

# Unveiling the shadows: Investigating the interplay of stalking and sexual homicide—A case study

Ewa Stefanska<sup>1</sup> | Nicholas Longpré<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, Greenwich University, London, UK

<sup>2</sup>School of Law, Criminology & Policing, Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, UK

## Correspondence

Nicholas Longpré, School of Law, Criminology & Policing, Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, UK.

Email: [longpren@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:longpren@edgehill.ac.uk)

## Abstract

Stalking can be defined as a pattern of fixated, repeated, and unwanted behaviours. Stalking is not an isolated incident and was associated to sexual violence. While the relationship between sexual violence and stalking is scarcely explored, no studies have tested the relationship between stalking and sexual homicide, which both involves elements of obsession. The aim of this paper was to study the relationship between stalking and sexual homicide using an exploratory case study analysis of 7 males convicted for sexual homicide. Results revealed: (1) The presence of obsession prior to the homicide; (2) The victims were ex-intimate partners or acquaintances; (3) The victims were followed several times prior to the index offence; (4) Stalking elements were not always considered by the authorities, which has led to an escalation of behaviours. This study expands our understanding between stalking and sexual violence, supporting the design of prevention and treatments.

## KEYWORDS

case study, risk assessment, sexual homicide, sexual violence, stalking

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2024 The Author(s). Behavioral Sciences & The Law published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Stalking can be defined as a pattern of fixated, repeated, and unwanted behaviours, ranging from contacting, spying, to homicide (Longpré, Stefanska, et al., 2023). Stalking involves two or more incidents, that cause the victim to feel harassed, distressed, or afraid that violence might be used against them (White et al., 2022). It includes an element of obsession, and given its chronic nature, it can impact the victim over a long period of time (Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012). Stalking remains a peculiar offence as its occurrence is not solely defined by the behaviours of the perpetrator, but also by the reaction of the victim (James & MacKenzie, 2018).

It is estimated that 20.6% of women and 8.7% of men will be victims of stalking in their lifetime, and 4.4% of women and 2.4% of men over 16 years old were victims of stalking in the last year (Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)). Furthermore, it is estimated that between 1% and 8% of the population has engaged in stalking perpetrations at some point in their life (Patton et al., 2010). Stalking is considered as a gender-based offence, with a majority of convicted perpetrators being men, and a majority of victims being women (Chan & Sheridan, 2019; Stefanska et al., 2022).

Stalking is not an isolated incident. Research suggests that it is associated to sexual violence (McEwan et al., 2017; White et al., 2022) and sexual homicide (Longpré, Tachmetzidi Papoutsi, & Stefanska, 2023). However, because of the severity of the offence and the absence of witness testimony, stalking elements are usually not considered or are not the primary focus of the investigation with cases of sexual homicide (Longpré, Tachmetzidi Papoutsi, & Stefanska, 2023). Furthermore, the relationship between stalking and sexual homicide is understudied, and little is known about the context in which stalking can increase the risk of severe sexual violence, stressing the need for more research. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between stalking and sexual homicide using a case study approach, analysing seven male sexual killers who served a custodial sentence in England & Wales, with a focus on the presence of risk factors.

### 1.1 | Sexual homicide

Sexual homicide combines two different types of offences, a sexual assault, and a homicide (Stefanska et al., 2020). The sexual assault can occur before, during or after the act of killing (Stefanska et al., 2017). Furthermore, while sexual sadism is an important motivational factor in sexual homicide (Longpré et al., 2020), with studies reporting a prevalence of sadism ranging between 29.3% and 37% among sexual murders (James & Proulx, 2016; Stefanska et al., 2018), it is not a feature for all cases. Other situational circumstances include cases where the victim is killed to eliminate a witness or where the victim is killed when resisting sexual assault (Georgoulis et al., 2023; Stefanska et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2023). While both men and non-binary identifying can be victims of sexual homicide, and women and non-binary identifying can be perpetrators, a majority of victims are women and a majority of perpetrators are men (Beauregard & Chopin, 2023; Stefanska et al., 2016). As such, sexual homicide is considered as a gender-based crime.

It is estimated that between 0.86% and 3.7% of homicide are of sexual nature (Chan et al., 2019) while this number is higher in the UK (13%, Stefanska et al., 2016). Despite the severity of sexual homicide, there is no universally adopted definition (Kerr et al., 2013), which might explain, in part, the discrepancy in the reported rates of sexual homicide across countries. Researchers widely adopted a definition of sexual homicide that follows Ressler et al. (1988) criteria, which rely on evidence from the crime scene and investigation. According to this definition, a sexual homicide needs at least one of the following criteria to be met: (a) victim lacks attire (totally or partially), (b) exposure of the sexual parts of the victim's body, (c) the body is found in a sexually explicit position, (d) an object has been inserted into a body cavity (anus, vagina, or mouth), (e) there is evidence of sexual intercourse, (f) there is evidence of substitutive sexual activity (e.g., masturbation and ejaculation at the crime scene), or of sadistic sexual fantasies (e.g., genital mutilation).

Crime scene evidence is commonly used to infer the Modus Operandi, which is defined as a particular way or pattern of doing something. This behavioural script provides indication on situational factors that have led to the sexual homicide aiding investigation (James & Proulx, 2016). Furthermore, this behavioural script of the perpetrator can be used to guide treatment and rehabilitation strategies (Longpré et al., 2018). Elements of fixation and obsession can be found in the Modus Operandi of sexual homicide - for example, in the choice of a victim, the ritualised acts, or the presence of recurrent deviant sexual fantasies—especially in cases where the escalation of sexual perpetration is noted (Beauregard et al., 2022; Chan, 2023; Stefanska et al., 2020). Both fixation and obsession are also core components of stalking Modus Operandi (Stefanska et al., 2022; White et al., 2022).

## 1.2 | Stalking & sexual violence

The relationship between sexual violence and stalking among convicted stalkers is scarcely explored (Rosefeld, 2004). While it is hypothesized that an important number of stalking perpetrators will have a history of prior conviction for sexual offence (Rosenfeld, 2004), results from previous studies note otherwise (McEwan et al., 2017; Mullen et al., 1999). However, it is important to highlight that these studies focussed only on prior convictions for sexual offences among convicted and imprisoned stalking perpetrators. These studies did not examine prior sexually violent behaviours for which offenders might not have been prosecuted, or the lower end of the continuum of sexual violence (i.e., sexual harassment, sexual coercion Longpré et al., 2020). With the high dark figure of both sexual violence (de Roos & Jones, 2020; Longpré et al., 2022) and stalking (Stefanska et al., 2022; White et al., 2022), it is highly possible that this relationship is underestimated among convicted populations. Furthermore, no studies have empirically tested the relationship between stalking and sexual homicide, which can involve some elements of obsession and fixation.

Previous studies have highlighted the presence of lower form of sexual violence elements in stalking cases. White et al. (2022), in a sample of 1032 participants who contacted the National Stalking Helpline in the UK, found an important prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault. This study revealed that sexual violence was mostly prevalent among ex-intimate stalking. Tachmetzidi Papoutsi and Longpré (2022), in a sample of 319 participants coming from the general population, found a strong relationship between stalking, sexual harassment and sexual coercion. However, sexual harassment was more prevalent among acquaintance stalkers, and sexual coercion was more prevalent among ex-intimate, indicating that the nature of the relationship might impact the nature of the sexual violence. These results were replicated by Longpré, Tachmetzidi Papoutsi, and Stefanska (2023) in a sample of 550 participants from the general population. Considering the heterogeneity of research on stalking and sexual violence, it remains unclear whether stalking and sexual violence are associated solely through an escalation of behaviours, whether these behaviours may co-occur in different instances, or whether both an escalation and a conjunction of stalking and sexual violence may exist (Tachmetzidi Papoutsi & Longpré, 2022).

## 1.3 | Risk assessment & treatment targets

There is a limited access to actuarial scales that allow police officers and practitioners to assess both the risk of violence and future-related offences among stalking perpetrators. For example, while the Severity of Stalking Behaviours Scale (SSBS; Stefanska et al., 2022) present strong psychometric properties, adequate discrimination between different levels of stalking and adequate discrimination between subgroups of stalkers, no follow-up study was conducted to assess if the SSBS can adequately predict the risk of reoffending. Furthermore, the low predictive value of some stalking scales hinders our effort to effectively assess the risk (Longpré, Tachmetzidi Papoutsi, & Stefanska, 2023). Most police forces in England & Wales as well as the National Stalking Helpline are assessing the risk of escalation with the Stalking version of the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment ([S-DASH];

Richards, 2009). This is highly concerning, as the S-DASH is not a risk assessment tool but rather an unvalidated professional checklist that presents weak empirical psychometric properties, and is unable to predict which cases might result in homicide or further assault and harm (McEwan, 2021).

Mixed results were found between risk assessment, stalking reoffending, and violent reoffending across studies (e.g., McEwan et al., 2020; Shea et al., 2018). While no individual risk factors have been found to be significantly predict stalking reoffending (McEwan et al., 2020), the consensus is that the different level of risk are associated with different outcomes (Longpré, Stefanska, et al., 2023; Shea et al., 2018). Eke et al. (2011), in a small sample of 78 convicted stalkers, found that 77% committed a new offence within an average follow-up of 8.8 years, with 56% being charged for new stalking related offences and 33% for violent recidivism (including sex offence). In a recent paper, Longpré, Stefanska, et al. (2023) proposed that uncovering different risk factors associated with different risk of outcomes, with a focus on context [including a specific focus on sexual violence], level of fixation and persistence should offer a more accurate and reliable assessment of the course of actions needed as opposed to idiosyncratic and subjective risk assessment of stalking. Not all risk factors are likely to be equally related to the same risk of recidivism and a careful consideration of context and how it might impact the level of risk should increase our ability to predict the risk of violence and future-related offences (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022). Furthermore, the severity of behaviours as well as the underlying psychological processes are central to assess the level of involvement, the level of fixation and the level of contact (Longpré, Tachmetzidi Papoutsis, & Stefanska, 2023), which should be considered in treatment (Wheatley et al., 2022). Therefore, in order to assess under which conditions stalking has escalated to sexual homicide, it is primordial to examine potential risk factors explaining wider situational contexts in which these offences have occurred.

One promising scale is the Stalking Risk Profile ([SRP], MacKenzie et al., 2009), a structured risk assessment guides for clinicians. The SRP uses Mullen's et al. (1999) classification system and as such there are five stalker types: the rejected stalker, the resentful stalker, the intimacy seeker, the incompetent suitor, the predatory stalker. Further information in relation to SRP can be found on the SRP website. Within the SRP, for each stalking typology risk of violence, persistence, recurrence, and risk to psychological damage to the stalker can be considered. The SRP separates risk into different domains. Specifically, the risk of stalking violence can be assessed in all cases, stalking persistence is assessed when stalking is active whereas and stalking recurrence is assessed after a period of cessation.

## 1.4 | Aims of the present study

The aim of this paper was to examine the relationship between stalking and sexual homicide using a case study approach. Seven cases of male sexual killers who served a custodial sentence within HM Prison Service in England & Wales were analysed and categorised according to the SRP typology (MacKenzie et al., 2009). The aim was to:

1. Summarise stalking behaviour within the sexual homicide cases whilst applying SRP tool.
2. Examine the presence of risk factors for violence in each sexual homicide case.

## 2 | METHODS

### 2.1 | Sample

The sample is composed of seven sexual homicide cases. The offenders were adult male, and they served a custodial sentence for murder or manslaughter within His Majesty's Prison Service (HMPPS) in England and Wales. The

victims were female, aged 14 years or above. In line with the HMPPS criteria, the offence was deemed sexual when the sexual aspect and/or a sexual motivation for the murder was evidenced, suspected, or admitted. Stalking behaviour was noted within their offence pattern, but a separate stalking charge was not required for the case to be included.

## 2.2 | Procedures and analysis

Information was gathered from the electronic or physical files of the offenders serving a life sentence for murder or manslaughter (containing the details of the crime event) in the Public Protection Unit Database. The SRP tool (MacKenzie et al., 2009) was used to classify cases as belonging to a particular stalking type in accordance with the manual's guidance. This was carried out by a qualified psychologist working in the prison service. Once assigned, a case was summarised for the reader and the risk factors for risk of violence were analysed. For the purpose of this paper only the risk of violence was examined. Within the SRP, the risk factors are separated into red flags factors (five factors), general risk factors (five risk factors) and risk factors related to specific profile (varies between each profile). The red flags consist of: suicidal ideation (V1); homicidal ideation (V2) last resort thinking (V3); high risk psychotic phenomena (V4); psychopathy (V5). General risk factors consist of: prior violence (V1); property damage (V2); access to or affinity with weapons (V3); approach behaviours (V4); impulsivity (V5); poor emotional control (V6); substance misuse (V7). As noted previously, risk factors related to specific profile vary between each profile.

An exploratory case study analysis was conducted. In psychology, case study is used to provide an in-depth analysis of individual, group, community, or event and relies on a descriptive research approach (Priya, 2021). The primary focus of exploratory case study analysis is to explain 'why' and 'how' certain conditions come into play and why certain sequence of events occurs (Yin, 2014), and is used to explore situations in which there is no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin, 2003). As such, because of the exploratory nature of this paper, and the scarce empirical evidence on the convergence of stalking and sexual homicide, exploratory case study analysis is the most suitable analytic strategy to generate new ideas and develop new hypothesis on this peculiar convergence of violence. Findings steaming from this analytic strategy will serve as a foundation for future quantitative studies on this topic.

## 3 | RESULTS

### 3.1 | Rejected stalker

**Mr A** was convicted of manslaughter by diminished responsibility of a former girlfriend, following the breakdown of this relationship. The index offence took place several months after the initial breakup. The breakup itself was initiated by the victim due to continuous suspicions and accusations from Mr A that she was having an affair. The victim has eventually moved to another town. A few months later Mr A has also moved to that town and, according to him, accidentally discovered that he was living next door to the victim. Following that, he tried to communicate with her by various means, including obsessively trying to contact her by phone almost every day for weeks, or watching her house. The refusal of the victim to speak to him convinced him even further that she had been seeing someone else. He said that he could not understand her attitude and why she was not trying to save their relationship. On the day of the index offence, he waited for 3 hours in front of her house, and harassed her until she reluctantly accepted to let him in. Following what it appeared to be consensual intercourse, his renewed jealousy led to an outburst of violence; he tied her up and strangled her. Mr A had previous convictions for five offences: two

of them were violent in nature and were perpetrated against intimate partners. One of these included kidnapping and threats to kill. Furthermore, one of the victims alleged rape, but he was found not guilty on indecent assault charges. There was evidence of paranoid personality traits, paranoid thinking (i.e., read hidden message meanings; jealousy without evidence), narcissistic traits, entitlement, and grandiose sense of self-worth.

Risk of stalking violence noted:

Red flag: V5 Psychopathy (partial) score of 14 on the PCL-SV.

General: V1 prior violence; V4 approach behaviours (living in increasingly closer proximity to the victim).

By motivational type: VRej1 threats (to harm or kill); VRej3 awareness of victim location; VRej 5 elevated anger level.

**Mr B** was convicted and given a life sentence for the murder and rape of his ex-partner. The victim and Mr B were in a relationship for several months. At some point, the victim tried to end the relationship, but Mr B took an overdose, which led them to get back together. A month later, the victim tried again to end the relationship and Mr B assaulted her. This led to a succession of court appearances and court orders that Mr B ignored. These included criminal damage, threats on social media, harassment, breach of exclusion order, and actual body harm. The behaviour increased when Mr B was under the influence of alcohol. The victim also alleged rape, but following arrest, Mr B was released without being charged. These offences spread across approximately one and a half years. On the day of the index offence, the victim allowed Mr B into her property and told him the relationship was over, at which point Mr B launched a frenzied upon the victim. The victim died of a combination of injuries sustained and the sexual assault was most likely carried out post-mortem or when the victim was unconscious. Following his incarceration, he continued to romanticise the relationship. There is no indication of personality disorders.

Risk of stalking violence noted:

Red flag: V1 suicidal ideation (possible).

General: V1 prior violence; V2 property damage; V6 poor emotional control; V7 substance misuse.

By motivational type: VRej1 threats (to harm or kill); VRej2 breached restraining order; VRej3 awareness of victim location; VRej 5 elevated anger level.

### 3.2 | Resentful stalker

**Mr C** was convicted of the murder of his neighbour, a woman he knew for more than a decade. He was pursuing a vendetta against her, after she rejected him on at least two occasions. While he claimed that it is not true, and that he did not like her due to her drinking habits, several witnesses confirmed the rejection. The stalking behaviour commenced approximately 2 years before the homicide. This included sending her abusive letters, where he threatened her personal safety and called her derogatory names. He was previously suspected of breaking and entering in the victim's house. Witnesses identified that he also had been taking things from her garden and throwing items into her garden. He was suspected of killing the victim's birds. Whilst Mr C has been diagnosed with depression and was prescribed antidepressants for this, he was later diagnosed as presenting with social phobia. It was hypothesised that the harassment and abusive letters sent to the victim were reflective of fixation stemming from obsessive tendencies and compounded by communication difficulties. The reports indicate suspicion of autism spectrum but not sufficient to warrant a diagnosis as well as presenting with paranoid, obsessive-compulsive, and antisocial personality traits, and low cognitive functioning. The primary engagement in the behaviour was assessed as seeking revenge as a response to perceived injustice whilst also seeking to control and dominate the victim.

Risk of stalking violence noted:

Red flag: V2 homicidal ideation (possible, assessed through content of the threatening letters).

General: V2 property damage; V4 approach behaviours (trespassing into the garden; breaking into the house).  
By motivational type: V-Res3 elevated anger level.

### 3.3 | Intimacy seeker

**Mr D** was sentenced for life for the manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility of a woman who was his neighbour. On the day of the index offence, he followed the victim, carrying a gun, and hid behind bushes to watch her. The victim was strangled with a pair of stockings and raped post-mortem. Mr D was diagnosed as presenting with psychotic symptoms, and having paraphilic disorders, including sadism (killing fantasies and having sex with a female body) and fetichism (stockings), therefore it is suspected that the index offence closely resembled his longstanding fantasies. Whilst Mr D had no previous convictions, it is suspected that he committed several burglaries of local houses in order to steal female clothing and underwear. Prior to the index offence, Mr D stalked the victim for several month, developing what was described 'an obsession'. Mr D claimed that him and the victim had an affair and described in detail sexual encounters they had (suspected erotomanic delusions). This was denied by the husband who made several complaints about Mr D's stalking behaviours and said that his wife was scared of Mr D, describing him as a creep. The reported stalking behaviours included spying on her with binoculars and following her in his tractor when she was out walking. A search of Mr D's property revealed drawings of the victim having sexual intercourse with her husband. Stolen clothing from the victim was also found. Further evidence included his writings which indicated preoccupation with deviant sexual behaviour from an early age. Sexual fantasies involved sexual violence, stalking and voyeurism.

Risk of stalking violence noted:

Red flag: V2 homicidal ideation.

General: V3 access to or affinity with weapons (shotgun).

By motivational type: V-Int3 presence of paranoid ideation.

### 3.4 | Incompetent suitor

**Mr E** was a lonely young man who was described as immature for his age. His father died when he was 10 years old and his mother passed away when he was 15 years old, which left him feeling isolated. Mr E had poor communication skills and was bullied at school. It is recorded that Mr E was sexually preoccupied during his adolescence but at the same time he appeared entitled. His first sexual experience occurred when he was 13–14 years old and included kissing and sexual touching his girlfriend. When approximately 14–15 years old, he committed a sexual offence against a nine-year-old girl (touching). The stalking occurred when he was 19 years old. Mr E saw the victim in town they lived in on several occasions before he approached her and asked her for a date. When she replied no, he felt hurt and rejected. This commenced the stalking behaviour which lasted for approximately 6 months. During that time, Mr E started following the victim, found out where she lived, and learned her movements and activities. He described how he fantasised about having sex with her. Later, he developed two plans to achieve this. One involved asking for a date and trying to build a relationship whilst the other plan involved coercing her into having sex (with the use of a weapon). On the day of the index offence, he left home armed with a knife. He saw the victim and started to follow her. He got up with her and she was anxious at this time. He asked her for another date and when she declined, he stabbed her multiple times and ran away.

Risk of stalking violence noted:

Red flag: V3 last resort thinking.

General: V1 prior violence.

By motivational type: V-Inc1 aged under 30; V-Inc 2 sense of entitlement.

### 3.5 | Predatory stalker

Mr F, a cab driver, was sentenced for life for the murder (rape and strangulation) of a 29-year-old woman who was his customer. He had a previous conviction for an indecent assault. Mr F developed an idea that he could claim sexual favours from his female clients, that he was entitled to sex and that females would offer sex rather than pay for their taxi fares. The indecent assault offence arose in that context and when a female refused sexual contact, he attempted to assault her. The victim managed to escape the car and raise an alarm. Mr F spent several months in prison for that offence and whilst there he became sexually preoccupied with the image of another customer. Following his release, he struggled to secure another employment and turned his attention to the woman he was sexually fantasising about in prison. Over the next few months, he watched her, often sitting outside her flat in his car pretending he is waiting for customers (he knew her address as his original fare was to her home). He learned her movements and would follow her, although it is not known if he attempted to communicate with her by other means. He later disclosed that he daily masturbated to the victim's images (taken by him). On the day of the index offence, he decided to have sex with the victim by any means although he expected resistance. He arrived at the victim's house and attacked her immediately after the victim opened the door. He rendered her unconscious and raped her but when she came round, she struggled and was strangled. When arrested, Mr F was found in possession of a large amount of pornographic material depicting scenarios of violent acts. At the time of his arrest for murder, it was discovered that Mr F possessed his victim's underwear, which he kept as a sexual trophy and masturbated onto as part of his sexual fantasy world.

Risk of stalking violence noted:

Red flag: V3 last resort thinking.

General: V7 substance misuse.

By motivational type: V-Pre1 past sexual violence; V-Pre 2 current evidence of sexually violent ideation or intent.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

### 4.1 | Overview of the results

The aim of this paper was to present stalking behaviour within the sexual homicide cases whilst applying SRP tool (MacKenzie et al., 2009) as well as to examine the presence of risk factors for violence (as opposed to persistence or reoccurrence) in each sexual homicide case. Although the rejected type is most commonly seen within forensic settings (Wheatley, 2023), the study was able to identify and present all types of stalkers noted in the classification system of the SRP (Mullen et al., 1999). With regards to risk, each case had at least one risk factor from each risk category that is, the red flags, general risk, and risk specific to the stalking type. Overall, there was a low prevalence of mental illness and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) which is in line with wider research suggesting that majority of those who stalk do not suffer from serious mental illness or ASD, although those with ASD traits may present in cases when a person aims to establish an intimate relationship in the context of inadequate social functioning (Mcguire & Wraith, 2000; Wheatley, 2023). Although Wheatley (2023) notes that ASD traits would most commonly be found in incompetent suitors, in our sample this was the case for the resentful stalker. Interestingly, a diagnosis of psychopathy was not found in any of the presented cases, even though all culminated in extreme violence and motivations for gaining control and dominance was noted in some perpetrators (Storey et al., 2009). Finally, while we found that personality disorders were rare, personality disorder traits were noted which supports wider literature findings (Wheatley, 2023).



The exploratory case study analysis revealed common themes across the cases:

1. The presence of obsession prior to the homicide.
2. Following the victim in the days/weeks/months prior to the index offence.
3. Previous accusations/convictions for sexual offence in some cases.
4. Low prevalence of personality disorders but traits noted.
5. In most cases, stalking elements were not considered (or not reported) to the authorities, which has led to an escalation of behaviours.
6. Stalking elements was secondary in investigation and the assessment of risk as sexual violence was of the primary focus.

These results are in-line with previous research, and have several implications, ranging from how authorities should consider the risk of escalation of stalking into sexual violence, to the need for further research between stalking and sexual violence, to how stalking elements should be considered in the assessment of risk and treatment target.

## 4.2 | Implications

### 4.2.1 | Prevention & police response

There is limited access to empirical tools that allow police officers and practitioners to assess both the risk of violence and future-related offences. Furthermore, the low predictive value of available stalking measures, some based on weak empirical support, hinder our effort to effectively assess thresholds to assist the determination of police interventions or the use of special measures such as Stalking Protective Order. For example, the threshold for mandatory our community treatment should not be the same as the threshold for Stalking Protection Orders. Our study confirmed that situation/context factors can create the perfect storm to an escalation to severe sexual violence if no prevention is implemented. While our findings are based on a small sample, results reveal that in most cases, stalking elements were not considered by the police or were not sufficient in deterring the perpetrator from further actions. The results are consistent with previous studies that revealed that stalking can lead to severe violence and homicide (Longpré, Tachmetzidi Papoutsi, & Stefanska, 2023; White et al., 2022). However, in order to determine which case needs more serious intervention, empirical tools assessing the risk of violence and future-related offences are needed.

While restraining order or Stalking Protection Orders can be implemented, our results are revealing that some individuals will break these orders, and it can lead to severe violence. This is in-line with White et al. (2022), who explained how some perpetrators have not hesitated to break a no-contact order, which has led ultimately to a homicide. Elements such as obsession prior to the homicide, as well as previous accusations/convictions for sexual offence could be used to guide police in determining what actions are needed and which level of control is needed. The use of technology could help the police and improve the protection of victims. For example, a pilot project commanded by the Minister of Public Safety in the province of Quebec (Canada) was implemented to prevent Femicide (Feminicide) with the use of GPS trackers and early results are promising in reducing severe violence when the risk is properly assessed.

Another important element found in this paper is the proximity between victims and perpetrators, as majority of victims were ex-intimate partners or acquaintances. There is a common misconception held by the general population, victims, and police officers that stranger stalkers are more concerning (Scott et al., 2013). However, studies have revealed the proximity between victims and perpetrators significantly increase the array of behaviours committed and the level of violence (White et al., 2022) and that the stalking perpetrators are usually well known to

the victim (Longpré, Stefanska, et al., 2023). Scott and colleagues (Duff & Scott, 2013; Scott et al., 2013) have shown that risk awareness towards ex-intimate stalkers can be increased in research settings by providing training on contextual information, such as the impact of proximity between victims and perpetrators, the relationship between stalking and sexual violence, as well as the link between obsessive behaviours and the risk of severe violence.

#### 4.2.2 | Risk assessment & treatment

Previous studies have found mixed results between risk assessment and stalking reoffending (e.g., McEwan et al., 2020; Shea et al., 2018). Eke et al. (2011) have found a high risk of reoffending among convicted stalkers in a follow-up study. Recently, McEwan (2021) has provided an evidence-based overview of key considerations for risk assessments of stalking. However, few studies have looked at elements of sexual violence in predicting the risk of stalking reoffending, or how stalking can increase the risk of sexual violence. Our results showed that there might be a link and that some cases included previous accusations/convictions for sexual offence while the proximity between victims and perpetrators should be considered. Assessing the risk of stalking without considering these elements appears counter-intuitive and might explain the mixed results found in previous studies. Therefore, to improve the assessment of risk, and to develop best practices, future research should have a careful consideration of the context and how it might impact the level of risk (Longpré, Stefanska, et al., 2023). Having said that, the SRP (MacKenzie et al., 2009) allowed to recognise individual differences of stalking perpetrators and establish different typology of stalking for sexual homicide cases. The tool proved to be useful in the assessment of risk factors for sexual homicide perpetrators. Although identification of treatment pathways was not part of this study, it appears that the tool would be useful for case formulation purposes, enabling to consider stalking behaviours alongside formulation of how sexual violence was related to the act of killing (Stefanska et al., 2020).

There is currently a lack of treatment effectiveness studies (Wheatley et al., 2022). With the high risk of reoffending of convicted stalkers (e.g., Eke et al., 2011), it is imperative to develop effective treatments. Developing a holistic approach that consider the context, the individual and the elements of sexual violence, should improve treatment effectiveness (Longpré, Stefanska, et al., 2023). While individuals convicted of sexual homicide usually have low reoffending rates (an estimated 3.3% reoffending rates for attempted or completed homicide within 12 years; an estimated 23.1% reoffending rates for a sexual offence within 20 years; Hill et al., 2012), and that treatments for such individuals have shown good effectiveness, considering elements of stalking could further improve treatment and rehabilitation (Longpré, Tachmetzidi Papoutsi, & Stefanska, 2023). With the risk of a sexually violent reoffending, all the relevant risk factors should be identified.

#### 4.2.3 | Research implications

Finally, these results also have research implications. The relationship between sexual violence and stalking has been understudied, and to our knowledge, this paper is the first study on stalking and sexual homicide. From the lower end of the spectrum of sexual violence (i.e., Sexual harassment, Sexual coercion (Tachmetzidi Papoutsi & Longpré, 2022)), to the upper end (i.e., Rape, Sexual homicide (Stefanska et al., 2022; White et al., 2022)), recent studies have revealed that the escalation from stalking to sexual violence occurs. However, the scarcity of research on the relationship between stalking and sexual violence, and the high dark figure of both types of violence, have made it difficult to explore and understand how they are related. For example, the SSBS (Stefanska et al., 2022) does not include items measuring sexual violence; because of the low base-rate of these items, they have been excluded from the analyses. This might be explained by the fact that when sexual violence is committed, the focus by the Criminal Justice system moves away from stalking. As such, both forms of violence are studied separately. This leads to a little focus on stalking in studies researching sexual violence, and little focus on sexual violence in studies researching stalking.

### 4.3 | Limitations

This study is not without limitations. The first limitation is the potential generalization of finding because of the small sample size and the analytic strategy used. An exploratory case study analysis was conducted on a sample of seven cases of male sexual killers who served a custodial sentence within HM Prison Service in England & Wales. Therefore, the results do not represent all cases of stalking and sexual homicide, and results should be interpreted accordingly. However, our findings are supporting previous findings on stalking and sexual violence (e.g., Stefanska et al., 2020; Tachmetzidi Papoutsis & Longpré, 2022; White et al., 2022). Moving forward, future studies should examine the relationship between stalking and sexual homicide on bigger samples, using quantitative design, to replicate our findings.

A second limitation steamed from the analysis of sexual homicide, which only represents a minority of all sexual violence (Chan et al., 2019). This form of violence represents an extreme form of sexual violence, and thus, our findings are not generalizable to the entire spectrum of sexual violence. While previous studies have shown that sexual homicide can share similar risk factors with other forms of sexual violence (Beckett & Longpré, 2024; Saravia et al., 2023), it is possible that the rare convergence of stalking and sexual homicide leads to a different set of risk and situational factors. Therefore, results need to be replicated across different samples and different spectrum of sexual violence.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to examine the relationship between stalking and sexual homicide using a case study approach. Seven cases of male sexual killers who served a custodial sentence within HM Prison Service in England & Wales were analysed. Results revealed that: (1) most victims were ex-intimate partners or acquaintances; (2) some cases included previous accusations/convictions for sexual offence; (3) in most cases, stalking elements were not considered (or not reported) to the authorities, which has led to an escalation of behaviours; (4) stalking elements was secondary in investigation and the assessment of risk as sexual violence was of the primary focus. Given that within the research both forms of violence (stalking and sexual offending) are studied separately, the current study provided a rare picture of stalking risk factors for all types of stalkers noted in the classification system of the SRP in sexual homicide cases.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

### INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

### ORCID

Nicholas Longpré  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7485-2386>

### REFERENCES

- Beauregard, E., & Chopin, J. (2023). Interactions between offender and crime characteristics leading to a lethal outcome in cases of sexually motivated abductions. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*. Online First. <https://doi.org/10.21428/cb6ab371.1d1d65b2>
- Beauregard, E., Chopin, J., & Andresen, M. A. (2022). Modus operandi in sexual assaults of female strangers does not change over time. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 35(2), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10790632221139174>

- Beckett, N. S., & Longpré, N. (2024). The dark tetrad in relationships: Sexual coaxing, coercion and rape myth acceptance. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2024.2354356>
- Brouillette-Alarie, S., Lee, S. C., Longpré, N., & Babchishin, K. (2022). An examination of the latent constructs in risk tools for individuals who sexually offend: Applying multidimensional item response theory to the static-2002R. *Assessment*, 30(4), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10731911221076373>
- Chan, H. C. O. (2023). Non stranger and stranger sexual homicides in mainland China: Comparing the modus operandi of male sexual murderers. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*. Online First. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10790632231190079>
- Chan, H. C. O., Heide, K. M., & Beauregard, E. (2019). Male and female single-victim sexual homicide offenders: Distinguishing the types of weapons used in killing their victims. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 31(2), 127–150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063217724765>
- Chan, H. C. O., & Sheridan, L. (2019). Who are the stalking victims? Exploring the victimization experiences and psychosocial characteristics of young male and female adults in Hong Kong. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(21–22), NP11994–NP12015. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519889938>
- de Roos, M., & Jones, D. N. (2020). Self-affirmation and false allegations: The effects on responses to disclosures of sexual victimization. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(11–12), 1–24. Online first. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520980387>
- Duff, S. C., & Scott, A. J. (2013). Understanding perceptions of stalking: The impact of additional contextual information regarding the breakdown of relationships. *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, 3(2), 136–144. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-09-2012-0005>
- Eke, A. W., Hilton, N. Z., Meloy, J. R., Mohandie, K., & Williams, J. (2011). Predictors of recidivism by stalkers: A nine-year follow-up of police contacts. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 29(2), 271–283. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.975>
- Georgoulis, H., Beauregard, E., & Chopin, J. (2023). Crime scene and victim characteristics in sexual homicide cases where the body is openly displayed. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 38(4), 892–903. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-023-09610-5>
- Hill, A., Rettenberger, M., Habermann, N., Berner, W., Eher, R., & Briken, P. (2012). The utility of risk assessment instruments for the prediction of recidivism in sexual homicide perpetrators. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(18), 3553–3578. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260512447570>
- James, D. V., & MacKenzie, R. D. (2018). Stalking and harassment. In J. L. Ireland, P. Birch, & C. A. Ireland (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of human aggression: Current issues and perspectives* (pp. 170–182). Routledge.
- James, J., & Proulx, J. (2016). The modus operandi of serial and nonserial sexual murderers: A systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 31, 200–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2016.09.006>
- Kerr, K. J., Beech, A. R., & Murphy, D. (2013). Sexual homicide: Definition, motivation and comparison with other forms of sexual offending. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 18(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.05.006>
- Longpré, N., Guay, J. P., Knight, R. A., & Benbouriche, M. (2018). Sadistic offender or sexual sadism? Taxometric evidence for a dimensional structure of sexual sadism. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 47(2), 403–416. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-1068-4>
- Longpré, N., Moreton, R., Snow, E., Kizsel, F., & Fitzsimons, M. (2022). Dark traits, harassment and rape myths acceptances among university students. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X221139037>
- Longpré, N., Sims-Knight, J. E., Neumann, C., Guay, J. P., & Knight, R. A. (2020). Is paraphilic coercion a different construct from sadism or simply the lower end of an agonistic continuum? *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 71, 1–11.
- Longpré, N., Stefanska, E. B., Tachmetzidi Papoutsis, M., & White, E. (2023). A wolf in sheep's clothing: Taxometric evidence of the dimensional structure of stalking. *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, 13(1), 18–33. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-09-2021-0038>
- Longpré, N., Tachmetzidi Papoutsis, M., & Stefanska, E. B. (2023). One size does not fit all: The combination reaction of stalking and sexual violence. In *The assessment of risk. Oral presentation at the international association for the treatment of sexual offenders. Trondheim, Norway, august 30th - September 1st*.
- MacKenzie, R., McEwan, T. E., Pathe, M., James, D. V., Ogloff, J. R., & Mullen, P. E. (2009). *Stalking risk profile: Guidelines for the assessment and management of stalkers*. Monash University.
- McEwan, T. C. (2021). Stalking threat and risk assessment. In J. R. Meloy & J. Hoffmann (Eds.), *International handbook of threat assessment* (2nd ed., pp. 197–201). Oxford Academic.
- McEwan, T. E., Daffern, M., MacKenzie, R. D., & Ogloff, J. R. P. (2017). Risk factors for stalking violence, persistence, and recurrence. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology*, 28(1), 38–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2016.1247188>

- McEwan, T. E., Harder, L., Brandt, C., & de Vogel, V. (2020). Risk factors for stalking recidivism in a Dutch community forensic mental health sample. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, 19(2), 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14999013.2019.1661885>
- Mcguire, B., & Wraith, A. (2000). Legal and psychological aspects of stalking: A review. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 11(2), 316–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585180050142543>
- Mullen, P. E., Pathé, M., Purcell, R., & Stuart, G. W. (1999). Study of stalkers. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 156(8), 1244–1249. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.156.8.1244>
- Patton, C. L., Nobles, M., & Fox, K. (2010). Look who's stalking: Obsessive pursuit and attachment theory. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(3), 282–290. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2010.02.013>
- Priya, A. (2021). Case study methodology of qualitative research: Key attributes and navigating the conundrums in its application. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70(1), 94–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>
- Ressler, R. K., Burgess, A. W., & Douglas, J. E. (1988). *Sexual homicide: Patterns and motives*. Lexington Books/D. C. Heath and Com.
- Richards, L. (2009). Domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence (DASH, 2009) risk identification and assessment and management model. available at: [www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/DASH-2009.pdf](http://www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/DASH-2009.pdf)
- Rosenfeld, B. (2004). Violence risk factors in stalking and obsessional harassment: A review and preliminary meta-analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 31(1), 9–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854803259241>
- Saravia, I., Longpré, N., & de Roos, M. (2023). Everyday sadism as a predictor of rape myth acceptance and perception of harassment. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 67(13–14), 1323–1342. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624x231165430>
- Scott, A. J., Nixon, K., & Sheridan, L. (2013). The influence of prior relationship on perceptions of stalking: A comparison of laypersons, nonspecialist police officers, and specialist police officers. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 40(12), 1434–1448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854813494183>
- Shea, D. E., McEwan, T. E., Strand, S. J., & Ogloff, J. R. P. (2018). The reliability and predictive validity of the guidelines for stalking assessment and management (SAM). *Psychological Assessment*, 30(11), 1409–1420. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000589>
- Sheridan, L., & Lyndon, A. (2012). The influence of prior relationship, gender, and fear on the consequences of stalking. *Sex Roles*, 66(5–6), 340–350. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9889-9>
- Stefanska, E. B., Beech, A., & Carter, A. J. (2016). A systematic review of the literature comparing male non-serial sexual killers and sexual aggressors: Examining homogeneous and heterogeneous characteristics of these groups. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 22(3), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2015.1126657>
- Stefanska, E. B., Higgs, T., Carter, A. J., & Beech, A. R. (2017). When is a murder a sexual murder? Understanding the sexual element in the classification of sexual killings. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 50, 53–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrim-jus.2017.03.004>
- Stefanska, E. B., Longpré, N., Bloomfield, S., Perkins, D., & Carter, A. J. (2020). Untangling sexual homicide: A proposal for a new classification of sexually motivated killings. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 71, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2020.101729>
- Stefanska, E. B., Longpré, N., & Harriman, R. S. (2022). The wheel of change moves on: Assessing the severity of stalking behaviour. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(15–16), 14672–14694. Online first, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626052111015216>
- Stefanska, E. B., Nitschke, J., Carter, A. J., & Mokros, A. (2018). Sadism among sexual homicide offenders: Validation of the sexual sadism scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 31(1), 132–137. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000653>
- Storey, J. E., Hart, S. D., Meloy, J. R., & Reavis, J. A. (2009). Psychopathy and stalking. *Law and Human Behavior*, 33(3), 237–246. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10979-008-9149-5>
- Sun, P., Beauregard, E., & Chopin, J. (2023). The significance of unusual acts in sexual homicide. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, 20(3), 181–195. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jip.1619>
- Tachmetzidi Papoutsí, M., & Longpré, N. (2022). The nomological network of stalking with sexual harassment, sexual coercion, and dark personality traits. In *Oral presentation at the NOTA annual international conference. Leeds, England, 4–6 may*.
- Wheatley, R. (2023). Introduction “stalking: What do we know about working with people who stalk and where do we go? *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, 13(2), 65–71. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-07-2021-0024>
- Wheatley, R., Henley, S., & Underwood, A. (Eds.) (2022). *Working with individuals who have engaged in stalking: A resource for psychologists*. British Psychological Society.
- White, E., Longpré, N., & Stefanska, E. B. (2022). Stalking behaviours presented by ex-intimate stalkers: A victim's perspective. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(7–8), 5074–5093. Online first, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520934429>

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

**How to cite this article:** Stefanska, E., & Longpré, N. (2024). Unveiling the shadows: Investigating the interplay of stalking and sexual homicide—A case study. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2679>