.

For example, after the former partner had arrived at the victim's house for the fourth time in a week, the attending officer did not find or arrest him. The reason given was that the suspect 'merely' went to the address and had left after the victim said she would contact the police. The attending officer decided there was no need for a domestic violence protection notice and no other safeguarding measures were put in place.

One officer involved in the handling of this case resigned from the force but was found likely to have a case to answer for misconduct had they remained a serving officer. Another officer was referred to the reflective practice review process - a management process focused on learning and development which can be used where a formal disciplinary approach is not required.

Police response to stalking prior to the suicide of the suspect where only the suicide risk for the suspect was recognised

The victim contacted the police on multiple occasions to report that her former partner was harassing her and had threatened to harm himself. The suspect was going to the victim's place of work and inundating her with messages, including

suicide threats. The threats of suicide by the suspect were rightly treated by police as high priority. He was visited by officers to check on his welfare.

The victim was not visited by police. This is despite her explaining the fear she felt because of the stalking. Over the course of three days, she contacted the police twice a day and requested updates. However, she was not visited by the police until the suspect sadly took his own life.

The only reference to the victim's safety throughout the records of the police contact was that she was noted as being "safe as not at [the suspect's] house". However, no consideration was given to where the suspect lived, or if he had access to the victim's address.

A call handler who dealt with the victim's call about her former partner's welfare was given management advice. The IOPC investigation found that resourcing issues had contributed to the police not going to the victim's address.

Police response to stalking prior to the suspect seriously injuring the victim – involving concerns about the assessment of risk

The victim and others had contacted the police on numerous occasions to report her former partner for stalking.

During the victim's conversation with the police, she said that she was so scared of him that it was easier to be in a relationship with him than not. She told the police that her former partner was not happy that the relationship had ended. She also said that he had recently broken into her house and she could not get away from him.

The victim told the attending officers that she was frightened of him turning up again. She gave the following answers to the DASH risk assessment which would indicate an increased level of risk:

- she had separated or tried to separate from the suspect within the last year
- he constantly called, texted, contacted, followed, stalked, or harassed her
- there was a history of domestic abuse
- the suspect was following her
- the suspect had been arrested by the police or had a criminal history

Despite these answers, the officer assessed the risk as standard and gave a rationale that there were "few risk indicators, no violence".

Following the IOPC investigation into this case, a number of officers were found to have a case to answer for misconduct or requiring management action.

In other cases reviewed, it was apparent that information about the victim or suspect was made available to officers. However, they did not use it to inform the initial risk assessment or to update subsequent risk assessments.

Police response to stalking prior to the murder of the victim – involving concerns about risk assessment

The victim reported her former partner to the police for assaulting her on several occasions and damaging her house. He was arrested and released on bail with conditions not to contact her.

After this, the victim reported to police that her former partner had threatened to “bury her in the back garden” and had repeatedly gone to her home when she had asked him not to. The former partner had made this threat over voicemail. A recording of the message was played to police and this was captured on the body-worn video of the police officers who attended. However, this new information was not noted by any officers or included in any risk assessments. This meant that the risk to the victim was not appropriately reassessed.

Learning was identified for some officers regarding the completion of risk assessments. This case also resulted in a learning recommendation to the force around risk assessments. The force implemented training regarding using DASH risk assessment forms.

Positive interventions on risk from supervisors

There were some examples of appropriate changes made to risk assessments after review by supervisors, with consideration given to the particular risks arising from stalking behaviours. These are reflected in the cases below.

Police response to stalking - involving positive intervention by a supervisor to change a risk assessment

The victim reported her former partner to the police for stalking her. She reported that her former partner had made a lot of calls to her, including threats, since she had ended the relationship and moved out. She also reported that he had been violent towards her during the relationship.

The officer who spoke to the victim completed a domestic abuse risk assessment (DARA) and recorded the risk as ‘medium’.

A supervisor reviewed the case file and requested the risk be escalated from ‘medium’ to ‘high’. They noted the suspect’s previous violence towards the victim

and that the suspect was demonstrating patterns of a 'rejected stalker'. The supervisor recorded their concerns that the suspect's behaviour could escalate. They noted that the suspect had recently been arrested for an unrelated assault, which further demonstrated a propensity for violence.

The supervisor also noted that the suspect had multiple previous convictions which were not related to the current victim. They stated that the offender was displaying "fixated, obsessive, unwanted and repeated behaviour". They recommended that the former partner be arrested and questioned in relation to these allegations.

Police response to stalking – involving positive intervention to change a risk assessment by a supervisor in the contact centre

The victim reported an acquaintance to the police for stalking. This included reports that he was following her and he was continually sending her messages, despite her asking him to stop.

The victim told the call handler that she only wanted to report the suspect in case he did the same to another person. The call handler initially closed the incident for this reason. However, a supervisor reviewed the incident log. They recorded their view that there was a "real and immediate risk to (the victim's) safety". They noted that the suspect may know where the victim lived. They also noted that despite there being no previous relationship between the victim and suspect, the suspect may feel that they had been spurned and could initiate contact with the victim.

The supervisor noted that the victim felt threatened by the action of the suspect. The supervisor decided that there was a need for an officer to attend to carry out a risk assessment and start an investigation into the report of stalking.

Issues with risk management

A risk management plan was considered in place if there were proactive measures taken by the police to enable the victim's safety outside of the police investigation. This could include, but was not limited to, mobile phone apps providing direct contact to police, personal safety alarms, installation of CCTV, warning markers on addresses or phone numbers, implementation of bail conditions, protective orders, referrals to MARACs or support with moving home.

The lack of risk management plans was often linked to issues with the risk assessment itself, with risks not identified or not properly assessed. However, in some cases risks were identified, but the responsibility for safeguarding and managing the risk was left to the victim. In some cases, there was also evidence of the police appearing to blame the victim for putting themselves at risk.

Police response to stalking prior to the victim and family members being seriously injured and killed – involving issues with risk management

The victim reported her former partner to the police for assaulting her twice and stealing her car. The police assessed the case as medium-risk. The former partner was arrested and charged with assaulting the victim and taking her car. He was bailed on condition that he did not contact her or any witnesses or to go to the victim's address.

The suspect was reported to police for breaching bail conditions on nine occasions over 17 days. The suspect was arrested on two of these occasions. He was re-bailed to an address one street away from the victim's house. A restraining order was put in place which was breached three times within two weeks. On the third occasion, the suspect set fire to the victim's house. One of the victim's relatives was killed and the victim and another relative were injured.

The risk to the victim was recorded as 'high' on some occasions. However, there were no recorded attempts to put in place an effective risk management plan or additional safeguarding measures following the escalating stalking behaviours.

One officer was found to have a case to answer for misconduct and this was addressed through learning. A number of other officers involved in the case were given management action for unsatisfactory performance.

Use of protective orders and bail conditions to manage risk

Evidence of the use of protective orders across the cases reviewed was extremely limited, particularly in relation to the use of stalking protection orders (SPOs). Only one case had evidence that an SPO was considered by officers. However, it should be noted that in a number of the cases reviewed, the stalking took place before the introduction of SPOs in 2020. In a small number of cases, other types of protective order were in place or had been applied for. In most of these cases, the protective order was a non-molestation order. This is an order that is applied for by the victim, rather than the police.

In a number of cases, bail conditions that required that the suspect did not contact the victim were put in place and appeared to be a key component in risk management. The police can arrest individuals who have breached bail conditions. However, breach of bail is not a crime, unlike a breach of a protective order. This means that there are greater limitations on the actions that the police can take following breach of bail.

In the cases reviewed, suspects were rarely arrested for breaching bail conditions. Relying on bail conditions to mitigate the risk to the victim often appeared to be flawed.

In 12 of the cases reviewed, there was evidence that bail conditions were put in place to prevent the suspect from contacting the victim. In 10 of these cases, it was apparent that the suspect breached the bail conditions. In only one of these cases was the suspect arrested for breach of their bail conditions. In many of these cases, the suspect's escalating behaviour went unchallenged and further protective measures were not put in place for victims.

Police response to stalking prior to the suspect seriously injuring the victim

A victim reported their former partner for stalking and threatening to kill her. He was arrested and released with bail conditions not to contact the victim or go to her home or work address.

The former partner was seen by the victim and her colleagues at her place of work a few days later. The police were called but the man left before police officers arrived.

The attending officer later explained the decision not to arrest the suspect for breaching their bail conditions. They said they believed it was a 'lower-level breach'. There had been no violence or threat of violence and so immediate arrest was not required.

The victim subsequently reported a further incident in which she alleged her former partner had attacked her and her mother with a weapon, causing serious injuries to both women.

Police response to stalking prior to the suspect murdering the victim – involving concerns about the police response to bail

The victim reported her former partner to the police for numerous domestic abuse related offences, including stalking. During the investigation the police released the victim's former partner with bail conditions not to contact the victim. The victim and a friend of the victim reported to police on four occasions that he had breached the bail conditions. However, he was not arrested. The risk posed to the victim was never reassessed.

At the end of the applicable bail period, the man was released under investigation with no bail conditions. The reason was that the victim had moved address, and the former partner did not know the new address and therefore was safeguarded. This assessment was made despite reports from the victim and a friend that the suspect knew the victim's new address. The victim was also not informed the suspect was no longer subject to bail conditions.

The victim's former partner murdered the victim a short time after being released under investigation.

The former partner's phone was later examined. It showed that he had obtained the victim's new phone number, accessed the victim's messages and had a record of her new address.

Following the IOPC investigation into the contact between the police and the victim, one officer was found to have a case to answer for misconduct for failing to investigate the breaches of bail and to adequately consider the risk to the victim. The supervising officer was found to have a case to answer for misconduct for failing to adequately supervise the investigation. Misconduct was proven against both officers and they received written warnings. The investigating officer was also required to undertake further training regarding stalking, risk assessment and domestic abuse.

Organisational learning was identified in relation to safety planning for victims and the ownership of investigations when a domestic abuse suspect or victim moved out of the force area.

Police engagement with victims

The case review looked at available evidence about how the police engaged with victims and how they provided support in stalking cases. The particular issues raised in the super-complaint and considered in this review, included whether the police appeared to dismiss or minimise victims' experiences of stalking, whether the police provided victims with appropriate advice around how to remain safe, and whether the police referred or informed victims about specialist support services.

In many cases, the engagement with victims by the police was poor. The case review included examples of the police dismissing the concerns of victims, minimising their experiences of stalking and sometimes seeming to blame them for the offending behaviour of the suspect. In only a small number of cases was there evidence that the victim was referred to or supported by specialist victim services.

Minimising and trivialising the impact of stalking on victims

There were a number of cases where there was evidence that the police either minimised or trivialised the victim's experience of stalking. Some of these examples are discussed previously in this report where the minimisation or trivialisation of stalking behaviours was linked to poor risk assessments or misidentification of stalking.

Linked to this, in most cases reviewed there was limited, or no, evidence that the police considered or understood the psychological impact of the stalking on the victim. The following case is an example of this:

The police response to stalking prior to the victim being seriously injured – involving concerns that the police did not recognise the impact of the stalking

A woman reported her former partner to the police for stalking her including threatening to kill her. She also reported that he had been violent towards her during the relationship.

In her statement to the IOPC, the victim explained that about a month after she reported her husband to the police, the police contacted her. They told her that they were unable to pursue the reports of stalking because the suspect had not physically harmed her. She told the IOPC that she felt the police did not appreciate the emotional and mental abuse and the impact of this on her. She described it as mental and emotional torture.

The IOPC investigation found that the stalking report was closed in error by a supervising officer reviewing the case. The victim was not initially told that the crime report had been closed.

A few months after the initial report of stalking, the victim was seriously injured, and the former partner was arrested for this crime.

The officer who closed the stalking incident log in error was found to have a case to answer for misconduct. This was dealt with by a performance meeting.

Victim blaming

In some cases, police demonstrated victim blaming in their comments or actions. Victim blaming is where the victim, rather than the suspect, is held entirely or partially to blame for the harm they suffered as a victim of crime. The IOPC has recently published guidance for police and IOPC staff [on ending victim blaming in the context of violence against women and girls](#). The case below is an example of victim blaming seen in some of the stalking cases reviewed:

Police response to stalking prior to the murder of the victim – involving concerns about victim-blaming

The victim reported her former partner to the police for stalking her. She told police that he had previously sexually assaulted her and that he was a risk to their children. The victim had a high-risk marker assigned to her on the police

command and control system to flag that she had previously contacted the police as a victim of domestic abuse.

Officers viewed several text messages between the two parties relating to the children in which the victim repeatedly told her former partner not to use kisses. The officers discussed the stalking allegations with each other. They used victim-blaming language, suggesting the victim was using her children as a weapon against her ex-partner.

The risk was initially assessed as high, and officers were told by a supervisor to arrest the suspect. However, this decision was changed by the supervisor because the text messages between the victim and suspect were seen to be affectionate by the attending officers; the suspect had previously presented himself for arrest on a different occasion; and the suspect and the victim were now at separate addresses.

The suspect was not arrested, and two of the children were allowed to stay with him overnight. He murdered the victim the following day.

The IOPC investigation into the case identified a range of failings with the police response. One officer involved with the case was dismissed from the force, and one received a final written warning.

Unhelpful and potentially dangerous advice to victims

In a number of the cases reviewed which involved stalking contact via social media, officers gave victims advice to block stalking suspects. This type of advice is not appropriate as could potentially lead to escalating stalking behaviours and prevent relevant evidence from being collected. This is set out in the College of Policing [advice to police on responding to stalking](#).

The following case is an example of where this type of advice was provided by police.

Complaint about the police response to domestic stalking where the victim was concerned about the safety advice from police

The victim made a complaint to the police raising a range of issues about how the police responded to her reports of stalking and domestic-abuse related crimes by her ex-partner. She reported that her ex-partner had sent her text and voice notes via WhatsApp of a sexual nature. A Claire's Law disclosure to the

victim highlighted that the suspect had existing convictions for violence against women. It was noted that the suspect had a gun.

The victim reported that she had been advised by the police safeguarding unit to block her ex-partner's number. The victim expressed concern about this advice. She said that she was worried blocking him would antagonise him and she had already told him she wanted him to stop making contact. She felt that the advice from police left her in a more unsafe position.

A number of officers received learning as a result of the investigation into this complaint. The learning covered a range of areas including crime recording, progressing cases and victim contact.

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