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Examining the consequences of stalking misconceptions

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It has been proven through previous research that stalking is a form of intimate violence. It is possible that by researching other forms of intimate violence, such as rape, we can come to gain a better understanding of stalking, particularly in our legal system. By following the example of rape myth literature, and previous studies on rape myths, we produce a starting point and a guide by which to follow. It is first necessary to build a scale to assess the stereotypes that people have about stalking. Our first study did this by creating the Stalking Myth Scale, a reliable and valid scale that yielded a reliability of 0.80, and correlated, as expected, with five other measures of intimate violence. We then used this scale, along with four other measures to examine the extent to which stalking myths were an acceptable predictor of case severity, sentencing, victim blaming, and perpetrator responsibility. We hypothesized that the endorsement of stalking myths would result in a minimization of case severity, lower sentencing, more victim blaming, and reduced perceptions of perpetrator responsibility. A scenario experiment was run, varying the gender of perpetrator and victim, and the type of victim-perpetrator relationship (stranger or intimate). Through this study our hypothesis was proven. It was found that endorsement of stalking myths was a significant predictor of all four variables (case severity, sentencing, victim blaming, and perpetrator responsibility).