



**NETWORK FOR SURVIVING STALKING
RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE FROM:**

**THE COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
- REVIEW OF THE NEED FOR STALKING LEGISLATION IN NORTHERN
IRELAND**

DECEMBER 2016

The Committee for Justice is undertaking a *Review of the Need for Stalking Legislation in Northern Ireland*, the aim being to assess whether the current legislation in place in Northern Ireland to deal with stalking is appropriate and effective, identify any gaps and consider the need for and potential benefits of introducing specific stalking legislation.

The Network for Surviving Stalking is collecting data from the victims of stalking via an online survey in all the regions of the United Kingdom. The survey is ongoing but NSS has reviewed the completed questionnaires to extract information from victims living in Northern Ireland.

The review committee has called for information related to each of the following **Terms of Reference**.

1 Identify the extent, types and impact of stalking experienced by victims in Northern Ireland

The extent

On 7.12. 2016, six respondents to the survey (total respondents 200) live in Northern Ireland (3%). 3% matches the size of the population of Northern Ireland in comparison with the other regions of the United Kingdom. However response rates to the whole UK survey do not exactly match the % of UK regional populations. Regional response rates appear to be influenced by the activity of local organisations that support victims in identifying stalking behaviour and offering advice and support. The small number of respondents from Northern Ireland could be an indicator of less active support organisations.

The length of time that respondents had been stalked:

5 respondents for more than 2 years
1 respondent for 5 -7 weeks

The length of time that respondents have been stalked could be an indicator that interventions have failed to stop the stalking behaviours and they have continued for an extended period of time.

The types

5 respondents have been stalked by ex-partners

1 respondent by a client she met through work

The respondents range in age from 20-24, to 55-59. Three respondents are over 50. Five are female and heterosexual, one is male and homosexual.

Each respondent listed a wide range of strategies used by the stalker and each respondent included stalking by emails/texts and by physical presence such as turning up outside the house, place of work, watching, spying and following.

1 respondent included more serious threats of harm:

- damage to possessions and property
- stealing personal property
- threatening to sexually assault
- sexual assault
- threatening to hurt children

The following quotes illustrate the lengths to which stalkers may go:

The man was a client from my work and I realised that he was following me home from work. Then when he moved into a private rental at the end of my street, I became more concerned but when I woke up each morning and he was standing outside my house I realised that I was right and not paranoid.

The stalker took a relative into the bank and she pretended to be me and signed paperwork in my name.

The Impact

The victims of stalking report a wide range of financial, physical and psychological impacts as illustrated by the representative quotes below.

I have had to pay for psychological counselling and medical treatment. Physical pain, palpitations and sweating, admitted to hospital with suspected heart attack (woman, aged 55-59, stalked by ex-partner for more than 2 years)

I am a professional woman who has gone on to become the CEO of my organisation. I am and always have been a strong person but this experience made my world smaller for a significant period of time, I worked and I went home, I didn't let my children play out of my sight, i was afraid he would harm my dogs when i was out or worse still get into my home and this man never touched me, threatened to hurt me or damaged any of my property but he is a scar I carry that will always be there. I still cannot believe I won't open my bedroom curtains and see him in my

garden smiling up at me and he hasn't been there for eight years (woman, aged 45-49, stalked by work client for more than 2 years)

I have had the expense of increasing my home and personal security. I have had to pay to attend court My work performance has deteriorated

- *I feel - or have felt - anxious*
- *I have experienced a loss of confidence*
- *I was/am frightened to be on my own*
- *I feel/felt isolated and lonely*
- *I have/had difficulty sleeping*
- *I have problems with trust, difficulties with intimacy (woman, aged 50-54, stalked for more than 2 years by ex-partner)*

2 Consider the effectiveness of the current legislation in dealing with stalking

5 respondents contacted the police. Only 1 respondent reported action being taken by the police after he dialled 999 to report the stalker had entered his house. The police arrived and the stalker was removed. The 4 other respondents reported visiting or contacting the police by phone but no action being taken. Two descriptions of the police (in)action are as follows:

I was advised that i had to report any significant incidents to get three incident numbers so that they could speak to him about harassment but following me, standing outside my home, calling at my work, moving into my street were not criminal. No steps were taken and the stalking continued.

Another victim reported visiting the police '*who recognised the situation immediately as stalking but took no action*'.

1 respondent contacted her solicitor and a letter was sent.

The respondent who was stalked by a workplace client also described the lack of support by her employer. Her employer implied that because she was a 'good looking woman' that she had in some way encouraged her stalker's behaviour. Such inappropriate comments by the employer suggest that awareness of stalking behaviours among employers is also required.

3 Consider the need for and potential benefits of having specific stalking legislation for Northern Ireland

One victim reported:

*PSNI responded within the framework that they had. The officer i spoke to was polite and sympathetic but ultimately thought he had no powers, which was true. **Northern Ireland needs this gap filled.***