

Response from Individual received on 5 December 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing in response to the Department of Justice's Committee for Justice Review of the Need for Stalking Legislation in Northern Ireland.

I know the call has gone out to groups and individual stalking victims, of which I am neither.

Sadly I write this today as a former stalker and I hope I can highlight the need for any new legislation to include the offence of 'cyber-stalking', stalking that goes on in the virtual world, on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

I stalked a number of individuals, all females, in this way from around early 2007 to around August 2013.

My behaviour started off as harassment, moaning at people if they hadn't replied to a text within minutes of receiving it, or if they any hadn't replied to an email or message on social media sites.

For some of my victims, however, it soon got much worse.

My actions included, but were not limited to:

- sending indecent messages/images on social media sites
- spying on victims social media profiles up to around two dozen times a day
- attempting to add or follow other friends of my victims in order to further spy on them
- sending rape threats on social media

In October 2011 I confessed to police what I had been doing and gave them the names of my victims.

In September 2012 I was finally charged with six counts of harassment and was eventually convicted in December 2012.

My sentencing was a month later and my 'punishment' was three years' probation, 100 hours community service, ordered to do the Community Sexual Offences Programme and restraining orders barring me from ever contacting five of my six victims.

I had threatened to rape people on social media but walked free from court.

The sixth victim did not get a restraining order because, on the day of my sentencing, I handed over a print out of an obscure comment she had made suggesting she may, one day in the distant future, want to restart contact with me.

The courts accepted this and did not include her on my restraining order, without even consulting the victim. This left me free to continue to bombard her with messages.

I did manage to stop contacting victim number six for about 6-8 weeks but eventually I resumed contacting her. Not as much as previously but still more than she clearly wanted as she never replied to any of my messages.

Eventually, in August 2013 she made a new complaint against me to PSNI and was charged with harassing her for a second time.

I was convicted in November 2014 and sentenced to twelve months, suspended for three years.

Once again I had walked free from court, albeit with a one year sentence hanging over me for three years.

The judges in both these cases badly let down my victims. At the very least I should have got a suspended sentence for the original offences.

Anyone who threatens to rape someone, whether in the 'real world' or the 'virtual world' should face a custodial sentence. I include myself in that.

Two of my victims have spoken out in the media about their experiences. The hurt and trauma I have caused them is unforgivable.

Of course, judges may hand out non-custodial or suspended sentences for offenders convicted under any new stalking legislation but I'd also like to think that would be less likely especially with a stricter maximum sentence than the current Protection from Harassment Order carries.

The current legislation is letting down victims of stalking in Northern Ireland.

My cases, and the leniency with which I was dealt with, is proof of this.

I, therefore, fully support the campaign to bring in new stalking legislation into Northern Ireland law and hope that this letter will be helpful to those undertaking this review to see that this legislation is long overdue.

I also hope that under any new legislation a restraining order will be automatically handed down unless the victim speaks up and says she/he does not want one. This way stalkers, cannot abuse the system to enable themselves to be able to continue to harass their victims.

I am embarrassed by my actions and how I behaved toward a number of people for around six years. I know I will never be able to make it up to those victims but I hope, by submitting this letter, I can at least help future victims of stalking.

This is a heinous crime and needs to be dealt with on its own. Please introduce this legislation to Northern Ireland law.