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# **STALKING AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WALES**

## **EXPLORING AND INCREASING KNOWLEDGE, AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING**

### **Summary Rapid Literature Review**

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Dr Sophia Kier-Byfield, Dr Sarah Wallace, Prof Emily Underwood-Lee,

Michelle Whelan, Elinor Spiers-Morgan

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## SUMMARY LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Introduction

Stalking is a prevalent and harmful behaviour, with research suggesting it particularly affects young people (Office of National Statistics, 2024). Despite its serious impacts, stalking is often misunderstood, underestimated or conflated with harassment. This summary review formed part of the project *Stalking and Young People in Wales: Exploring and Increasing Knowledge, Awareness and Understanding* project (funded by the VISION Consortium Small Projects fund). It provides an overview of stalking, the risks faced by young people, the review methodology, and it outlines existing educational resources and interventions aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of stalking among young people. Although the project's starting point was young people's understanding of stalking in Wales, it is the intention that this review will have relevance beyond the Welsh and UK context.

### Defining Stalking

Stalking is generally understood to be a pattern of Fixated, Obsessive, Unwanted, and Repeated behaviours (often referred to by the acronym FOUR) that cause fear or distress (Suzy Lamplugh Trust, n.d., a; Alice Ruggles Trust, n.d., a). It includes behaviours such as following, monitoring, threatening and contacting victims, both online and in-person. The lack of a clear legal definition complicates the recognition of and response to stalking (Storey et al., 2023), although the amendments to the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 clearly stipulate that stalking is a separate and distinct crime under the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (Suzy Lamplugh Trust, n.d., a). Stalking is therefore recognised in the UK as part of the broader Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence framework (Home Office, 2021; Welsh Government, 2022), but misunderstandings about stalking's severity, especially when perpetrated by known individuals, can hinder effective responses (Scott and Sheridan, 2011; Bracewell et al., 2020). Data collection is hampered by inconsistent definitions and underreporting (Brady and Nobles, 2015).

## **Prevalence and Risk Among Young People**

Young people are reported to be disproportionately affected by stalking. The Office for National Statistics has reported that '8.8% of people aged 16 to 19 years experienced stalking', with 'more than 1 in 10 women (10.5%) and around 1 in 15 men (6.7%) aged 16 to 19 years' having been victims (Office for National Statistics, 2024). International studies echo this trend (Cloonan-Thomas et al., 2022; Gomes et al., 2024). Adolescents may not recognise stalking behaviours (Janickyj et al., 2025), and many cases can involve acquaintances, stem from bullying, and can have both distinctions from and similarities to adult cohorts (Roberts et al., 2016; Purcell et al., 2018). Research suggests that young people can be both victims and perpetrators (Rothman et al., 2021; Cloonan-Thomas et al., 2022;), and experts argue that stalking among young people should not always be assumed to be taking place within the context of a romantic relationship (Worthington, 2023). Many perpetrators may not intend harm or recognise their behaviour as stalking (Ybarra, 2017). Gender, sexuality, and relationship dynamics influence motivations and experiences (Purcell et al., 2010; Janickyj et al., 2025).

## **Justification for the Review**

Reviews of stalking rates and behaviours suggest that stalking is a common and severe problem among young people (Roberts et al., 2016; Barr and Newman, 2024). Reviews of healthy relationship programmes provide a limited focus on stalking (Jennings et al., 2017; Benham-Clarke et al., 2023). In addition, media portrayals often trivialise or glamorise stalking, contributing to normalisation (Shafer et al. 2013; Munk and Austin 2023). Education and youth professionals are well-placed to intervene, but more knowledge is needed as to the scale, messaging and impact of provision.

## **Methodology**

A rapid review was conducted using academic databases and online searches. Inclusion criteria focused on English-language, peer-reviewed or accessible grey literature from 2014 onwards, with mention of stalking and relevance to young people within the 16-24 age

bracket. 17 academic papers and 16 grey literature resources were reviewed. In addition to literature identified through searching, relevant resources and contextual insights were obtained through direct communication with subject matter experts. These included unpublished tools and internal documents not publicly available online.

## Findings

### Grey Literature Summary

- Advice Resources for Young People:** Information pages from Paladin (n.d.), Action Against Stalking (n.d.) and Alice Ruggles Trust (n.d., b) offer general advice, but their brevity highlights the ongoing need for, and importance of, specialist youth services for stalking, e.g. Paladin's Young People's Services. The Suzy Lamplugh Trust has an awareness poster available that can be distributed in schools and universities, but the only differentiation is the education level in the poster's wording, rather than any other distinguishing features between experiences at school and university (Suzy Lamplugh Trust, n.d., a).
- Guidance/Education Opportunities for Supporting Young People:** Although there was evidence of well-informed resources for non-experts to facilitate stalking learning and (SPARC, n.d.; Alice Ruggles Trust, n.d., c; Alice Ruggles Trust, n.d., d), there was also evidence of wording that excluded the importance of obsession/fixation in stalking (Education Workforce Council, n.d.). More research may be needed into how confident teachers feel to deliver such lessons without the guidance of a stalking expert. The Alice Ruggles Trust's school assemblies programme is showing promising early results (2024), and although other education and awareness programmes exist, evidence of evaluation was limited.<sup>1</sup> There was little evidence of stalking specific training for young people in Wales, for example the AGENDA resource does not specifically cover stalking (AGENDA, 2024).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Many other specialist stalking organisations deliver training on stalking in organisations and workplaces, including The Suzy Lamplugh Trust and Hollie Gazzard Trust, but resources or evaluations are not available online.

<sup>2</sup> Further personal communications with steering group members, project partners revealed that there was likely to be minimal delivery of stalking education in Wales at the time of writing. It was unclear what resources or programmes might be in development but investigations were ongoing.

- **Videos:** With unrestricted access to the internet, young people may encounter videos intended for an older age group. An example by Staffordshire Police is straightforward in presentation (2024), but the background images could support existing perceptions of stalking. Another example uses a movie trailer format to highlight the negative influence of media portrayals, but the ironic delivery of the narrative could be confusing for younger audiences (Gloucestershire Constabulary, 2023).
- **Videos for Young People:** Educational videos that are used for young people vary in tone and approach. Derbyshire Constabulary's youth-focused video (2023), the Alice Ruggles Trust's Broadly video and their animation video offer potentially relatable or impactful content (2018; 2021). In many videos, representation is not comprehensive in terms of minority groups and experiences, and there was minimal evidence of independent evaluation of the impact of such resources.<sup>3</sup>
- **Podcasts:** The Alice Ruggles Trust's podcast "Is It Just Me?" (2023) provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of young people but lacks continuity, comprising only two episodes. This content is likely to be hard to produce as it relies on survivor stories and real-life testimonies.

## Academic Literature Summary

- **Limited Focus on Stalking:** Most interventions subsume stalking under broader categories like relationship violence for the purposes of bystander training where definitions might vary (Coker et al., 2015; 2016; 2017; Waterman et al., 2021; Krauss et al., 2021).
- **Qualitative Gaps:** Few studies use qualitative methods to understand young people's perspectives. White & Carmody (2018) highlight the potential value of peer-led, face-to-face education. Joslin and Basch (2015) reviewed US health/wellness textbooks, observing the limited nature of advice devoted to stalking.

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<sup>3</sup> Specialist stalking charities also regularly post youth-centred stalking awareness content, and a more thorough review of stalking information on social media and engagement patterns, comments or trends is warranted.

- **At-Risk Groups:** Tailored interventions are needed for different age groups within the young people bracket, LGBTQ+ youth, those exposed to parental inter-personal violence, and neurodivergent individuals (Post et al., 2014; Coker et al., 2020; Waterman et al., 2021; Mennicke et al., 2022; Nikupeteri et al., 2023).
- **Digital Tools:** Apps for advice have shown promise (Glass et al., 2020), but games and VR interventions lack stalking-specific content and evidence of impact from evaluations (Potter et al., 2019; Potter et al., 2020; Krauss et al., 2021; Porta et al., 2023), which in turn suggests the importance of multiple forms of delivery and more research on different intervention strategies.
- **Help-Seeking:** Research on how young people seek and receive help suggests that young people can delay seeking help until behaviours escalate, meanwhile altering their behaviour (Stermac et al., 2017; Ameral et al., 2020). Education should focus on recognising early warning signs, understanding support mechanisms, debunking myths and challenging language and norms that could minimise stalking.

## Conclusion

There is a clear need for more targeted, evaluated, and inclusive stalking education for young people. Current resources are fragmented, US-centric, and much of the rigorously researched programmes (e.g. randomised control trials) are more broadly focused on preventing a range of harms rather than understanding and recognising stalking in all its nuances. Future efforts should prioritise:

- Clear, consistent definitions of stalking.
- Inclusive, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant materials.
- Evaluation of digital and in-person interventions.
- Co-production with young people to ensure relevance and impact.

Stalking has now been included in UK Government Relationships and Sex Education guidance (2025), which suggests a move towards a more widespread acceptance that stalking is a topic young people need to know about. However, further research and investment are needed to ensure young people across all contexts are supported in recognising and responding to stalking.

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