



University of
Nottingham

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology

The Influence of Perpetrator Personality Pathology on Perceptions of Relational Stalking

Division of Forensic Psychology Annual Conference, July 2024

Alfred Vaughan, Forensic Psychologist in Training (Alfred.vaughan@nottingham.ac.uk)

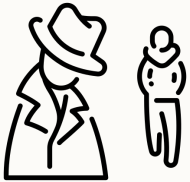
With Dr Simon Duff & Dr Elizabeth Paddock

Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology, University of Nottingham



Why is perception research important?

Under UK law, the identification of **stalking** is a **legally subjective** process (*Sambrooks, 2018*)



Stalking

Involves the accumulation of unwanted behaviours which, in isolation, may be considered harmless (*Scott, 2020*)

Legislation

Accommodates this through a 'reasonable person' test (*Scott et al., 2019*)

However, onus rests on victims to distinguish unreasonable stalking behaviour from, e.g., 'reasonable courtship' (*Sinclair, 2010*)



- ... 'stalking' therefore largely **determined by the perceptions** of those involved.



Why is perception research important?

How can stalking being determined by the perception of those who experience it be a problem?



Perceptions of Stalking

Misperceptions of stalking are incredibly prevalent (*see Scott., 2020 for a review*)

... prevent victims and support structures from identifying and intervening in stalking
(*Korkodeilou, 2016; McNamara & Marsil, 2012*)

Relational Stalking

Perceived less seriously when perpetrated by an ex-partner than stranger (*Duff & Scott, 2013; Chung & Sheridan, 2021b*)

... individuals who stalk ex-partners are the most prevalent, persistent, and violent of those who stalk (*McEwan et al., 2017; Rosenfeld, 2004; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007*)

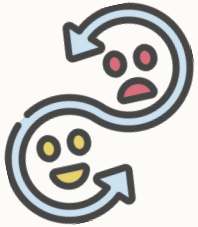
- ... relational stalking therefore remains an important area for perception research.





Stalking and personality pathology

Many factors influence how stalking is perceived; personality remains relatively unexamined...



Personality & Perceptions of Stalking

Previous experimental research limited to an *observer's* personality; e.g., 'dark tetrad' traits found to reduce perceived severity (Chung and Sheridan, 2021a)

Personality Difficulties & Stalking

However, most individuals who engage in stalking meet diagnostic criteria for '*personality disorder*' (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014; Nijdam-Jones et al., 2018; Wheatley et al., 2020)

This group are twice as likely to victimise ex-partners than strangers (McEwan & Strand, 2013), and are the most violent and likely to re-offend (Rosenfeld, 2003; Rosenfeld & Lewis, 2005)



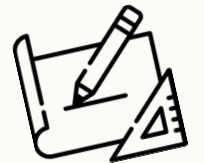
- Despite presenting the greatest risk, experimental research had not yet examined how the personality of individuals who stalk can influence perceptions of stalking...



The present study

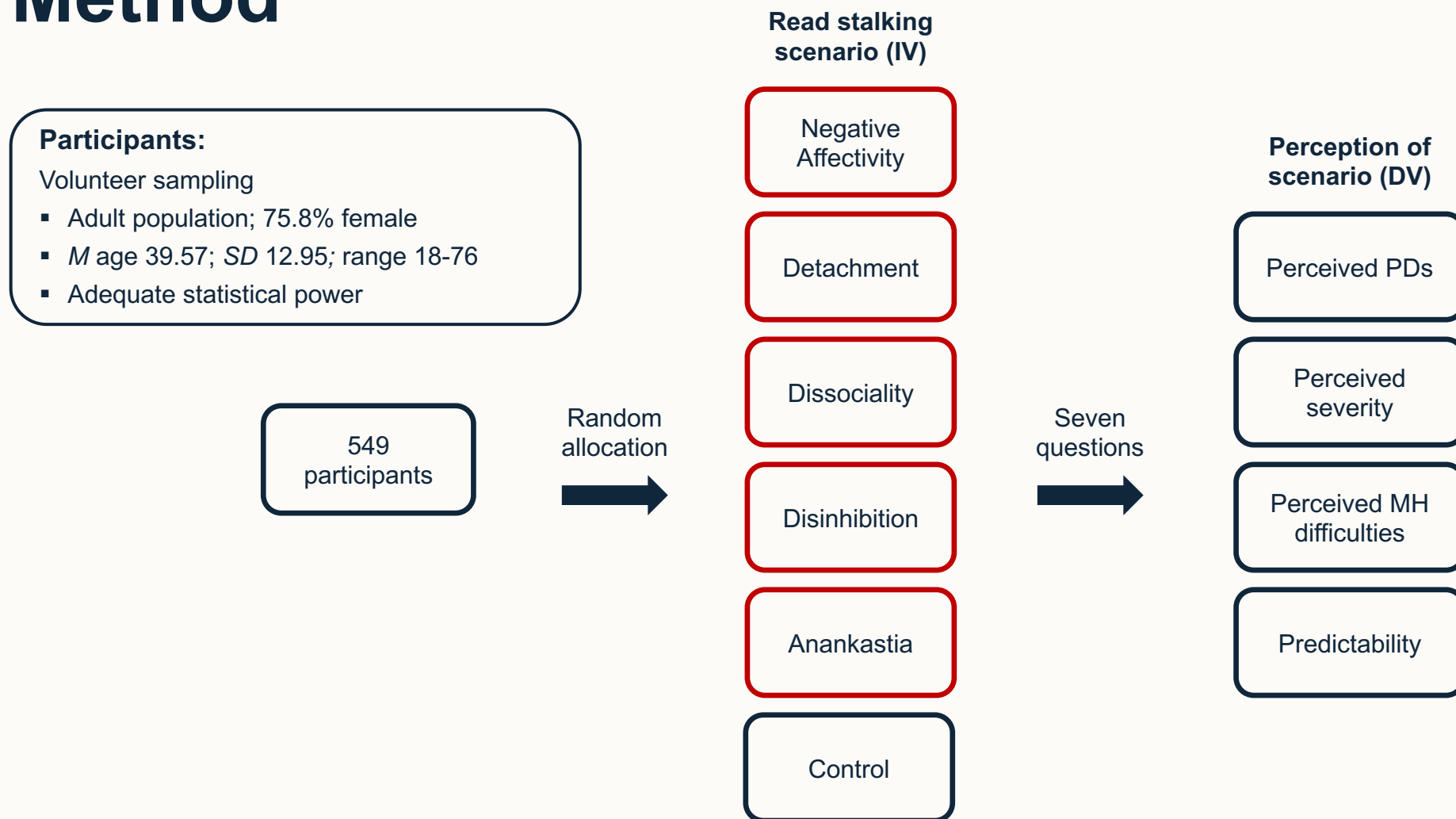


- **Aim:** to investigate how individuals perceive **relational stalking** when the individual engaging in stalking presents with '**personality disorder**';
- **Rationale:** to increase understanding of **misperceptions**, and inform attempts to **improve** the **recognition of**, and provision of **support for**, stalking victimisation;
- **Non-directional hypothesis adopted:** expected perpetrator personality pathology to influence perceptions of relational stalking;
- **Design:** partial replication; online **vignette study** using a **between-participants experimental** design.



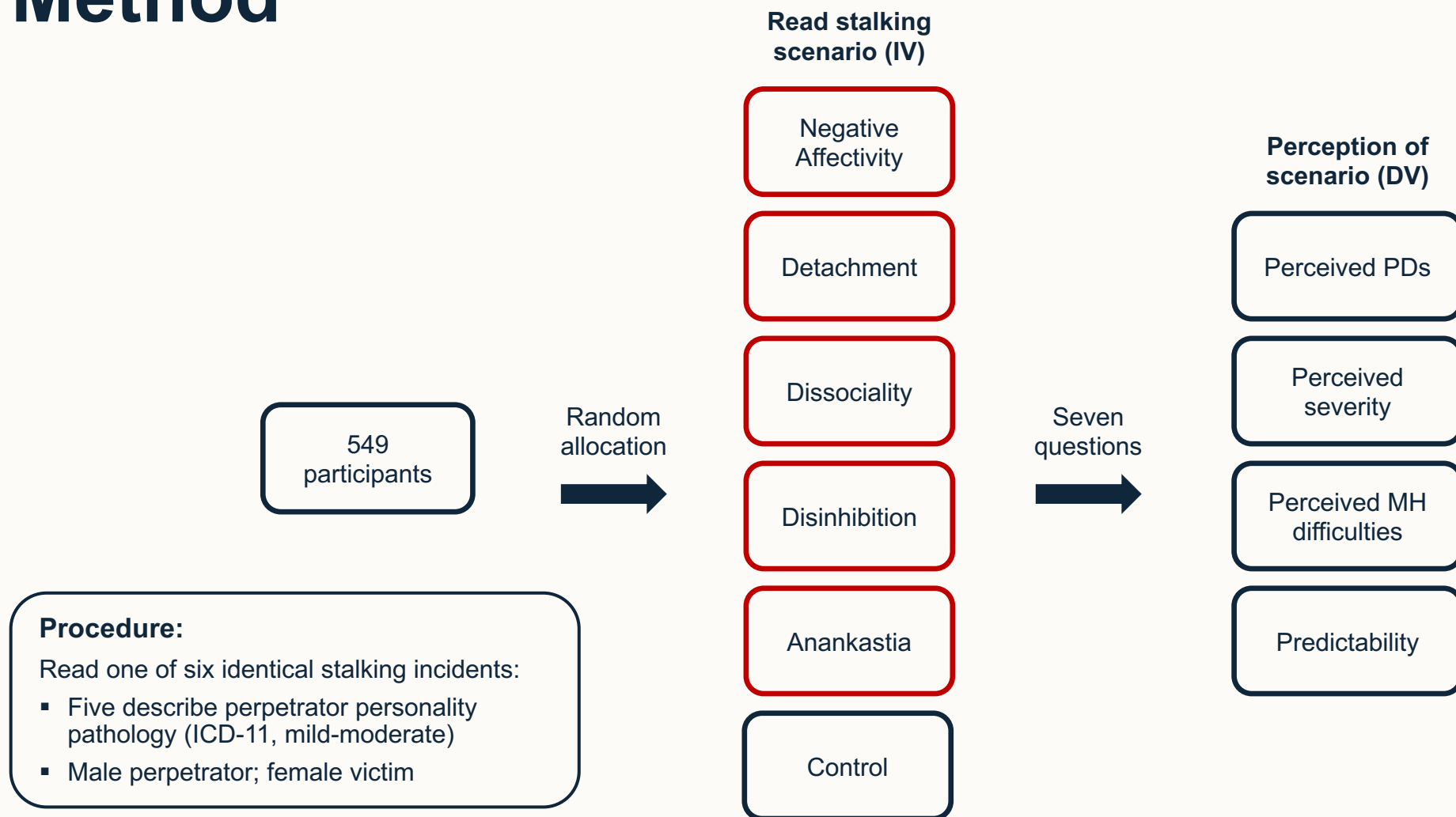


Method





Method





Example scenario: Negative affectivity

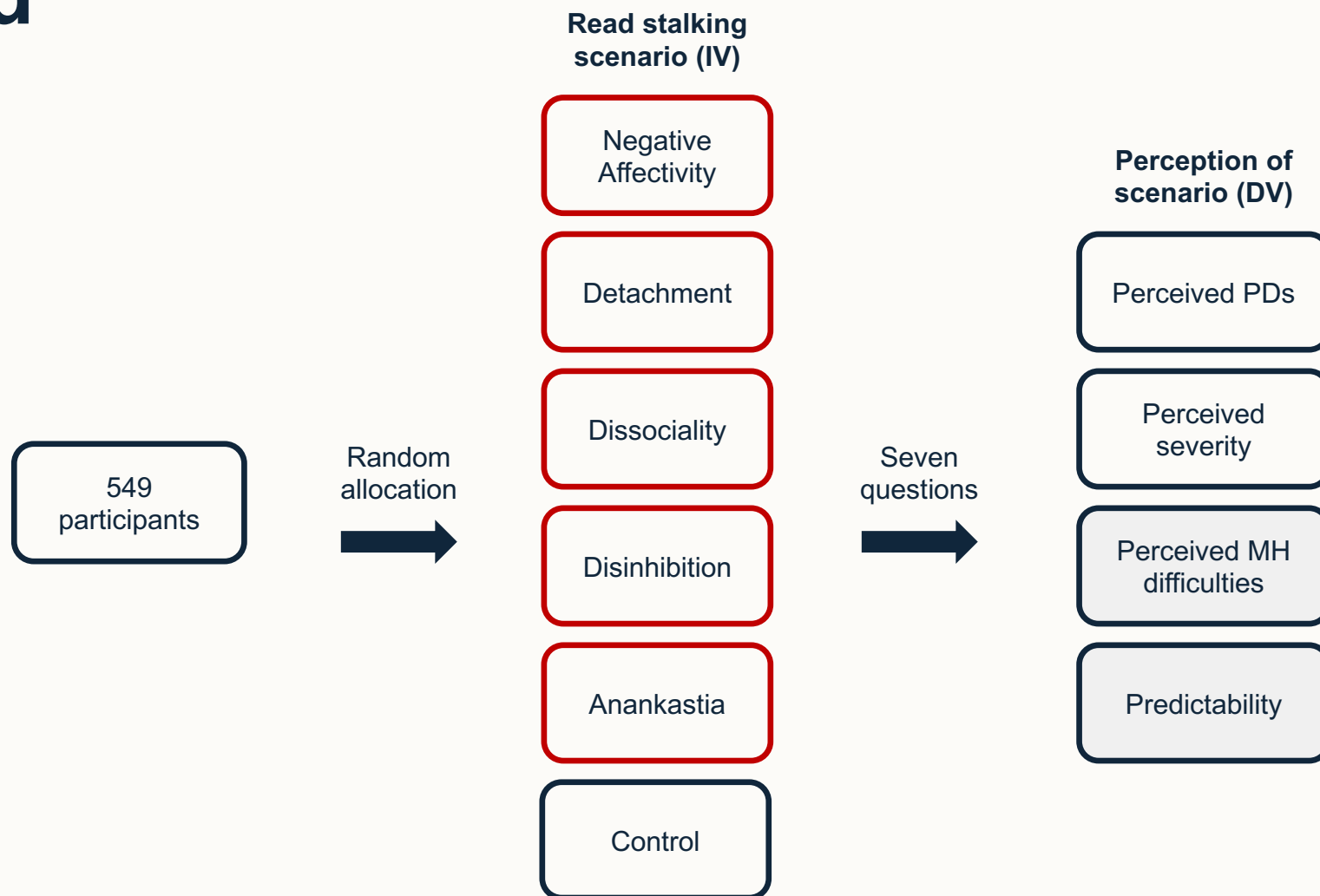
“ Amelia first met George when she started working in the same department store as him. A romance developed and they subsequently dated...

During their relationship George frequently **accused Amelia of being unfaithful** when she stayed late at work or went out with friends. George often **became upset and inconsolable for long periods of time** and would **tell Amelia that he was not good enough for her**. Amelia ended the relationship after six months.

In the two months that followed, George... sent Amelia around **five text messages a day**, **approached Amelia several times** when she left work, and **telephoned her at home**. Amelia **asked George not to call her**, but he **still called regularly**. Most recently... asked Amelia to change her mind and requested they get back together. ”



Method





Key findings

Influence of perpetrator personality pathology on perceptions of the stalking scenarios...



MANOVA

One-way MANOVA found a small, significant difference in perceptions of the hypothetical stalking incident based on perpetrator personality pathology.

$((F(35, 2261) = 3.11, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .04))$

ANOVAs & Post-hoc

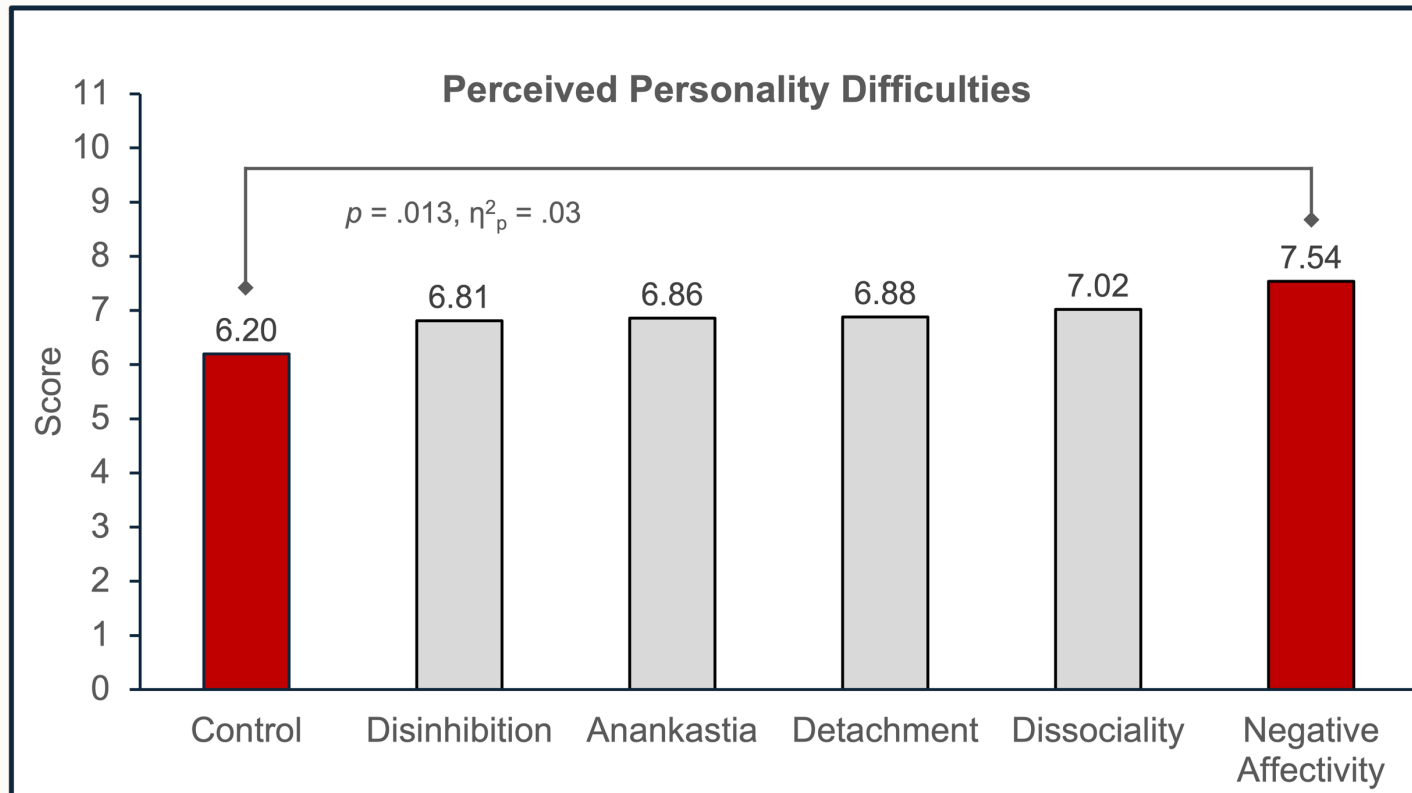
Univariate ANOVAs (Holm-Bonferroni corrected) and post-hoc Tukey-Kramer pairwise comparisons used sequentially to explore differences in responses to individual questions...





Key findings: Personality difficulties

“Do you think that [name of ex-partner] is experiencing personality difficulties?”



Interpretations

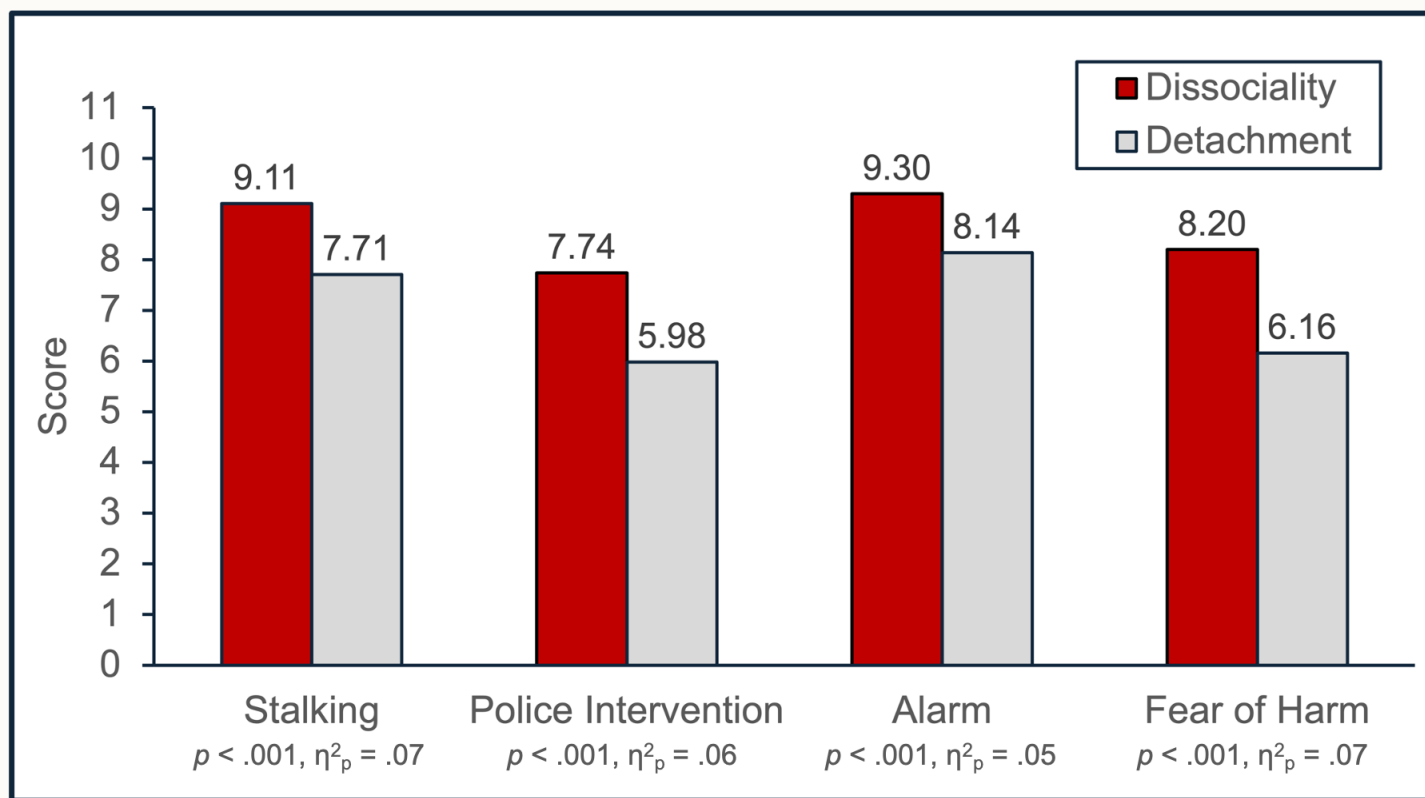
Trend to view PDs as PDs...

Control picking up on some difficulties?

Dissociality and negative affectivity
typical “dramatic & erratic”?



Key findings: Perceived severity



Results & Interpretations

Exhibited traits of dissociality perceived to carry most severity, detachment least;

Detachment most frequently sig. different in post-hoc analyses;

Police intervention – trends suggest not reflective of other severity questions.



Conclusions & Implications

Novel finding: perpetrator personality pathology does differentially bias perceptions of stalking behaviour.

- Crucially, the perpetrator's personality influenced how harmful stalking was perceived to be, and recommendations for support;
 - Given detachment is a key trait within clinical psychopathy, warrants further exploration.

Implications

1. Professionals – 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 their stalking risk;
 - Especially considering stalking is rarely an individual's documented index offence.
2. Victims of stalking more readily seek support from family and friends (*Buhi et al., 2009*); misperceptions risk delaying support and early intervention.
 - Continued attempts needed to improve the recognition of and support for victims of stalking (e.g., via public education); future replication with additional contextual information regarding r/s.
3. Personality is socially- and culturally-specific; replication needed cross-culturally, with different victim-perpetrator sex compositions (e.g., male victims), and with a representative sample.



University of
Nottingham

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology

Thank you

Please ask questions and share feedback.

Alfred Vaughan, Forensic Psychologist in Training (Alfred.vaughan@nottingham.ac.uk)

Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology, University of Nottingham



References (I)

- Buhi, E. R., Clayton, H., & Surrency, H. H. (2009). Stalking victimization among college women and subsequent help-seeking behaviors. *Journal of American College Health*, 57(4), 419-426. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JACH.57.4.419-426>
- Cavezza, C., & McEwan, T. E. (2014). Cyberstalking versus off-line stalking in a forensic sample. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 20(10), 955-970. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2014.893334>
- Chung, K. L., & Sheridan, L. (2021a). Perceptions of stalking in Malaysia and England: The influence of perpetrator-target prior relationship and personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 182, 111064. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.111064>
- Chung, K. L., & Sheridan, L. (2021b). Perceptions of stalking: Examining perceivers' country of origin, perpetrator-target prior relationship, and the mediating effect of victim responsibility. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 088626052110426. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211042601>
- Duff, S. C., & Scott, A. J. (2013). Understanding perceptions of stalking: The impact of additional contextual information regarding the breakdown of relationships. *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, 3(2), 136-144. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-09-2012-0005>
- Korkodeilou, J. (2016). Stalking victims, victims of sexual violence and criminal justice system responses: Is there a difference or just 'business as usual'? *The British Journal of Criminology*, 56(2), 256-273. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azv054>
- McEwan, T. E., Daffern, M., MacKenzie, R. D., & Ogloff, J. R. P. (2017). Risk factors for stalking violence, persistence, and recurrence. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 28(1), 38-56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2016.1247188>



References (II)

- McEwan, T. E., Daffern, M., MacKenzie, R. D., & Ogloff, J. R. P. (2017). Risk factors for stalking violence, persistence, and recurrence. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 28(1), 38-56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2016.1247188>
- McNamara, C. L., & Marsil, D. F. (2012). The prevalence of stalking among college students: The disparity between researcher- and self-identified victimization. *Journal of American College Health*, 60(2), 168-174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2011.584335>
- Nijdam-Jones, A., Rosenfeld, B., Gerbrandij, J., Quick, E., & Galietta, M. (2018). Psychopathology of stalking offenders: Examining the clinical, demographic, and stalking characteristics of a community-based sample. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 45(5), 712-731. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854818760643>
- Rosenfeld, B. (2003). Recidivism in stalking and obsessional harassment. *Law and Human Behavior*, 27(3), 251-265. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023479706822>
- Rosenfeld, B. (2004). Violence risk factors in stalking and obsessional harassment: A review and preliminary meta-analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 31(1), 9-36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854803259241>
- Rosenfeld, B., & Lewis, C. (2005). Assessing violence risk in stalking cases: A regression tree approach. *Law and Human Behavior*, 29(3), 343-357. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10979-005-3318-6>
- Scott, A. J. (2020). Stalking: How perceptions differ from reality and why these differences matter. In R. Bull & I. Blandon-Gitlin (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Legal and Investigative Psychology* (pp. 238-254). Oxon: Routledge.



References (III)

- Scott, A. J., Duff, S. C., Sheridan, L., & Rajakaruna, N. (2019). The influence of contextual information regarding the breakdown of relationships and perpetrator-target sex composition on perceptions of relational stalking. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 25(4), 364-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2018.1529231>
- Sinclair, H. C. (2010). Stalking myth-attributions: Examining the role of individual and contextual variables on attributions in unwanted pursuit scenarios. *Sex roles*, 66(5), 378-391. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9853-8>
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2007). The state of the art of stalking: Taking stock of the emerging literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 12(1), 64-86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2006.05.001>
- Wheatley, R., Winder, B., & Kuss, D. J. (2020). What are the features of psychopathology for men who commit stalking offences? A systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 55, 101461. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2020.101461>

Notes

- **Credit:** presentation images and icons provided by Flaticon.com.