

# Changes needed to improve police response to stalking

Published on 27 September 2024

Reports published after a joint investigation into a super complaint made by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust

News 6 mins read

The College of Policing, the [Independent Office for Police Conduct](#) (IOPC) and [His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services](#) (HMICFRS), have investigated a super-complaint on how police deal with stalking and harassment.

The report follows a super-complaint made by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, on behalf of the National Stalking Consortium, about the way police respond to reports of stalking. The investigation looked at areas of concern raised by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust including:

- failing to identify cases of stalking and investigate them properly
- understanding the impact on victims and protecting them from further harm
- using existing powers effectively and managing perpetrators

## What did the investigation find?

The joint investigation found clear evidence to support the concerns raised in the super-complaint, which was submitted in November 2022. While police understanding of stalking is improving, reflected in innovative action by the police, too often these cases are not being taken seriously enough and the quality of investigations is inconsistent.

The investigation reviewed more than 500 police investigation case files and spoke with officers and staff involved in responding to reports of stalking. We spoke with victims and support services, to better understand their experiences, and also reviewed a significant amount of research and data on the subject.

A survey of all 43 police forces in England and Wales was carried out, and IOPC stalking cases were reviewed to inform our findings.

## Findings

Among the findings highlighted in the report are:

- poor risk assessment and safeguarding may be leaving some victims at serious risk
- laws and guidance for police are confusing and inconsistent
- there is a lack of understanding by police of the scale and types of stalking in their area
- there are issues with the quality and resourcing of some investigations
- more can be done to share and build on the good work already being done

## What actions need to be taken?

Our report has made 29 recommendations that give policing and our criminal justice partners a clear plan of action to improve standards in our response to stalking. These include:

- outlining steps chief constables can take now to improve the quality of stalking investigations
- changing the criminal law on stalking, which is currently confusing in places, to make it easier for police to understand and apply
- making stalking protection orders simpler and easier for the police to use
- ensuring police and support services work more closely together to improve the service provided to victims

Victims of stalking rightly expect that, when they report something to the police, their concerns will be taken seriously.

These recommendations – to Chief Constables, Police and Crime Commissioners, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Crown Prosecution Service – will ensure that cases are correctly identified and are properly investigated. Police will

take the necessary steps to protect victims from further harm and bring perpetrators to justice.

The report calls on all forces to publish an action plan setting out how they intend to respond to our recommendations and have asked the NPCC to provide an update on the progress made to make these important changes in summer 2025.

## What have we done to support the investigation?

We have carried out focus groups with officers and staff from five forces, alongside two rapid-evidence reviews. One review concerned the link between stalking and serious harm or homicide. The other focused on ways to improve the experience of reporting stalking to the police.

## Experience of reporting stalking to the police

Our rapid evidence review shows that:

- many victims do not report cases to the police because they fear doing so will escalate the perpetrator's behaviour or they won't be taken seriously, often only doing so when the situation worsens and they need additional support
- while most victims are dissatisfied with the police response, those with positive experiences felt understood and supported, especially when a named officer managed their case and kept them informed
- [Read the Victim Experience of the Police Response to Stalking: Rapid Evidence Review](#)

## Officer and staff perspectives

We conducted focus groups with officers and staff from five forces to discuss barriers and enablers in responding to stalking allegations, revealing:

- response officers and call handlers are expected to recognise stalking despite sometimes feeling they don't have enough training and experience
- skills and knowledge gap in gathering and interpreting digital evidence when the majority of cases have an online element

- the positive effect dedicated support officers and partnerships with third sector organisations have in improving responses to stalking cases
- [Read our Officer and Staff Perspectives on the Police Response to Stalking Report](#)

## Links between stalking and serious violence or homicide

Our rapid evidence review found that:

- while many studies suggest a connection between stalking and serious violence or homicide, the evidence is not conclusive
- victims who are in or have had relationships with their stalkers are at greater risk of harm
- online stalking has similar emotional and psychological impacts as physical stalking, and both should be treated with equal seriousness
- [Read our Stalking and Serious Violence or Homicide: Rapid Evidence Review](#)

*“Our joint investigation into Suzy Lamplugh's Trust super-complaint has shown that policing has made progress in the way it tackles stalking. I'm pleased that we have been able to share the examples of promising practice we encountered during the investigation on our practice bank so that they can be adopted more widely across policing.*

*Despite the progress made, our investigation has also shown that the service needs to improve further. To support this improvement officers now have access to updated advice and training for when they are responding to stalking or harassment cases. One, of a number, of next steps will be to strengthen national guidance for police across England and Wales to improve the quality of investigations.”*

**Chief Constable, Sir Andy Marsh, CEO of the College of Policing**

- [Read the report in full on the Gov.uk website](#)

## Sharing promising practice

We have also published examples of promising practice we encountered during the investigation on our practice bank, including:

- [Using processing software to increase the efficiency of stalking investigations](#)
- [A safeguarding app to protect victims of domestic abuse and stalking](#)
- [Early awareness stalking intervention](#)
- [An integrated risk management service for cases of stalking](#)
- [Providing a specialist response to stalking through a multi-agency team](#)

## Improving our guidance

The review has found that guidance for policing on stalking is scattered and inconsistent. We acknowledge and accept the recommendations and have begun work to improve our [authorised professional practice \(APP\) on stalking or harassment](#).

We've updated specific advice for [first responders](#) and for [investigators](#) that supports police to successfully identify stalking or harassment, investigate allegations thoroughly, and safeguard and care for victims.

We are also supporting policing to acquire the digital skills they need to undertake stalking investigations effectively. [Operation Modify](#) – our interactive training – helps officers and staff develop their understanding of digital opportunities for intelligence and investigation.

## Tags

Stalking or harassment