

Stalking Victimization Among Police Officers

Angela Guldemann

University of Berne and University Hospital of
Psychiatry, Zurich

Rolf-Dieter Stieglitz

University of Basel

J. Reid Meloy

University of California, San Diego

Elmar Habermeyer

University Hospital of Psychiatry, Zurich

Anneliese Ermer

University of Berne

The purpose of this study was to assess nonprofessional and professional related stalking victimization in a selective sample of 542 Swiss police officers. The stalking lifetime prevalence rate was 5.2% ($N = 28$). Four percent ($n = 22$, 4.1%) were stalked by nonprofessionally related stalkers, and 1.1% ($n = 6$) of the police officers were stalked for professional reasons. Lifetime stalking victimization among officers was 10% for women and 4% for men. Both groups showed more similarities than differences. A number of police officers were reluctant to inform their private and professional network about the stalking for various reasons, including embarrassment about stalking victimization. Only the minority of the stalking cases were officially reported to the justice system. Further implications are discussed.

Keywords: stalking, victimization, police officers, professional related stalking, nonprofessional related stalking

Stalking has increasingly been recognized as a social and legal problem in Western countries during the last two decades (Meloy, 2007). The majority of scientific and legal definitions describe stalking as a repeated pattern of unwanted contact and approach behavior that (could) cause(s) anxiety or fear in the stalking victim. Purcell, Pathé, and Mullen (2004) showed that a 2-week threshold dis-

tinguishes between brief instances of intrusiveness and protracted stalking. Although the inconsistent use of definitions makes comparisons difficult, the prevalence rates of international epidemiological studies imply that stalking is a phenomenon that warrants attention. Reported lifetime prevalence rates vary between 4.5% and 23%, with the rates for women being generally higher (6% to 32%) than for men (2% to 15%; Van der Aa & Kunst, 2009). No epidemiological data exist for Switzerland yet. In the neighboring country of Germany, Dressing, Kuehner, and Gass (2005) conducted the first epidemiological study in continental Europe among a representative community sample. Stalking was defined as multiple episodes of harassment occurring over a time frame of at least 2 weeks, using more than one contact or approach method, and causing fear in the victim. Almost 12% of the 400 female and 297 male respondents were stalked once in their lifetime. The lifetime prevalence rate for females was 17%, and 4% for males.

Angela Guldemann, Forensic Psychiatric Service, University of Berne, and Department for Forensic Psychiatry, University Hospital of Psychiatry, Zurich; Rolf-Dieter Stieglitz, Department of Psychology, Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry, University of Basel; J. Reid Meloy, Department of Psychiatry, University of California, San Diego; Elmar Habermeyer, Department for Forensic Psychiatry, University Hospital of Psychiatry, Zurich; Anneliese Ermer, Forensic Psychiatric Service, University of Berne.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Angela Guldemann, University Hospital of Psychiatry Zurich, Department for Forensic Psychiatry, Lengstrasse 31, P. O. Box, 1931, 8032 Zurich. E-mail: angela.guldemann@puk.zh.ch

Stalkers can be from all backgrounds regardless of gender, age, or social class. A range of studies imply, however, that in the majority of cases stalkers are male, between 30- and 40-years-old, and single or living in separation at the time of the stalking. Male stalkers usually pursue a female victim, with ex-partner stalking being the most common type (Meloy, 2007). Hence, the majority of stalking victims are women, although male victims may be underreported because males could be more reluctant than females to admit being a victim (Sheridan, Gillett, & Davies, 2002). Higher rates of same-gender stalking have been reported for male than for female victims (Dressing et al., 2005; Purcell, Pathé, & Mullen, 2002), but not all studies are equivocal in this regard (Meloy, Mohandie, & Green, 2011; Strand & McEwan, 2011). The result aforementioned could be an artifact, in that male victims may take male stalkers more seriously while failing to report to the police when being stalked by a female. This could be due to embarrassment or the erroneous belief that it is less problematic when a female stalks them (Purcell, Powell, & Mullen, 2005). In contrast to male stalkers who often want to restore a broken relationship, female stalkers tend to pursue individuals to establish a *new* relationship (Meloy & Boyd, 2003; Meloy et al., 2011).

Stalking victims are exposed to a chronic stress situation with physical violence occurring in about one third of all cases and this number seems even higher when the victim is an ex-partner (Meloy, 2007). In an analysis of 17 studies from the years 2002 until 2010, Will, Hintz, and Blättner (2012) showed that stalking victimization has adverse effects on physical, psychological, and social well-being. Kuehner, Gass, and Dressing (2012) also reported an association with poor mental health, impaired psychological functioning, and the use of medication that seems largely comparable across male and female stalking victims.

Profession as a Risk Factor for Stalking Victimization

Although stalking could happen to anyone, it has been suggested that being a member of certain professions may enhance the risk of stalking victimization (e.g., Purcell et al., 2005). First, one has to contemplate what kind of fea-

tures makes a profession more at risk than others. One aspect that could presumably increase the risk of stalking victimization is working in a profession with frequent human contact. The mere exposure to other people, however, does not seem to be a sufficient criterion. The stalker's perception of the profession and its representatives as (a) influential, (b) helpful, or (c) harmful to him or her may be a more essential component.

The research on stalking of professionals is still in its infancy and seems hampered by divergent definitions of stalking, by various sampling strategies, and by a lack of, or poor construction of a control group. Research conducted to date has identified at least three professions at increased risk of stalking victimization: public figures, mental health professionals, and journalists.

Public Figures

Higher rates of stalking victimization than in the general population have been established for public figures (Hoffmann, Meloy, Guldemann, & Ermer, 2011; Malsch, Visscher, & Blaauw, 2002; Meloy, Mohandie, & Green, 2008). Palmer, Barry-Walsh, and Pathé (2015) found that 87% in their sample of 102 politicians in New Zealand reported experiencing harassment. The Internet facilitates stalking behavior (Palmer et al., 2015). Moreover, the availability of public figures in the social media and their sharing of private details and pictures may strengthen solely fantasy-based, or in some cases delusional, attachments in unstable individuals (Meloy et al., 2008).

Mental Health Professionals

Another group of professionals in danger of stalking victimization are those in the mental health field (for more details, see Carr, Goranson, & Drummond, 2014). Patients suffer from mental disorders, some of which seem to be associated with stalking behavior such as delusional or personality disorders (McEwan & Strand, 2013). A vulnerable situation arises when core elements of a therapeutic relationship like empathy or understanding are misinterpreted as a friendship or romantic affection. Due to the mental health problems of the patients they may also lack adequate coping strategies to deal with real or perceived injus-

tice or with rejection in a therapeutic setting. Prevalence rates for stalking victimization among physicians (e.g., general practitioners, psychiatrists) range between 11%–68% (Nelson, Johnson, Ostermeyer, Sikes, & Coverdale, 2015). Still, Hughes, Thom, and Dixon (2007) reported that only half of their sample (psychiatrists and nurses) was actually stalked by clients, and the others were stalked in a private setting. It appeared that more female than male stalkers targeted the professional related group. In the Krammer, Stepan, Baranyi, Kampfhammer, and Rothenhäusler (2007) study of stalked Austrian psychologists and psychiatrists, male professionals were stalked significantly more often than female professionals; noteworthy again was the high percentage of female stalkers (60%). According to Meloy and colleagues (2003, 2011), female stalkers often pursue a slightly older acquaintance in order to establish intimacy; an older and male psychotherapist would fit this description (Purcell, Pathé, & Mullen, 2001). The Austrian authors reported slightly higher same-gender stalking ratios for male psychologists than females. Purcell, Powell, and Mullen (2005) also found significantly more same-gender stalking occurring to male than female clinicians.

Journalists

Dressing, Martini, Witthöft, Bailer, and Gass (2007) studied the stalking victimization of professional related versus nonprofessional related stalking episodes in a sample of 493 journalists from Germany. The same definition of stalking as in the community study aforementioned was used (Dressing et al., 2005). The response rate in this study was rather low (6%). Three quarters (76%) of the journalists stalked were female and one quarter (24%) were male. The lifetime prevalence of stalking episodes not related to the respondents' profession was 12% (e.g., ex-partners, friends), whereas 2.2% of the journalists had dealt with professional related stalking at least once in their life.

A distinct but nonsignificant difference was reported related to the motives: The professional related group assumed envy and revenge as primary reasons for the stalking. Neither stalking duration nor stalking methods differed significantly between the two groups. The au-

thors reported that significantly more male than female journalists were targeted in the professional related group. The victims in the professional group were significantly less anxious about the stalking situation than the nonprofessional related group, even though there was no significant difference concerning the number of threatening or violent incidents caused by the stalkers in both groups. Dressing et al. (2007) suggested that the greater number of men among the professional related group may be the reason for, on average, less fear associated with being stalked within the professional related victim group compared with the nonprofessional related group. Dressing and colleagues argued that men's general reluctance to admit feelings of fear might have contributed to the result. Further analysis showed that the lower anxiety level in the professional related group could not be explained by gender differences in coping with stalking, and might therefore be specific for professional related stalking in journalists (Gass, Martini, Witthöft, Bailer, & Dressing, 2009).

As for the consequences of stalking, the negative impact on the journalists' health due to the stalking experience did not significantly differ across the two groups. The two groups did not differ significantly in the frequency of taking measures against stalking (e.g., filing a police report). Still, a significant difference emerged concerning talking to colleagues and superiors at work: The professional related stalking victim group discussed their problem more frequently in their work environment, whereas only 22% reported sufficient support from their employer (Gass et al., 2009). In sum, Dressing et al. (2007) concluded that the lifetime stalking prevalence rate in their journalist sample (14.2%) was slightly elevated in comparison to the rate found in their representative German community sample (11.6%; Dressing et al., 2005), but suggested that other professions may be at a greater risk. We believe that one such profession comprises police officers, as MacKenzie and James (2011) pointed out. To date, researchers have not studied stalking victimization among police officers. The current study aims to extend the empirical literature on stalking to start to fill the gap on this topic.

The Current Study

To date, few studies have compared individuals affected and not affected by stalking in a professional context (e.g., mental health personnel; Purcell et al., 2005) and—even more rarely—individuals from the same profession who were either stalked for reasons associated with their work or for personal reasons (e.g., journalists; Dressing et al., 2007). As discussed above, research has demonstrated some professions to be at elevated risk, such as public figures, mental health professionals, or journalist. With respect to police officers, although in general they are less exposed to public attention than, for example, some journalists, there are factors that could make being a police officer a profession at particular risk for stalking. Police officers potentially deal with a large number of persons during their working day. It is a fact that police officers are often the target of threats and violence while conducting their work. For the year 2014, the Swiss Department of Statistics reported 2,567 offenses regarding Swiss Penal Code 285, which covers “violence and threats against public authorities and public officials” (Swiss Department of Statistics, 2015). The number does not allow further differentiation but it is assumed that a high proportion is concerned with violent acts against police officers. Single criminal acts against police officers are not the subject of this study, but they could nonetheless serve as a starting point or be part of a prolonged stalking episode that targets a specific police officer.

Against this background, the current study will examine stalking victimization of police officers in their professional and private lives. Because Switzerland’s stalking research is still in its infancy, the current study also provides an opportunity to assess characteristics of stalkers and their behavior and gauge prevalence rates in a selective (nonrepresentative) professional sample of victims. Gender differences have been identified as relevant for stalking victimization (e.g., women are more often victims of stalking, more fearful). Hence, we assessed whether gender differences were also present among male and female police officers. The following questions were addressed in an exploratory manner:

1. What is the prevalence of professional related and nonprofessional related stalking in a sample of police officers?
2. What are the general characteristics of stalkers and stalking behavior in this sample and how do the results relate to the empirical literature?
3. Are there differences among the professional and nonprofessional related groups in relation to:
 - sociodemographic variables of stalker and victims,
 - aspects of stalking behavior and context (e.g., motivation, duration),
 - impact of stalking on victims (e.g., fear, change of daily activities well-being, self- concept),
 - management of stalking (e.g., informing professional and private networks, reporting stalking to the police).
4. Do gender related differences emerge between female and male police officers regarding sociodemographics, stalking behavior/context, impact on victim and management of stalking?

Method

Materials and Analyzed Variables

Questionnaire. The survey was carried out as a request by three Swiss police headquarters for use in their internal education (Berne, Zurich, Solothurn). The stalking questionnaire used in this study was an extended version of a short questionnaire by Stompe and Ritter (2009) which mainly focused on general knowledge and attitudes on stalking among Austrian police officers. In the current study the questionnaire was extended after an intensive literature review and comprised four main sections. The police officers were asked about (a) their personal experiences as stalking victims, (b) their knowledge about stalking, (c) their professional experiences with stalking cases, and (d) their attitudes toward stalking. The results of the sections b, c, and d will be presented in a subsequent paper. The answer format was single or multiple choice as well as free answer format (e.g., other considerations, description of violent incidents). The German version of the questionnaire is obtainable from the first author.

Variables analyzed. Sociodemographic variables (gender, age, years of service) of the participants (also referred to as “victims”) were of interest. The stalking behavior/context (e.g., duration, frequency, stalking methods, frequency of violence, the relationship between stalker and victim) and underlying motives of the stalkers (e.g., emotions such as rage, jealousy, romantic affection, etc.) were assessed. Furthermore, the consequences of stalking in terms of its impact on the victim (e.g., fear, well-being, change of daily activities, seeking professional support, self-concept), their management on the stalking experience (e.g., informing their social networks, official report to the police), as well as positive and negative reactions from the social and professional network were assessed.

Stalking definition. As there is no stalking legislation in place in Switzerland currently, no legal definition could be used as a framework. In accordance with another definition from the published research on stalking (Dressing et al., 2005), stalking was defined as repeated unwanted attempts at contacting or approaching a specific person for at least 2 weeks, using multiple methods, and causing fear or apprehension through these types of behavior. The participants were asked to declare if they had been subjected to such incidents in their (a) private and/or (b) professional lives, and were asked if they had been stalked by more than one perpetrator at different points in their lives.

Procedure

The study was conducted online; no face-to-face interviews were conducted. The police forces of the Swiss cantons of Berne and Solothurn as well as the city police of Zurich participated between September, 2010 and October, 2010. An online link was either sent to the police officers’ professional e-mail accounts (Zurich and Solothurn) or could be accessed over their agency’s internal network service (Berne). In Zurich and Solothurn, the e-mail was sent to individuals with an official police status (not to administration staff). In Berne, staff was also notified that only police officers should take part. It was required that the officers currently or previously served time as front-line police officers. The police officers were able to participate in the survey for 5 weeks. A re-

minder e-mail was sent to the officers or posted on their agency’s internal network service two times. The online link was accompanied by a note explaining the rationale of the study and highlighting the voluntariness and anonymity of their participation. The police officers were also notified about a consultancy group program for stalking victims at the first and last authors’ workplace (Guldemann, Fürstenau, & Ermer, 2010). This notification served two purposes: First, to inform police officers about this program in order to enable them to prospectively refer stalking victims to the program. Second, to ensure that officers who are/were stalked were also informed where they could seek support. The study was approved by all three police commanders in charge. No decision of an ethics committee was required.

Participants

Sociodemographic variables. Five-hundred and forty-two police officers took part in the study. All of them completed the section about stalking victimization. The majority of the participants were male (77%, $n = 420$); 23% ($n = 122$) were females. The mean age of all participants was 37 years ($SD = 9.6$; range = 18–63 years) and their average length of service was 13 years ($SD = 9.7$; range = 1–40 years).

Representativeness of the sample. The response rate varied across the Swiss cantons resulting in an overall response rate of 18.6%, with the Canton of Solothurn leading with 41% (94 out of 230), 33% (297 out of 904) in the City of Zurich, and 8.5% (151 out of 1,782) in the Canton of Berne. When the gender distribution of the 542 participants is compared with the gender distribution of the three police corps, females were overrepresented in each canton (e.g., 16% female officers in the Canton of Bern compared with 24% female participants in this canton). In comparing the age ($M = 41.07$, $SD = 10.06$) and years of service ($M = 15.08$, $SD = 11.13$) from the participants in Berne with the official police distribution statistics in this canton, rather close similarities were revealed (age: $M = 41$ years; years of service: $M = 16$ years). Similar statistics were not available for the other two police corps (Solothurn and Zurich).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with SPSS version 20. The Type I error rate was set at $p = .05$. The chi-square test was used for categorical variables and when expected values were less than five, Fisher's exact test was used (two-tailed). Continuous variables were analyzed with independent t tests when the assumptions were met. Effect sizes (phi and Cramér's V for contingency tables) are reported and interpreted according to Cohen (1988). The corresponding values are 0.10 (small), 0.30 (medium), and 0.50 (large) for effect sizes.

Results

Descriptives

Prevalence of stalking. The lifetime stalking prevalence was 5.2% ($N = 28$). The majority ($n = 22$, or 4.1% of the total sample) had been stalked for nonprofessional related reasons. One fifth of the individuals who reported having been stalked ($n = 6$, or 1.1% of the total sample) had been stalked in connection with their work as police officers (see Table 1). No victim reported multiple incidents of stalking victimization by different perpetrators.

Sociodemographic variables. Three quarters of the stalkers ($n = 21$) were described as male and one fourth ($n = 7$) as female. The stalker's age range ranged between 20 and 61 years, with a mean age of 35 years ($SD = 12.3$). The stalkers were described as single in three quarters ($n = 21$; 75%) of the cases. In three cases (11%) the stalkers were reportedly in a relationship, and in four cases (14%) the marital status was unknown. In one third of cases ($n = 10$, 36%) the stalker was a former intimate partner of the victim. Three stalkers (11%) pursued the new partner of their ex-partner. This means that in almost half of all stalking cases (13 out of 28 cases, 47%) the stalking emerged

from a broken romantic relationship. In contrast, stalking related to the respondent's profession as police officers—meaning that the victim had initially dealt with the subsequent stalker professionally (e.g., as a witness or as a suspect)—occurred in one fifth of the cases ($n = 6$). All six professional related stalkers were male. Four of the six profession related stalking victims were male (see Table 2).

Aspects of stalking. In one third of cases ($n = 9$, 32%) the stalking behavior had ceased after 2 weeks to 3 months. More than half of the victims ($n = 15$, 54%) had been stalked for between 3 months and 1 year. In a minority of the cases ($n = 4$; 14%), the duration of the stalking exceeded 1 year. The victims had been contacted daily in about one third of the cases ($n = 9$, 32%); more than one third ($n = 11$, 39%) reported weekly contacts by the stalker, and almost one third ($n = 8$, 29%) claimed that the frequency of contact had varied over time. Except for three officers (11%), all participants reported the use of multiple stalking methods. In the three cases with a single method only, the contact intensity was substantial and long-term.

The most frequent stalking methods were reported as follows (multiple types possible): telephone calls ($n = 19$, 68%); sending text messages ($n = 12$, 43%); sending letters ($n = 12$, 43%); appearing at victim's home ($n = 11$, 39%); contacting third parties to collect information about victim ($n = 9$, 32%); sending e-mails ($n = 7$, 25%); slandering the victim ($n = 7$, 25%); following the victim around ($n = 7$, 25%); appearing at victim's workplace ($n = 6$, 21%); insulting victim ($n = 6$, 21%); contacting the victim via third parties ($n = 6$, 21%); following victim with a car ($n = 5$, 18%); threatening the victim's family ($n = 2$, 7%); and property damage ($n = 1$, 4%). A third reported direct threats ($n = 8$, 29%) against them. Stalking victims in this study had been assaulted physically during the stalking episode in 18%

Table 1
Prevalence of Stalking Victimization

Whole sample ¹ ($N = 542$)	Nonprofession related stalking ¹ ($N = 542$)	Profession related stalking ¹ ($N = 542$)	Male officers ¹ ($N = 420$)	Female officers ¹ ($N = 122$)
5.2% ($n = 28$)	4.1% ($n = 22$)	1.1% ($n = 6$)	3.8% ($n = 16$)	9.8% ($n = 12$)

¹ Lifetime prevalence rates.

Table 2
Relationship Between Stalkers and Their Victim Police Officers

Relationship type	Percentage (<i>N</i> = 28)
Ex-partner	36% (<i>n</i> = 10)
Former partner of the current intimate	11% (<i>n</i> = 3)
Profession related stalking (e.g., witness, suspect)	21% (<i>n</i> = 6)
Stranger	14% (<i>n</i> = 4)
Work colleague	11% (<i>n</i> = 3)
Acquaintance	3.5% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Boss	3.5% (<i>n</i> = 1)

(*n* = 5) of the cases. In four out of these five cases the victim was physically restrained (e.g., leading to bruises on both arms), pushed, slapped or punched, usually in the face. The fifth case also involved slapping, punching, and additionally threatening with a firearm.

Stalking motives. The stalkers' motives as perceived by the victims were multifaceted. The most frequent motives reported were rage (*n* = 15, 54%), love (*n* = 14, 50%), jealousy (*n* = 11, 39%), revenge (*n* = 9, 32%), mental illness (*n* = 8, 28%), power/control (*n* = 7, 25%), reconciliation (*n* = 5, 18%), and envy (*n* = 2, 7%).

Impact on victims. Thirty two percent (*n* = 9) admitted that they felt intense fear during the stalking. The remaining 19 victims (68%) did acknowledge that they felt at least anxious, not just irritated about their situation. A quarter of the victims (*n* = 7) adjusted their daily activities because of the stalking (e.g., change route to work). The majority of the victims (*n* = 18, 64%) confirmed that their physical health (e.g., headaches) and mental health (e.g., feelings of tension) were affected negatively by the stalking episode. The professional help of a psychologist or doctor was sought in 14% (*n* = 4) of the cases; one person went on sick leave due to the stalking.

Informing private and professional networks. Seventy-nine percent (*n* = 22) of the police officers informed friends and family about the stalking. In contrast, only half of the police officers informed their colleagues or their superiors about the stalking (*n* = 14, 50%). The police officers reported both positive and negative reactions after disclosing their stalking victimization (see Table 3). About 20% (*n* = 3) stated that they had wished for more support from their employer after their disclosure.

Legal outcome. The stalking behavior was officially reported to the police by three of the 28 stalking victims (11%). In two of the three cases (threat and actual bodily harm), the stalker was convicted. The self-reported police officers' motives for not officially reporting the incidents were diverse (see Table 3).

Results on Group Comparisons

Prevalence of stalking victimization. There was no significant difference regarding the frequency of stalking victimization reported in the three cantons, $\chi^2(2, 28) = .80, p = .670$, Cramér's *V* = .04. The mean age of the 28 stalking victims was 40.05 years (*SD* = 9.44) and the years of police service was 15.77 (*SD* = 10.11); subsequent independent *t* tests revealed no significant differences for both variables in relation to stalking victimization when *p* = .05. Of the 542 participants, 28 were stalked; of these 28, 24 were stalked only in the past, and four were stalked only during the current study period.

Professional related and nonprofessional related stalking. Male stalking victims were not significantly more often targeted in the professional related than in the nonprofessional related group (67% vs. 55%, *p* = .673, $\Phi = 0.10$). None of the police officers who were targeted by a professional related stalker assumed the stalking happened because of love (0% vs. 64%, *p* = .016, $\Phi = 0.52$). The motive of jealousy was the only other motive that almost reached statistical significance, as most victims of stalking in a nonprofessional context reported jealousy (50% vs. 0%, *p* = .055, $\Phi = 0.52$). No other motive reached statistical significance. There were no significant differences between the professional and nonprofessional

Table 3

Summary of Reasons for Informing or not Informing Their Social Network About Stalking and Subsequent Reactions From These Networks (Multiple Answers Possible)

Items	Percentage (N = 28)
Police officers who have informed their private network about the stalking	79% (n = 22)
Positive reactions from private network	
Understanding	57% (n = 13)
Advices received	45% (n = 10)
Negative reactions from private network	23% (n = 5)
Number and reasons why the remaining police officers failed to inform their private network	21% (n = 6)
It's a shame since I am a "police officer"	66% (n = 4)
I am afraid of recriminations	33% (n = 2)
I can handle the situation on my own	33% (n = 2)
Police officers who have informed their professional network	50% (n = 14)
Positive reactions from professional network	
Understanding	36% (n = 5)
Advices received	64% (n = 9)
Negative reactions from professional network	21% (n = 3)
Officers who had wished for more support from their superiors	21% (n = 3)
Number and reasons why the remaining police officers failed to inform their professional network	50% (n = 14)
I can handle the situation on my own	64% (n = 9)
It's a shame since I am a "police officer"	29% (n = 4)
No one would believe me	7% (n = 1)
Police officers who did inform the justice system	11% (n = 3)
Number and reasons why police officers failed to inform justice system	89% (n = 25)
I can handle the situation on my own	36% (n = 9)
I am afraid of the consequences	28% (n = 7)
It's a shame since I am a "police officer"	20% (n = 5)
I stopped stalker with other means (e.g., lawyer sent letter)	16% (n = 4)
An official report will not be successful	12% (n = 3)

related stalking groups regarding stalking methods, including threats and violent incidents during the stalking ($p > .05$). There was no difference between the professional and nonprofessional related stalking cases regarding the presence of fear (17% vs. 36%, $p = .630$, $\Phi = .17$). Also, no significant differences were detected for non-professional and professional related stalking cases regarding change of daily activities, impact on general wellbeing and use of a professional help ($p > .05$). There was no significant difference in telling their private networks independently if the stalking was professional related or not (67% vs. 82%, $p = .581$, $\Phi = 0.15$). The two groups also did not significantly differ in informing their professional network independently if the stalking was professional related or not (67% vs. 45%, $p = .648$, $\Phi = .17$).

Gender comparison. The gender distribution among the 28 victims revealed that 57% ($n = 16$) were male, and 43% ($n = 12$) were female. The lifetime prevalence rate among the

genders implied that 3.8% of all male police officers and 9.8% of all female police officers who participated in this study had been a victim of stalking. Hence, female police officers reported experiences with stalking significantly more often than their male counterparts $\chi^2(1,542) = 6.92$, $p = .009$, $\Phi = .12$. Female victims had been stalked by an exintimate partner more frequently than male stalking victims (58% vs. 19%, $p = .050$, $\Phi = 0.41$). Significantly more same-gender stalking occurred among males than females; no female stalker stalked a female police officer (56% vs. 0%, $p = .008$, $\Phi = 0.50$). Female stalking victims admitted significantly more often being fearful than their male counterparts (58% vs. 13%, $p = .017$, $\Phi = 0.49$). Even though female stalking victims were more often physically attacked by their stalkers, male police officers were also attacked, resulting in no significant group difference (13% male vs. 25% female attacked victims, $p = .624$, $\Phi = 0.16$). There was no

significant difference in violent behavior between male and female stalkers (19% male vs. 14% female violent stalkers, $p = 1.0$, $\Phi = 0.05$). There were no significant gender related differences found for change of daily activities, impact on mental health and use of professional help. There was no gender difference in reporting the stalking to their private network (81% vs. 75%, $p = 1.00$, $\Phi = 0.07$). Also, there was no gender difference in reporting the stalking to their professional network (56% males vs. 42% females, $p = .704$, $\Phi = 0.14$).

Discussion

This study is the first to report data from a Swiss sample of stalking victims. The description of the stalkers is that they are usually male, in their mid-thirties and single/separated at the time of the stalking. The usage of different methods of stalking and multifaceted motives corresponds well with the results of previous research (Meloy, 2007) as does the fact that the majority of victims reported negative impacts on their lives that they attributed to the stalking victimization. The lifetime prevalence rate among the genders (males: 4%; females: 10%) in the whole sample is comparable with the rates of community studies (Dressing et al., 2005). There were no gender related differences found for the negative impact of stalking as assessed by the variables in this study (e.g., mental health, use of professional help, change of daily activities due to the stalking). This suggests that—in line with Kuehner et al. (2012)—the deleterious effects of stalking seem similar for both genders. But in line with past research, women were more often affected by stalking and female victims were more often stalked by an ex-intimate than male stalking victims. Moreover, female police officers reported more often being fearful than men. Also in line with some other studies (Dressing et al., 2005; Purcell et al., 2005), significantly more same-gender stalking occurred among males than females. There were no differences between men and women in the rate of informing their private or professional networks about their stalking experiences.

To our knowledge, the current study also represents the first analysis of professional and nonprofessional related stalking experiences among police officers since this profession was

identified as a “profession at risk” for stalking victimization (MacKenzie & James, 2011). The results show that 5% of police officers reported stalking victimization once in their lifetime. The lifetime stalking prevalence rate is at the lower end when compared with rates from epidemiological studies (4.5% to 23%; Van der Aa & Kunst, 2009). It also is lower than the rates reported in Dressing et al.’s (2005) community (12%) and Dressing et al.’s (2007) journalists (14%) sample using the same stalking definition. Besides reflecting a real difference, a number of reasons could be attributed to the lower numbers of stalking victims in our study: The gender distribution in the police sample is clearly male dominated (77% male participants), whereas the gender distribution of participants in representative community studies (e.g., Dressing et al., 2005, 2007) or other specific samples are more gender balanced, which is important given that victimization rates are higher among women than men. The overall lower prevalence rate could also be partly explained by the fact that in comparison with other studies, a rather restrictive stalking definition was used (with a time frame). By taking into account some of the negative attitudes reported by stalked police officers in this study (e.g., that such a constellation feels like an embarrassment), it is conceivable that other actual victims did not participate in the study.

Are Police Officers a Profession at Risk?

While almost half of the stalking cases occurred in an extended ex-partner stalking context (47%), the second largest group was, in fact, professional related stalking (21%). None of the professional related victims reported romantic desire as a motive for the stalking. Especially considering the small sample size, the effect size was large ($\Phi = 0.52$). The perception of the stalker’s motive underlying a rather negative attitude toward the professional is in line with the proposed category of the so-called “resentful stalkers” by Mullen, Pathé, and Purcell (2010). This stalker type targets professionals of all kinds in order to scare them and remedy a perceived injustice done to them. Still, only 1.1% of participants were stalked in relation to their work as police officers. This rate seems low in comparison with other assumed “at risk” professions such as mental health professionals

and more akin to the prevalence rate for professional related stalking among journalists (2.2%; Dressing et al., 2007).

Possible explanations as to why police officers might be less likely to be targeted for prolonged stalking episodes in contrast to threatening single events in their professional lives might include their status as police officers, in that they are closely associated with the criminal justice system as well as the stalker's perception of a strong opponent (e.g., police officers carry weapons). There is evidence that police officers might have a higher threshold as to what constitutes stalking (Kamphuis et al., 2005), thereby leading to lower reporting rates. It is also possible that police officers are more sensible at protecting their private data, making them harder targets for victimization. Other professions such as public figures or mental health professionals also tend to share more information on a professional homepage (e.g., curriculum vitae) in order to advertise themselves. In contrast to a rather high percentage of female stalkers targeting mental health professionals, no female stalked a police officer in this context. All six professional related stalkers were male and they stalked four male and two female police officers. At least two reasons could explain this result. First, the sense of "noncompatibility" concerning their own profession and experience as a stalking victim could theoretically be more pronounced when the stalker is a female. Hall (1998) reported that male victims perceived female stalkers in particular as a handicap. When reporting to law enforcement, some male victims were under the impression that they have to handle the stalking better on their own if the perpetrator was a woman. If this observation concerning attitudes toward male victims/female stalkers by law enforcement staff is also true in Switzerland, it could be a reason for stalked police officers not to report stalking incidents involving female perpetrators. Second, police officers have more frequent contact with men than women. This contrasts with, for example, a mental health setting, in which a regular therapeutic relationship between a (male) mental health professional and a (female) patient could provide a more vulnerable basis for the development of stalking behavior.

In our comparison of professional and non-professional related stalking of police officers,

more similarities than differences were found. This echoes the results of Dressing et al.'s (2007) study of stalked journalists in a private or professional context. There were no significant differences in our study regarding stalking methods or negative impact on victims in the professional versus nonprofessional group. This result was also found by Dressing et al.'s (2007)—an indication that stalking in both contexts can be harmful to the victims. Similar to Dressing's et al. (2007) professional related targeted journalists, there were more male than female victims in the professional related police group but the difference was not significant in our study. Even though the police officers seem to differ on fear levels by gender, there was no significant difference regarding violent attacks on male (13%) and female (25%) victims. Attack behavior also didn't significantly differ between the stalker's gender. Other research also suggests that female and male stalkers pose a similar threat for violence (Meloy et al., 2011). While 80% of the police officer victims informed their friends and families, only 50% informed their professional network about the stalking. But neither in the private or professional related group was this difference statistically significant. In both studies the targeted victims (police officers and journalists) were not wholly satisfied with the support they received by their employer when they revealed their stalking victimization. Furthermore, only a minority in both professional groups reported the stalking to the legal justice system (police: 11%; journalists: 20%).

Practical Implications

General stalking guidelines propose that victims should inform their social environment about the stalking because stalkers tend to approach third parties to collect information about them and/or spread rumors and untruths. From a strategic point of view, witnesses confirming the stalking behavior may be valuable when the victim files a police report against the stalker. Besides receiving positive reactions from their networks after their victimization disclosure, negative and trivializing reactions were also experienced in the nonprofessional and professional related setting. Around 20% wished for more support from their employer (the police) during the

stalking episode. Trivialization of stalking experiences as well as victim blaming can make victims reluctant to ask for support in the future and may result in avoidance coping strategies (e.g., social isolation), which may result in decreased well being (Kamphuis, Emmelkamp, & Bartak, 2003). Moreover, for some police officers it was a contradiction to be stalked and serve as a police officer, an experience that seems to have affected their self-concept. This view was independent of the origin of the stalking (private or professional). Such an attitude can be harmful because victims are reluctant to seek support from their social and the legal systems and this could result in extended stalking exposure, which in turn affects their well-being (Kamphuis et al., 2003).

Only three out of 28 stalking victims made official reports to the police. The reasons given by the police officers for their reluctance to involve the criminal justice system were many. As MacKenzie and James (2011) pointed out, the filing of a police report is not suited for every case. Still, the involvement of the police and other helping agencies seems advisable in order to monitor the situation for possible changes in risk assessment (Mullen, Pathé, & Purcell, 2010). When affected by stalking, the victims should be aware of general stalking guidelines (e.g., set clear boundaries, ignore contact attempts by the stalker). The knowledge of these guidelines are especially important in the early stage of stalking to enhance the possibility of stopping the stalking at the earliest point in time. The longer a stalking situation continues the harder it could be for the stalker to stop because he or she has already invested a lot of time, energy, and other resources and the loss of face is difficult. Again, 20% of victims in this study were reluctant to officially report the stalking to the police, citing conflict with the fact that they were police officers. In order to support police officers, the head of the police corps should be advised to make physical, sexual or psychological victimization of police officers a subject in internal further education. Police officers should have access to a support point within the police system where they can report stalking behaviors and receive adequate support in dealing with their situation.

Limits of Study

Some methodological issues must be discussed. Gathering a representative sample of Swiss police officers is difficult. The questionnaire was only designed for German speaking police officers. There is a minority of police officers in the Canton of Berne whose mother tongue is French. We decided to exclude them as possible participants because of the language barrier. Furthermore, women participated in the study at higher rates than would be expected based on the general gender distribution in the three police corps. Hence, the participants in this study may reflect to a certain degree the gender, age and years of service of the officers in their cantons, but not all Swiss officers. The decision to take part in a study depends on multiple factors such as relevance of topic to the participant, experiences with the topic, and gender of the participant. It has been observed that males tend to participate less often than females in traditional (off-line) surveys (Moore & Tarnai, 2002). It is not clear yet if the same gender gap applies to online surveys, but some results suggest that males also tend to participate less often online than females (Smith, 2008), an additional factor that may have contributed to the lower response rate in this male dominated sample. The overall response rate of this study (18.6%) is rather low, with marked differences between the response rates in the cantons. While it was possible to directly send the online link via e-mail to the police officers in two cantons, the online questionnaire was put on the intranet in the third canton and may have contributed to the low response rate in this canton.

The sample studied here is a small, nonrandom sample, and this limits the generalizability of the results and they should be treated with the necessary caution. Moreover, statistically significant differences are harder to detect in small samples. Finally, data are based on self-reports, and therefore there is no way to check the validity of the responses.

Conclusion

The stalking lifetime prevalence rate was 5% ($N = 28$) in this police sample. Lifetime stalking victimization rates among the genders were comparable with rates from other studies. Most stalking episodes occurred in a private setting,

although 1% ($n = 6$) of the police officers were stalked due to professionally related reasons once in their life. Some results found in previous studies about the context, nature, and impact of stalking were confirmed. The private and professional related group showed more similarities than differences. It became clear that these stalking episodes went unreported to the private and professional networks and the legal system in a relevant number of cases, sometimes due to the attitude that “being a stalking victim” and “being a police officer” are incompatible, a fact that should be addressed in internal police education.

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