



The influence of perpetrator personality pathology on perceptions of relational stalking

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1. Introduction

Stalking Victimisation

- National survey estimates indicate that 3% of men and 5% of women experience stalking annually in England and Wales¹;
- True incident rates are likely higher than estimates², in-part consequent to underreporting³.

(Mis)perceptions of Stalking

- Under UK law, the identification of stalking is a legally subjective process⁴ often determined by the perceptions of those involved⁵;
- Misperceptions of stalking are prevalent⁶ and prevent victims and support structures from intervening in stalking victimisation^{7, 8};
- Ex-partner (relational) stalkers are perceived to present the least threat⁹, despite being the most prevalent¹⁰ and violent¹¹ stalkers.

Stalking & Personality Pathology

- Most stalking perpetrators meet diagnostic criteria for 'personality disorder'¹²⁻¹⁴. This group are also twice as likely to victimise ex-partners than strangers¹⁵, and thus present the greatest risk¹⁶.
- Despite this, experimental research has not yet examined the influence of a *perpetrator's* personality on perceptions of stalking.

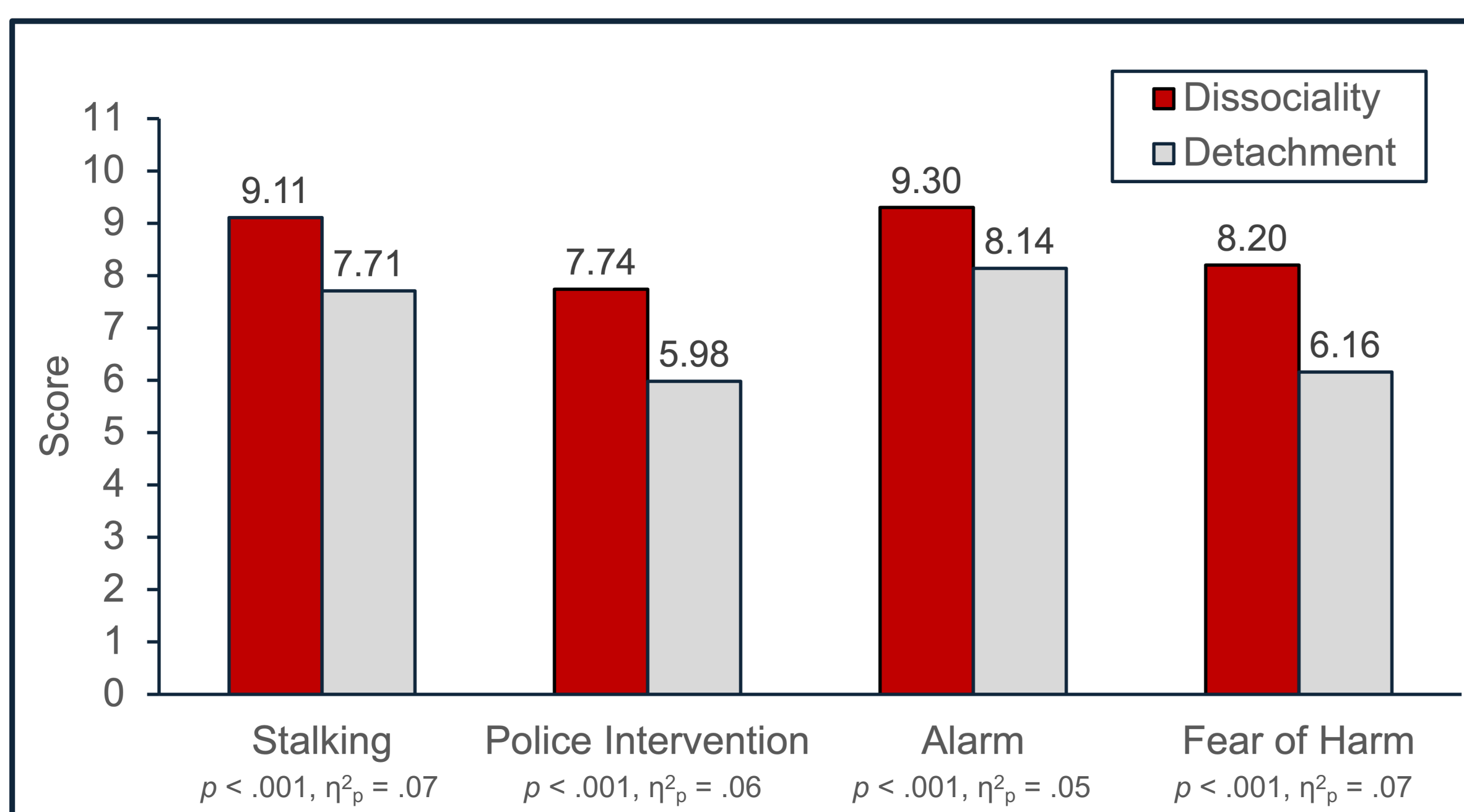
3. Key Findings

Influence of Perpetrator Personality Pathology

- A one-way MANOVA found a small, significant difference in perceptions of the hypothetical stalking incident based on perpetrator personality pathology ($p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$).

Perceived Stalking Severity

- Assessed via four questions measuring to what extent the incident i) constituted stalking, ii) required Police intervention, iii) caused the victim alarm, and iv) caused the victim fear of violence.
- One-way ANOVAs & post-hoc comparisons found consistent, small-moderate significant differences in perceptions:
 - Perpetrator with dissocial personality difficulties consistently perceived to be the most serious; detachment the least serious.



Perpetrator Predictability & Mental Health Difficulties

- No significant difference in perceived predictability of the perpetrator's behaviour ($p = .307$, $\eta^2_p = .01$).
- The perpetrator exhibiting negative affectivity was perceived to experience the greatest mental health and personality difficulties; the control condition the least ($p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .03$).

2. Methodology

Aim & Rationale

- Aim:** to examine the influence of perpetrator personality pathology on perceptions of relational stalking.
- Rationale:** to increase understanding of (mis)perceptions of relational stalking and inform attempts to improve the recognition of, and provision of support for, stalking victimisation.
- Non-directional hypothesis:** expected perpetrator personality pathology to influence perceptions of relational stalking.

Participants

- 549 adult members of the public recruited through volunteer sampling (75.8% female);
- Adequate statistical power; age range between 18 and 76 years-old ($M = 39.57$, $SD = 12.95$).

Design, Materials, & Measures

- Online vignette study using a **between-participants experimental** design.
- Participants randomly allocated to read one of six accounts of an identical relational stalking incident (male perpetrator, female victim);
 - Five conditions described perpetrator personality difficulties concordant with the ICD-11 'PD' trait domain qualifiers;
 - Control did not describe their personality.
- Between 85 & 102 participants in each condition.
- Perceptions measured through seven 11-point Likert-scale questions, which assessed:
 - Perceived incident severity¹⁷;
 - Predictableness of perpetrator behaviour;
 - Presence of perpetrator mental health and personality difficulties.

Six Conditions

Detachment

Negative
Affectivity

Disinhibition

Anankastia

Dissociality

Control

4. Implications & Recommendations

Conclusions

- Novel finding:** perpetrator personality pathology does differentially bias perceptions of stalking. Crucially, it influenced how harmful stalking was perceived to be, and recommendations for support.
- Detachment, a key trait in psychopathy, perceived least seriously.

Implications & Recommendations

- Professionals should consider the potential for personality-related misperceptions of stalking to bias the recorded history of those in contact with the CJS, and the accurate assessment of stalking risk.
- Stalking victims more readily seek support from family and friends¹⁸; these findings inform continued attempts to improve the recognition of and support for victims of stalking (e.g., via public education).
- The victims in this study were strangers to participants; future research may benefit from replicating findings in situations with additional contextual information (e.g., with close family/friends).
- Personality is socially- and culturally-specific; future research should replicate findings cross-culturally, with different victim-perpetrator sex compositions (e.g., male victims), and with a representative sample.

