

## Hourglass's Response to the Protection from Stalking Bill (Northern Ireland) Consultation.

Hourglass is pleased with the proposed Protection from Stalking Bill and the provisions contained within it put forward by the Department of Justice. Although since 2018, Hourglass has only had 19 cases where stalking was mentioned as a form of abuse, or as part of wider abuse,<sup>1</sup> the charity is well aware of the risk to older people of stalking and stalking related victimisation. While detailed data on stalking of older people is slim, especially from a UK or NI perspective, the stalking of people appears to follow similar trends to those of wider forms of abuse and domestic abuse violence committed against older people, with the vast majority of perpetrators being men,<sup>2</sup> and most harassment being committed by someone who the victim knew.<sup>3</sup>

The fear that stalking can cause, can also be an issue for the mental and physical health of older people, Morrall et al noted crime induced changes in behaviour, revolving around lack of confidence and increased fear -especially with women, regarding attitudes towards going out alone or going out after dark.<sup>4</sup> As Moore and Trajanowicz argue “[Fear of crime] motivates people to invest time and money in defensive measures to reduce their vulnerabilities. They stay indoors more than they wish, avoid certain places, buy extra locks...”<sup>5</sup> For older people, who already have an increased risk of isolation and loneliness, further disengagement with family and communities post victimization could potentially be fatal or cause serious health defects, with elderly social isolation being linked to an increased risk for all cause mortality, diminished immune function, and cognitive decline. Fear among older people can further be driven by these factors, as declining health be it psychological or physical can make older people feel even more defenceless if they encounter stalking, violence, or crime. The stalking of older people, much like wider forms of abuse and mistreatment also appears to be a hidden crime, and one that may have a higher prevalence than commonly understood, Basile et al in a study focused on the US from 2006, suggested that 1.59% of those aged over 55 had been a victim of stalking,<sup>6</sup> and that those aged over 55 or retired are the least likely to report stalking victimisation.<sup>7</sup> If these trends are similar in a NI or UK wide context, then the issue of the stalking of older people needs urgent research and policy based attention.

As such, Hourglass views it as positive to see increased attention being given to stalking as a whole, and of the creation of a specific offence of stalking, and the behaviours and acts which can constitute stalking and harassment. The inclusion of aspects like the stalking protection order provides better protections for victims of all ages, and the discussion around the bill can shine a lens on stalking/harassment and its subsequent effects on mental and physical health.

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<sup>1</sup> Hourglass Helpline Data (2021)

<sup>2</sup> Timothy M Diette et al., “Stalking: Does it Leave a Psychological Footprint,” *Social Science Quarterly* 95, no. 2 (2013)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* (2013).

<sup>4</sup> P. Morrall et al., "Crime and Health: A Preliminary Study into the Effects of Crime on the Mental Health of UK University Students," *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 17, no. 9 (2010)

<sup>5</sup> Mark Moore, Robert Trojanowicz, *Policing, and the Fear of Crime.* (1988).

<sup>6</sup> Kathleen C. Basile et al., “Stalking in the United States; Recent National Prevalence Estimates,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 31, no. 2 (2006)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* (2006).