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Stalking: intimate partner violence and debt collection problems in Hong Kong

纏擾：香港親密伴侶暴力及追債問題研究

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Abstract

Stalking (harassment that causes fear) is known to be a serious social problem worldwide. However, there is no empirical research in Hong Kong confirming the scale of the problem or identifying how much of the problem stems from debt collection (i.e. which could in theory be addressed through regulation of debt collection), former cohabitants (i.e. which could in theory be addressed through domestic violence legislation) or others (e.g. people who have positive or negative emotions towards the victim which they cannot address through normal relationships). This study builds on the previous survey research done by the research team on violence against women and crime victimization in order to provide the qualitative and quantitative evidence needed to identify how best the problem can be addressed in Hong Kong. A small-scale telephone survey (1,050 respondents) was used to provide estimates of prevalence (one year and ever) of stalking (in different forms) against both adult men and women in Hong Kong. Follow-up interviews (28 interviews covering 48 stalking incidents), were used to provide details of the nature of victims' lived experience.

One Year Prevalence rates for stalking

Gender	Age Group	18-30	31-40	41-50	50+
Male	Overall	12.6%	8.0%	14.3%	7.5%
	Unwanted letters	0.0%	2.0%	3.9%	0.9%
	Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Unwanted phone calls	3.5%	2.0%	9.1%	5.2%
	Loitering	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Followed	0.0%	2.0%	1.3%	0.0%
	Unwanted emails	5.4%	6.0%	3.9%	1.4%
	Doxxing	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
Female	Overall	16.2%	14.3%	8.8%	6.1%
	Unwanted letters	0.0%	4.8%	3.5%	0.3%
	Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Unwanted phone calls	6.7%	6.4%	4.4%	4.5%
	Loitering	3.8%	1.6%	0.9%	0.0%
	Followed	1.9%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%
	Unwanted emails	5.7%	1.6%	1.8%	1.3%
	Doxxing	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Layman summary of policy implications and recommendations

From the quantitative findings, it is undeniable that stalking is a common problem, especially for younger people, with overall one-year rates of 12.6% for males aged 18-30 and 16.2% for females aged 18-30. The vast majority of incidents did not have a connection with a partner, ex-partner or debt collector, indicating that focusing only on the enhancement of domestic violence and debt collection legislation cannot address the range and very real problems in Hong Kong. Unwanted phone calls and emails causing alarm or distress are the dominant modes for both males and females.

From the qualitative and quantitative findings, it is clear that debt collection, domestic violence, workplace harassment, nuisance calls, email, social media and physical stalking all continue to be stalking mechanisms and that it is essential that the general public, human resource professionals, NGOs and police all receive the education, training and resources needed in order to address these problems. It is also clear that legislation to address problems outside debt collection and domestic violence needs to be re-examined, while being aware that this legislation should not impinge on press freedom or freedom of expression.

Given all the above, the following policy recommendations have been developed to address these issues.

Government

- mandatory sex education in schools, including practical measures such as how to protect yourself in public transportation and training students from a young age to speak up when experiencing stalking incidents
- better regulate debt collection industry by legislation
- re-examine legislative solutions to address stalking outside debt collection and domestic violence
- train frontline police officers on better reporting system for stalking cases and handling of victims
- public education and advertisement on raising the awareness on different types of stalking behaviours; further education on responses when being victimised
- additional PCPD education on how people can reduce the risks from phone, email and online stalking
- funding for NGOs to provide services to potential and actual victims
 - domestic workers
 - victims of nuisance calls
 - victims of physical stalking

NGOs

- counselling services provided to victims, perpetrators
- educational services to help victims to aware possible ways to fight back specific forms of stalking behaviours

Workplace

- develop stalking incidents reporting system
- include reporting and complaints procedures in staff manual that also addresses the potential problems with power relationships

行政摘要

研究摘要

纏擾（即會令受害者產生恐懼的一種騷擾）是世界各地皆有的嚴重社會問題。不過，香港至今並沒有實證研究確定纏擾的規模和起因，例如是否來自收取債務（理論上可以透過監管收債方式解決），前同居者（理論上可通過家庭暴力法例處理）或其他人（例如對受害者有正面或負面情緒，而這些情緒不能在正常關係中表達出來）。這個研究將建基於研究小組過往有關犯罪受害問題及婦女性暴力的問卷調查上，提供所需的質性與量性數據，以確定香港解決此問題的最佳方法。本研究會採用小型的電話問卷調查（1,050 名受訪者），以估計香港成年男女被纏擾（以不同形式）的普遍性（一年以上）。研究進行了深入訪談跟進個案（28 次訪談涉及 48 個纏擾事件），從而了解受害者經歷的纏擾性質及細節。

纏擾行為的一年盛行率

性別	年齡組別	18-30	31-40	41-50	50+	
男性	整體	12.6%	8.0%	14.3%	7.5%	
	不想接收的信件	0.0%	2.0%	3.9%	0.9%	
	不想接收的禮物	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
	不想接收的來電	3.5%	2.0%	9.1%	5.2%	
	徘徊	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
	跟隨	0.0%	2.0%	1.3%	0.0%	
	不想接收的電郵	5.4%	6.0%	3.9%	1.4%	
	個人資料被發放	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	
	女性	整體	16.2%	14.3%	8.8%	6.1%
		不想接收的信件	0.0%	4.8%	3.5%	0.3%

不想接收的禮物	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
不想接收的來電	6.7%	6.4%	4.4%	4.5%
徘徊	3.8%	1.6%	0.9%	0.0%
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不想接收的電郵	5.7%	1.6%	1.8%	1.3%
個人資料被發放	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

研究項目對政策影響和政策建議的摘要

從量性研究的結果來看，纏擾無可否認是一個常見的問題，尤其是年輕人，18-30 歲的男性，纏擾達一年的總比例為 12.6%，而同齡的女性則為 16.2%。絕大多數事件與伴侶、前伴侶或收債人沒有關係，這表明僅以集中透過加強家庭暴力和收債立法並不能解決廣泛並真正出現在香港的問題。無論是男性還是女性，導致擔憂或困擾的途徑主要是來自不想接收的來電和電子郵件。

從質性和量性研究的結果來看，顯而易見，收債、家庭暴力、工作場所騷擾，騷擾電話、電子郵件、社交媒體和直接纏擾都是持續成為纏擾的途徑。因此，至關重要的是，公眾、人力資源專業人員、非政府組織和警察都必須獲得解決這些問題所需的教育、培訓和資源。同樣清楚的是，需要重新審視處理收債和家庭暴力以外的問題之立法，並同時意識到立法不應對新聞自由或言論自由造成影響。

上述調查結果清楚表明，需要採取全面的政策應對措施來處理相關問題：

政府

- 在學校中推行強制的性教育，包括一些實際措施，例如如何在公共交通中保護自己，以及訓練學生從小當遇到纏擾行為時會說出來
- 通過立法更好地規範收債行業
- 重新審視立法工作，以應對收債和家庭暴力以外的纏擾行為
- 培訓前線警務人員為纏擾個案及處理受害者建立更好的通報系統
- 透過公眾教育和廣告，以提高對不同形式的纏擾行為的認識；進一步教育受害人如何應對
- 個人資料私隱專員公署提供額外的教育，以教導公眾如何減低電話、電郵和線上纏擾的風險
- 為非政府組織提供資金，向潛在和實際受害者提供服務
 - 家庭傭工
 - 滋擾電話的受害者
 - 人身纏擾的受害者

非政府組織

- 向受害者、犯罪者提供輔導服務
- 提供教育服務，以幫助受害者意識到能以可行的方式來抵抗特定形式的纏擾行為

工作場所

- 建立纏擾事件的通報系統
- 在員工手冊中包括報告和投訴程序，這些程序亦能處理權力關係的潛在問題

Introduction

Stalking was identified in 2000 by the Law Reform Commission as a problem in Hong Kong that needed better policy responses. Security Bureau (SB) has recently given up on a legal response on the grounds that they are unable to identify a legislative response that is acceptable to LegCo and the public. As identified by Professor Simon Young, consultant to SB, part of the problem has been the serious lack of empirical information about the prevalence and nature of stalking in Hong Kong. This study provides a start for filling that large vacuum.

Objectives of the study

1. Estimate one-year and life-time prevalence for stalking in Hong Kong by gender and age group
2. Model the relationship between other demographic variables and stalking prevalence in order to gain deeper understanding of who most needs help
3. Identify relationship (if any) between perpetrator and victim
4. Provide a detailed picture of the experiences of victims, that can be used to identify the possible effectiveness of different policy responses

Research Background

Global trends in anti-stalking legislation

Stalking legislation varies greatly around the world. In the United States, stalking was not criminalized until California passed an anti-stalking law in 1990, defining it as “willful, malicious and repeated following or harassment” of another person (Fox et al. 2011:75-76; Miller 2012). By 2000, 50 states had enacted stalking laws. Most states include physical stalking and cyber-stalking (i.e., repeated and unwanted messaging, emailing, computer hacking and contact via social networking websites), yet differ in terms of definitions, specifications of stalking behavior and of regarding fear and/or threat requirement and the degree of punishment. It is also noted that no anti-stalking legislation exists at the federal level and only interstate cases entail federal participation, when the federal government in 1996 passed the Interstate Stalking Punishment and Prevention Act to prohibit an individual from traveling across state lines with the intent to stalk (Dietz & Martin 2007:754). Hence, specific anti-stalking statutes remain the responsibility of states and local governments.

Some countries have enacted anti-stalking legislation that bans persistent pursuit, including Canada (1993), Australia (1999), Netherlands (2000) and Germany (2007). Other countries do not have specific stalking laws but have passed anti-harassment legislation as in the UK. In England and Wales, the enactment of the Protection from Harassment Act of 1997 (Fox et al. 2011), distinguish between violent and non-violent harassment. For Scotland, harassment and stalking are considered as a crime of ‘breach of peace’, where Protection from Harassment Act 1997 enables victims to seek civil action in protecting themselves (Law Reform Commission, 2000b). In New Zealand, the Harassment Act 1997 makes the most serious types of harassment criminal offences and empowers the Court to make orders to protect victims who are not covered by domestic violence legislation (Law Reform Commission 2000b).

Still, most countries have yet to pass anti-stalking laws, particularly in Asia. Singapore has no anti-stalking legislation and has relied on the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act of 1996 to deal with stalking behaviors (Law Reform Commission 2000:94). One exception is the enactment of a national law (2010) in Japan to combat stalking, yet its

revised anti-stalking law in 2013 is under fire from preventing online stalking after the stabbing of female idol singer Mayu Tomita (The Japan Times 2016). Triggered by the outrage over the 2012 Delhi gang rape, India is one of the few Asian countries to introduce stalking as a punishable offence through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill of 2013, under the Indian Penal Code (Section 354D), providing a broader definition of rape and punishments for sex crimes that includes stalking (The New York Times 2013).

Perceptions of stalking

Spitzberg's (2002) meta-analysis of 103 studies of stalking-related phenomena found most legal definitions describe stalking behavior as "an intentional pattern of repeated or ongoing unwanted pursuit that a reasonable person would find fearful or threatening" (p. 262). Few legal definitions have taken into account public perceptions of what should be regarded as unlawful stalking activities (Sheridan et al. 2000). Sheridan and Davies (2001) observe that England and Wales' anti-stalking laws are comparatively broad and align with public perceptions of stalking. However, Philips et al. (2004) highlighted that ambiguous stalking laws may lead to false or failure to recognize behavior as stalking by the victims. Therefore, public perceptions of stalking in the development of legislation is essential (Dennison & Thomson, 2000).

Research on public perceptions of stalking offers several insights. Hills & Taplin (1998) observed that who is engaging in the stalking activities and the perceived ability to anticipate the level of danger are important in shaping one's perception of stalking. Scott, Rajakaruna and Sheridan (2012) found conduct severity and perpetrator-target relationship also influenced perceptions. Kinkade et al. (2005) identified extralegal and personal factors (i.e., past victimization experience, gender, race, television-viewing practices, political view, religious belief) as important variables in one's interpretations of stalking and stalkers. Gender plays a role in shaping people's perceptions of stalking. Some studies suggest there is a gender difference in stalking perceptions with men tending to perceive stalking as less serious than female (Dunlap et al. 2012; Dennison & Thomson, 2000; Phillips et al., 2004). Others however argue that there are few gender differences. People perceive certain behaviours as stalking when presented with a hypothetical scenario regardless of their gender (Finnegan & Fritz's, 2012; Philips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010). Nonetheless, this study also shows that people express "greater concern for female targets of male pursuers than for male targets of female pursuers" (Finnegan and Fritz, 2012, p.905). This is consistent with existing literature (Philips et al., 2004; Sheridan & Scott, 2010) with female targets more likely to be regarded as vulnerable and needing to seek help than males.

Some researchers specifically look at victim perspectives as they believe victim's perception of stalking is important in formulating anti-stalking legislation. Sheridan et al. (2000) discovered stalking to be far more prevalent than government estimates when victims' perspectives are factored in. A nation-wide telephone survey with 16,000 respondents in the US revealed that a small but important group of respondents (4%) regarded themselves as stalking victims but the majority (60%) failed to meet the legal definition of a stalking victim (i.e. "the fear requirement of feeling very frightened or fearing bodily injury or death for themselves or someone close to them" (Tjaden et al., 2000:18). At the same time, a small proportion of respondents are "legally-but-not-self-defined" victims, indicating a discrepancy between victim and legal definitions of stalking.

Theories surrounding stalking behavior

Stalking comes in different forms and contexts. Holmes and Holmes (1998) categorized stalking in the US into 7 major kinds: (1) Celebrity; (2) Lust; (3) Hit; (4) Love-scorned; (5) Domestic; and (6) Political. This categorization has been widely used (Davis, 2001). Stalking associated with relationships is commonly observed; and involves intimate or dating partners (ie. former or current lovers, cohabitantes and spouses), especially after marital or dating breakups— a trend likely derivative of its close association with intimate partner violence (Melton, 2000). In the US and UK, studies on risks factors have pointed out that prior or current intimate relationship between perpetrator and victim are significant (Breiding, 2014; Thompson et al., 2013). Compared to acquaintances, strangers and family members, intimate partners stood out as the most common type of stalking reported in US (Breiding, 2014). 43% of women and 28.7% of men in UK (Office for National Statistics, 2016), and 61% of women and 44% of men in US (Breiding, 2014) have been stalked by their current or ex-partners before. Patton et al. (2010) explained stalking in intimate partner violence with attachment theory. Via conducting a quantitative survey on stalking with 2,783 university students, they concluded that childhood experience of lacking intimacy and security leads to a higher risk of stalking perpetration in adulthood. Most theories center on the perpetrator, and adopt a psychological framework (Miller, 2012; Wilson et al., 2006). Fox et al. (2011) conceptualize all forms of stalking under one theoretical framework. They explored stalking via social learning theory, where perpetrators ‘learn’ via social interactions to imitate stalking behavior, particularly through interactions with peers. Despite finding some support for the theory, their analysis falls short of providing the qualitative context of these learned behaviors. The different motives of stalking moreover, such as how a stalker of debt collection differs from one of lust, were not analyzed. In essence, little headway has been made theoretically, despite the field’s reliance on large-scale surveys and lack of data on meanings and experiences of perpetrators and victims.

Stalking as a form of violence

While statistics on types of stalking is lacking in Hong Kong, two forms of stalking, primarily debt collection and domestic stalking, are found particularly noticeable according to police statistics (Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau CMAB, 2011). In 2016, 9723 cases of non-crime harassment, including repeated phone calls and harassments by visits, and 1852 crime relating to debt collection were reported to the police (HKSAR, 2018). The scale of stalking and harassment associated with debt collection seemed to be one of the largest in Hong Kong. As discussed, existing studies on stalking lack a meta-theoretical framework covering all forms of stalking. In particular, theories such as attachment theory (Patton et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2006) and social learning theory (Fox et al., 2011) might not be applicable to understanding other forms of stalking behaviors, such as by debt collection, or political stalking. ‘Instrumental violence’ is therefore adopted as our theoretical framework (Eisner, 2009). Violence can be defined as ‘behaviour that intentionally threatens or does physical harm’ (Ray, 2009), and emotional, psychological, sexual and material damage (Stanko, 1994, quoted in Ray, 2009). Instead of the common narrow perception of violence as actions causing physical harm, academic definitions of violence have included a much wider spectrum of behaviors that some scholars framed as power abuse (Kelly, 1987). The nature of violence varies from individual to collective actions, where multiple theories are raised surrounding different violent behaviours such as sexual violence, political violence and war (Eisner, 2009). Eisner (2009) suggested the framework – ‘instrumental violence’ to enable a holistic explanation to various violent behavior. According to Eisner (2009), violence under this framework is understood as an external tool to individuals, for them to achieve certain goals. Eisner (2009) raised several types of goals for instrumental violence: to

arrive intrinsic rewards such as displaying masculinity (Anderson and Umberson, 2010) and desire to feel worthy (Katz, 1988); for protection and revenges such as the use of relational violence in protect and dominant friendships (Trammell, 2009). The concept of instrumental violence therefore enabled a systematic understanding of different types of stalking in Hong Kong. For example, extending the concept of ‘relational violence’ (Trammell, 2009) to understand how stalking behavior are used to control the relationship between intimate partners, or ex-partners. This could also enable understanding of how and why stalking behavior facilitated debt collection. Through in-depth interviews with victims in this study, the process and experiences of stalking, therefore the effect of such instrumental violence, could be examined.

The current situation of anti-stalking legislation in Hong Kong

In the Law Reform Commission (LRC) report (2000b), stalking is described as a series of acts directed at a specific person that causes someone to feel harassed, alarmed or distressed; it usually involves a course of conduct that extends over a period of time (2000a:5). Common stalking behaviors range from repeated following, covert surveillance, unwanted communications or silent telephone calls, false accusations of victims to more violent behaviors like property damaging and murdering. It is also important to note that stalking can co-occur with various forms of harassment, such as verbal abuse, physical assault, psychological terror and/or sexual coercion (Jordan et al. 2007). As explained in the LRC report, this kind of behavior can take place in the domestic and intimate relationships, newsgathering activities and certain specific relations among debt collectors, gang members and disgruntled clients, etc. Stalking is not a criminal offence in Hong Kong under existing laws, leading to a lack of stalking-related incidents (Law Reform Commission 2000b:15) as the police tend not to maintain statistics on cases of following or harassing someone which are not an offence (ibid, p.34). Still, available materials reported in the press and among the responses to the Consultation Paper on stalking published in 1998 offer some useful indication of the problem (see Chapter 3 in the LRC report). In particular, out of the 38 incidents listed in the report, nearly one-fourth of the primary perpetrator involves woman stalking man or woman (10 cases), showing the pattern of stalking is not necessarily tied to man being the main perpetrator and woman being the primary victim. The report also connects the concern of privacy loss with one’s private life, highlighting that the effect of stalking behavior not solely upon personal information, but also impacting the establishment and development of one’s personal relationships (Law Reform Commission 2000b:23-28).

According to the LRC report (2000b), it is suggested that under existing laws, protection from stalking afforded by the civil and criminal law is “spotty, uncertain and ineffective” (CMAB, 2011:8). While the existing civil law provides a remedy in some instances, protection under the law of torts remains “fragmented, ad hoc and piecemeal” as the torts fail to capture the full extent and degree of a stalker’s behavior (Law Reform Commission 2000a:3). It is also complicated by the limitation of relying solely on civil remedies, when injunctions do not act as much of a deterrent (Law Reform Commission 2000b:73-74). Existing criminal law is equally inadequate, as stalking is not considered as an independent phenomenon and prosecution is possible only if one’s act falls within the scope of a criminal offence ie. victim is threatened with immediate unlawful violence or sustained physical and/or psychological injury (Law Reform Commission 2000b:75). In view of the inadequacy of existing criminal law, the LRC report considers that anti-stalking legislation should be introduced to provide better protection to victims, as long as there are adequate cases to show that stalking is a “problem” for those affected by such conduct (Law Reform Commission 2000b). Anti-stalking legislation was shelved by the government given no favorable

conditions for pursuing it after a three-month consultation in late 2011. It appears that the controversial issue of striking a balance between protection of individual privacy rights and freedom of speech/press freedom lies at the heart of this lack of public consensus (CMAB, 2011:4-5; South China Morning Post 2014). According to Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (2011), the administration mainly took the recommendation that extends the scope of the former Domestic Violence Ordinance (“DVO”) to cover relationships of former spouses, former heterosexual cohabitants and their children, as well as other immediate and extended family members with effect from August 2008. It further renamed as the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance (“DCRVO”) (Cap.189) when the administration considered the extension of coverage to the existing and former same-sex cohabitants and their children from January 2010.

Overview of prevalence in Hong Kong

Prevalence of stalking varies considerably across different contexts, largely due to a lack of standardization in samples, stalking definitions, perpetrator types and time frames etc. Still, those figures can offer some insight into the extent of the phenomenon and several trends emerged. Stalking victims range from ordinary citizens to celebrities, yet the majority of victims are ordinary people being harassed in their workplace or in a domestic context (Law Reform Commission 2000b:15). The statistical prevalence of stalking from a survey conducted by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics in 1994 and 1995 reported that both male and female victims are frequently stalked by ex-partners or current partners (11% for male victims, 58% for female victims) and through a work relationship (11% for male, 3% for female). The majority of victims are likely to be harassed at home (55%). With the increased use of social media and forum, the number of cyberstalking and bullying are also on rise as increased by 44% between 2013 to 2014 (Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs, 2014).

New forms of stalking emerged via the social media, which have also extended to stalking in the real world (see case of Franklin Chu, Oriental Daily, 2014). As cyberstalking and bullying is still problematic in definition and legislation, this research will focus only on the first four categories of stalking with physical actions. Reported forms of stalking behaviours associated with debt collection have not been widely researched. The only statistics available is from the Security Bureau Report in 2005. The total number of reports on non-crime debt collection behaviours have been increasing from 13353 in 2001 to 20429 in 2004. There were 20429 cases received on non-crime reports on debt collection in 2004 alone (Security Bureau, 2005). This included stalking behaviours such as nuisance by visits, minor assault, telephone nuisance. Hong Kong Monetary Authority provided statistics on complaints against debt collection agents employed by authorized institutions. In the second half of 2017, 7 out of 28 authorised institutions have received complaints against debt collecting agents. 14 complaints were received, where the incidence of complaints per 1,000 accounts is 0.04. The average number of complaints received every 6 months from 2014 to 2017 are all lower than 50 (HKMA, 2017, 2018). While complaints received include stalking and other inappropriate behaviors such as criminal behaviours, the statistics nevertheless provided a preview on the situation of stalking due to debt collection.

Common stalking methods employed at the workplace include harassing both the victims and their colleagues with verbal abuse at one’s office, making excessive telephone calls, sending unwanted electronic messages as well as letters by facsimile transmission to one’s place of employment (Law Reform Commission, 2000b:6, see also Chapter 3 of the LRC report). For domestic stalking, apart from initiating multiple forms of harassment such as following and

surveillance, some stalkers may repeatedly threaten to harm the victims and/or their new partners, children or beloved members/items. Most extremely, stalkers may seek to threaten suicide in an attempt to exert power and control over the victim (Law Reform Commission 2000b:7). Stalking related to relationships represents a significant proportion of cases - a trend likely derivative of its close association with intimate partner violence. Some studies, however, point out that marital status serves as a protective function against experiencing stalking, as unmarried individuals are at a higher risk of being stalked especially by their ex-partners (Dietz & Martin 2007; Hellmann & Kilem 2015).

In cases of domestic stalking, it is worth noting that relational proximity will affect the perceptions and responses to the incident, as suggested in similar studies from domestic violence (see Broadhurst et al. 2012). For intimate partner violence, Broadhurst et al. (2012) find that victims who had been abused by their current partner are less likely to perceive the violence as serious (38%) and even as crime (14%), when compared to those who had been abused by a non-partner (62% and 45% respectively). Utilizing vignettes of varying degrees of stalking behaviors, another study on stalking perceptions among the US undergraduates affirms a similar finding. Specifically, participants are significantly less likely to characterize a vignette as stalking when the target and perpetrator are described as previously having an intimate relationship, compared to the two characters as having no prior relationship or merely acquaintances (Phillips et al. 2004).

In sum, it appears that as relational proximity increases, there is a greater reluctance to consider harassing behaviors as a problem, while reverse scenario elicits more serious concerns among victims of non-partners. Most studies highlight the constellation between male offenders and female victims as the characteristic feature of stalking, in which stalking appears to be dominated by male perpetrators especially in cases of female victims being stalked by ex-intimates (Law Reform Commission 2000b:15-19). However, Haugaard and Seri (2004) suggest that both genders are equally likely to initiate intrusive contact after the end of a relationship; they are also likely to engage in similar types of intrusive contact and therefore, men do not necessarily engage in intrusive contact that is characterized as more aggressive or more personally confrontational than do women in this context. This may point to a need for more diverse recognition of victim-offender constellations: While some cases show that the proportion of same- and opposite-sex offenders is equally distributed among male victims (Hellmann & Kliem 2015), other cases involve women stalking women (being stalked by the former wife of the divorcee, lesbian partner etc) or women stalking the opposite sex despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of victims are women being stalked by men (see Chapter 3 of the LRC report).

To examine the magnitude of the problem, we cannot overlook the potential cohort effects due to social changes, especially the interaction between age groups and recent technological changes. A number of studies show that younger people are more likely to experience stalking than older individuals who tend to report feeling fearful less often than younger cohorts (Dietz & Martin 2007; Hellmann & Kilem 2015; Miller 2012; Van der AA & Kunst 2009). As Miller (2012:501) noted, advances in communication technology will potentially lead to an increased ability to harass others, or at least a combination of different forms of harassing behaviors: In view of “cyberstalking”, it is possible that older people are less frequently involved or are less familiar with the term.

In Hong Kong, the statistical prevalence of stalking among adults is still unknown. Recorded crime figures on stalking are unavailable as stalking is not counted as an offence under

existing laws. According to the Law Reform Commission report, (2000b), this is further compounded by officers' unwillingness to handle stalking-related cases. When reported, those complaints are often entered in the station's Miscellaneous Report Book (as opposed to Crime Complaint Register), and retrospective identification would be a costly and labor-intensive exercise that requires a review of all recorded cases by the police "manually" (Law Reform Commission 2000b:34). In addition, victims surveys suggest that, the willingness of victims reporting to the police is hindered by a number of reasons, leading to an undercount of crime. While some victims may not be comfortable to fully disclose their experience because of the social stigma associated with being a victim, others are even unaware of being a crime victim to be protected from abuse (Dietz & Martin 2007; Hellmann & Kilem 2015; Van der AA & Kunst 2009). This is particularly the case in Hong Kong where the public may not perceive such conduct as a matter for which they are entitled to a legal remedy (Law Reform Commission 2000b:35), when the implementation of anti-stalking provision remains absent. Even for those who approach the police for assistance, they are usually discouraged from a lack of enforcement on the part of the criminal justice system given that procedures for civil remedy are "cumbersome, expensive and less appropriate where emergency protection is required (Law Reform Commission 2000a:3).

Understanding the need of extending effective protection for stalking victims via legislation, anti-stalking ordinance and its applicability has to be, at the same time, carefully drafted and reviewed in the protection of press freedom. HKSAR Government received overwhelming oppositions from political parties, Amnesty International Hong Kong, and women rights organisations, expressing concern over the misuse of such ordinance against press freedom during such ordinance consultation in 2011 (Labour Party, 2011; HKJA, 2012; Association for the Advancement of Feminism, 2012). With the determinant of feeling 'harassed' and 'distressed' by stalking victims as rather subjective (Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs, 2012b), press coverage of a certain person usually lies on the fine line between 'reasonable pursuit' and 'stalking'. Interests of both stalking victims and press freedom have to be equally protected. In the light of the anti-stalking ordinances in US, Freedom of Information(1967) served the purpose of protecting press freedom. With the definition of stalking included newsgathering and the lack of media exemption in the current legislation, such an ordinance in Hong Kong might pose threat to the quality and freedom of journalism. One of the major controversies in establishing anti-stalking ordinance was on the lack of reliable evidence supporting the need of victims (Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs, 2012b). A recent paper (Chan and Sheridan, 2016) examined stalking amongst university students in HK and Mainland China, covering perceptions of behavior, perceived reasons for stalking, and perceived coping strategies, but excluding prevalence. This paper concluded that stalking is universal behavior and that the current criminal justice actions in Hong Kong are insufficient. As mentioned, there has not been systematic research on prevalence and victimisation experiences of stalking in Hong Kong.

This research aims to fill in this research gap, and inform relevant policy making bodies on anti-stalking legislation. This research concerns both statistical prevalence and exploration on qualitative experiences, impact and perception of stalking from victims. The findings of this study will enable the government to identify needs and gaps of relevant anti-stalking policies, thereby providing the mechanisms to better protect and support the needs of victims.

Research Methodology

The study has two major components: telephone survey and follow-up interviews.

Phase 1: Telephone Survey

The first stage of data collection involved a mobile computer-aided telephone survey. In Hong Kong, telephone surveys normally yield response rates of around 40%, which is higher than face-to-face interviews. Coverage for fixed lines is at most 60% and over 95% for mobile phones. A 2006 telephone survey on crime victimization in Hong Kong (Broadhurst et al) showed that an anonymous, gender-matched telephone survey yielded comparable results to a government face-to-face household non-gender matched survey done this same year for crimes that have low sensitivity, but yielded much higher estimates for highly sensitive crimes such as sexual violence, suggesting that this methodology has much greater trust and hence validity than household surveys for sensitive crimes.

The questionnaire construction relies heavily on the UN International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) and International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) protocols (which have been implemented in Hong Kong by the PI), the British crime survey and surveys on stalking conducted in Australia and the US. The questionnaire was carefully pilot tested to ensure that it is well understood and accepted by single and married men and women.

The survey is intended to estimate past year and ever experience of stalking and the relationship of demographics of the victim and perpetrator with prevalence. It is also intended to identify previous relationships with the perpetrator (debtor, intimate partner, co-habitor, no prior relationship) to assist in identifying possible policy responses. The survey targets adult respondents.

Phase 2: Qualitative Interview

Sampling

The telephone survey, which provides a clear picture of the prevalence of stalking in Hong Kong and outline basic patterns of stalking behaviour, was followed by the qualitative interview phase. For those respondents who report experience of any form of stalking, we asked if they are prepared to engage in a follow-up interview, either over the phone or in person, whichever they are more comfortable with. Given the relatively small sample size, we also asked if other adult household members experienced stalking, in order to increase the potential pool of interviewees and also obtained a few more interviews through referrals from the interviewees. Our previous experience showed that gender matching makes follow up interviews feasible in Hong Kong (Tang, 2006). Together with the prevalence assumptions of 10% for life-time prevalence and 5% for one-year prevalence, we aimed to conduct 30 qualitative in-depth interviews from 950, and later adjusted to 1,050, survey interviews. From the 1,050 survey interviews, 49 respondents were referred to the team responsible for Phase 2. Upon the referrals (at different times of the research from 11th September 2019 to 27th February 2020), qualitative research team would reach out to the respondents within 3 working days by phone and/or WhatsApp. Unfortunately, only 28 referred respondents were willing to attend the in-depth interviews while other respondents (N=21) did not accept the invitation due to following reasons: 1) do not regard himself/herself as a victim (n=1); 2) do not want to be interviewed (n=6); 3) unreachable (n=14).

Procedures, settings and confidentiality

The interviews were around 20-90 minutes each, in a semi-structured format. We have developed an interview schedule based on the current literature themes, focusing on

perception, impact and victimisation experience of the interviewee. We also discussed how interviewees' experience relates to public perception, in order to try and help frame these issues in a way that may gain public support.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, some interviews (n=19) were conducted over the phone as the participants did not prefer face-to-face interviews. For interviews in which the participants were willing to be interviewed in person (n=9), they were conducted in the activities room of a governmental organization or NGOs and HKU offices with privacy. Participants of all interviews and case studies signed a consent form, which informed them the details of the research and ensured them of the confidentiality of the information they provided. Participants were informed that they could stop at any stage of the interview. All interviews were conducted in Cantonese and audio-recorded with the participants' consent, then transcribed into English by professional transcribers who signed a confidentiality consent form for further theme-based qualitative analysis using nVivo. All the consent forms and recordings were stored securely in the office of Centre for Criminology. To encourage participation, a \$300 coupon was given to each participant as incentives. However, only 17 participants accepted the incentives.

Themes of the interview schedule are provided below. We designed and piloted the interview schedule with at least one victim in each of the four categories. Preliminary results yielded from the telephone survey were also used to inform and adjust the interview schedule throughout the data collection period.

Themes covered in qualitative interview schedule:

- Demographics of respondent
- Recount of stalking experience, actions taken, feelings
- Covert and overt violence
- Relationship with perpetrator
- Perception and impact of the stalking experience
- Public perceptions of stalking
- Policy suggestions

Analysis

While the telephone survey shows the prevalence of stalking behavior and thus the need of anti-stalking policies in Hong Kong, the qualitative interviews aim to depict the experiences of being stalked, including how people dealt with the experience. Experiences and needs emerged as victims are vital in drafting relevant policies. The interviews therefore serve to crosscheck with and validate data found from telephone surveys and provide more in-depth examination of stalking experiences. Relationship between the victim and perpetrator in affecting the perception of stalking experience is also explored, as to explore the need of drafting separate policies for the four forms of stalking as mentioned.

In the light of the current categorization of stalking perpetrators (stalking by debtor, intimate partner, cohabitor, no prior relationship), the qualitative analysis examined how well these categories fit into the stalking situation in Hong Kong. Similarities and differences between the current categories and experiences of victims in Hong Kong were explored using content analysis and based on grounded theory, yielding new categorization of stalking that better describes stalking in Hong Kong. As stalking is related to sexual harassment in domestic and workplaces, criminal intimidation arising from debt collection, and intimate partner violence,

we distinguish between different forms of covert and overt violence, which entail different policy implications.

Twenty-eight in-depth interviews were conducted with eleven female respondents (n=11) and seventeen male respondents (n=17) from 2 December 2019 to 6 April 2020. Forty-nine stalking incidents in total were shared by the respondents. Table 1 below lists the demographics of the in-depth interview respondents.

Table 1 - Demographics of Interviewees (n=28)

Case number	Age (when interviewed)	Age (when victimised)	Gender	Nature of stalking incident	Relationship
#01	19	17	M	Friend requests on social media	Stranger
		19		Friend requests on social media	Acquaintance
#02	22	15	F	Physical stalking, sexual harassment in workplace	Acquaintance
		17		Sexual harassment in workplace	Acquaintance
		19		Calls, texts, physical and psychological abuse	Intimate partner
#03	47	47	F	Physical stalking	Acquaintance
		47		Physical stalking	Stranger
#04	27	12	F	Physical stalking, sexual harassment	Acquaintance
		26		Physical stalking	Stranger
		27		Physical stalking	Stranger
#05	19	12	F	Silent calls	Stranger
		15		Messages on social media	Acquaintance
		17		Physical stalking	Stranger
#06	55	19	M	Silent and obscene calls	Acquaintance
#07	71	65	M	Debt collection letters	Debt collector
#08	63	Around 30	F	Silent calls	Intimate partner
#09	38	24	F	Texts, calls, letters, physical and sexual	Intimate partner

				abuse	
#10	76	54	M	Nuisance calls	Stranger
#11	50	32	M	Debt collection letters	Debt collector
		40		Debt collection letters	Debt collector
		48		Debt collection letters, phone calls	Debt collector
#12	59	58	M	Messages on social media	Stranger
		59		Extortion emails	Stranger
#13	50	45	M	Silent calls	Acquaintance
#14	36	7	M	Obscene calls	Stranger
#15	45	15	M	Physical stalking	Stranger
		18		Sexual harassment in workplace	Acquaintance
		45		Sexual harassment	Stranger
#16	29	29	M	Dox	Stranger
#17	54	44	M	Silent calls	Stranger
#18	64	60s	M	Debt collection letters, phone calls	Debt collector
		60s		Nuisance calls	Stranger
#19	21	21	M	Silent calls	Stranger
#20	80	77	M	Debt collection letters	Debt collector
		80		Nuisance calls	Stranger
#21	61	59	M	Debt collection phone calls	Debt collector
#22	32	17	F	Debt collection notice, phone calls to home and workplace, waiting at workplace	Debt collector
		17		Physical stalking	Relatives

		18		Letters, physical stalking	Acquaintance
		18		Texts	Acquaintance
		31		Texts	Acquaintance
#23	18	18	M	Nuisance calls	Stranger
#24	53	34	F	Debt collection phone calls, physical stalking	Debt collector
#25	41	41	M	Nuisance calls	Stranger
		41		Obscene social media group invitations	Stranger
		41		Physical stalking	Stranger
#26	45	25	F	Nuisance calls	Stranger
#27	29	25	F	Calls, texts, physical and sexual abuse	Intimate partner
#28	30	17	F	Debt collection messages, phone calls	Debt collector

Data handling and ethics

The data involving victimisation experience is highly sensitive and personal. All data collected in the interviews was stored in a password-protected computer in our centre. Interview audios were transcribed by our research support team, who are also required to sign a research consent form in protecting the information involved. Given the sensitive nature of the project, several measures have been adopted in protecting participants in this research. All participants were informed on the objectives, procedures and background of the study, and required to complete a consent form prior to their participation. They were also informed that their participation is voluntary and may elect to stop at any time. In the event of the possible risk of triggering participants' negative emotions due to the sensitivity of the issue, we had a system for the research team and the participant to contact appropriate counselling support. Participants' identities have been concealed and pseudonyms used. Audio-recording has been erased upon request. All personal data will be disposed of after three years. The anonymised telephone survey data will be deposited with PICO for sharing in future.

Research Results/Findings

Phase 1: Telephone survey

The proposed sample size for this preliminary investigation had been reduced in the revised proposal to 950 gender-matched computer aided mobile phone interviews (475 for each gender), given the constraint of the greatly reduced budget approved by PICO. Unfortunately, although the prevalence assumptions of 10% for life-time prevalence and 5% for one-year prevalence, were reasonable, this did not yield sufficient individuals, with experience of stalking, who were willing to participate in the phase 2, i.e. the qualitative interviews (the reduced trust and willingness to participate in the general public because of the anti-government protests and COVID-19 are the likely sources of this problem). We increased the sample size to 1,050 interviews by squeezing the budget for other items. The survey was done in Cantonese, English or Putonghua at the choice of the respondents, covering more than 98% of Hong Kong residents (Census and Statistics, 2016).

The fieldwork was conducted between 2nd September 2019 and 4th March 2020. Nine interviewers participated in the survey in the form of telephone interviews using the CATI system, calling from 4:00pm to 10:30pm. A sample of 24,900 telephone numbers was drawn to contact our respondents. These numbers are grouped by different kinds of contact status as follows in Table 2a:

Table 2a Response status for the telephone survey

Type	Final status of contacts	Number of case
1	Success	1,050
2	Partial	34
3	Refusal	209
4	Business number	908
5	Language problem	3
6	Not Available	4,898
7	Ineligible respondents (e.g. excess of quota)	75
8	No Answer	10,547
9	Physical or mentally problems	2
10	Fax	719
11	Invalid	6,455
	Total	24,900

This means that the overall contact rate (Types 1-6/Total) was 28.5% and the overall response rate (Type1/Types 1-3) was 81%.

The sample was weighted using HKSARG data on age and gender for end 2019, to maximize representativeness (see Table 2b).

Table 2b Population, Unweighted and Weighted sample size by Age and Gender

Age group	End 2019 Population			Unweighted Sample			Weighted Sample		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
18-20	93,600	86,400	180,000	11	15	26	15	14	29
21-30	434,100	491,700	925,800	44	43	87	70	80	150

31-40	465,900	712,000	1,177,900	50	62	112	75	115	191
41-50	468,300	675,500	1,143,800	77	114	191	76	109	185
51-60	557,300	654,500	1,211,800	111	125	236	90	106	196
61+	859,500	956,900	1,816,400	208	186	394	139	155	294
Refuse				1	3	4	1	3	4
Total	2,878,700	3,577,000	6,455,700	502	548	1,050	467	583	1,050

The themes covered in the telephone survey (see Appendix A for the full questionnaire) were:

List of stalking behaviours covered:

Q1a: Sending multiple unwanted letters, text message, or cards that were either obscene or threatening and caused fear, alarm or distress

Q2a: Sending multiple unwanted gifts that was either obscene or threatening and caused fear, alarm or distress

Q3a: Making multiple obscene, threatening, nuisance or silent phone calls which caused you fear, alarm or distress

Q4a: Waiting or loitering outside home or workplace on more than one occasion in a manner which caused you fear, alarm or distress

Q5a: Following around and watched on more than one occasion in a manner which caused you fear, alarm or distress

Q6a: Sending multiple unwanted email or social network message that was obscene or threatening which caused you fear, alarm or distress?

Q7a: Putting personal, obscene or threatening information on the internet on more than one occasion and which caused you fear, alarm or distress

For each behaviour, we also asked:

Qxb: What is your relationship with that person?

Qxc: When was it?

Qxd: How frequent was the behaviour?

Qxe: How did you feel when it happened (multiple response)?

Qxf: Where were the main places of contact between you and the stalker (multiple response)?

Qxg: How long did the stalking last?

Qxh: How many times did it happen?

Qxi: Was any actual harm (physical or psychological) caused to you rather than just a threat?

Qxj: Was that harm physical?

Qxk: Why do you think the perpetrator will stalk you (multiple response)?

Qxll: Did you seek help or take any actions?

Qxm: What kind of help did you seek or action did you take (multiple response)?

Qxn: Did you report the stalking to authorities?

Qxo: To whom did you report (multiple response)?

Qxp: Did the stalking stop after your reporting?

Demographics of respondents:

- Gender
- Age Group
- Ethnicity
- Educational attainment
- Marital Status
- Household Income
- Household size
- Housing type

We piloted the survey on a sample of 10 across age and gender, to check for problems in the wording.

Prevalence results

Prevalence ever (see Table 3a) and one year (see Table 3b) were calculated for Gender (Male and Female) by Age Group (18-30, 31-40, 41-50, 50+) combinations for each of the stalking behaviours and for stalking behaviour overall.

Table 3a Prevalence		Ever			
Gender	Age Group	18-30	31-40	41-50	50+
Male	Overall	23.5%	32.0%	26.0%	13.7%
	Unwanted letters	1.9%	2.0%	7.8%	1.8%
	Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
	Unwanted phone calls	12.6%	16.0%	16.9%	8.8%
	Loitering	0.0%	6.0%	0.0%	0.4%
	Followed	1.9%	2.0%	2.6%	0.4%
	Unwanted emails	7.0%	12.0%	5.2%	3.4%
Female	Overall	36.2%	41.3%	27.2%	16.8%
	Unwanted letters	11.4%	12.7%	8.8%	1.9%
	Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Unwanted phone calls	14.3%	22.2%	14.9%	12.2%
	Loitering	7.6%	11.1%	3.5%	1.9%
	Followed	6.7%	6.4%	4.4%	1.3%
	Unwanted emails	12.4%	4.8%	4.4%	2.3%
	Doxxing	3.8%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%

As can be seen from Table 3a, overall prevalence ever in males is highest in the 31-40 age group (32%) and lowest in the 50+ age group (13.7%). For all male age groups, unwanted phone calls that caused fear, alarm or distress was the most prevalent ever form of stalking. For females, there is a similar pattern that overall prevalence ever is highest in the 31-40 age groups (41.3%) and lowest in the 50+ age group (16.8%) and unwanted phone calls that caused fear, alarm or distress was the most prevalent ever form of stalking. The key difference between males and females was that unwanted letters and loitering were a common problem for females, while unwanted emails was a common problem for males and females under 30. Note that prevalence ever is naturally biased towards higher levels in older people, although recall bias limits this bias to some extent.

Table 3b Prevalence		1 Year			
Gender	Age Group	18-30	31-40	41-50	50+
Male	Overall	12.6%	8.0%	14.3%	7.5%
	Unwanted letters	0.0%	2.0%	3.9%	0.9%
	Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Unwanted phone calls	3.5%	2.0%	9.1%	5.2%
	Loitering	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Followed	0.0%	2.0%	1.3%	0.0%
	Unwanted emails	5.4%	6.0%	3.9%	1.4%
Female	Overall	16.2%	14.3%	8.8%	6.1%
	Unwanted letters	0.0%	4.8%	3.5%	0.3%
	Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Unwanted phone calls	6.7%	6.4%	4.4%	4.5%
	Loitering	3.8%	1.6%	0.9%	0.0%
	Followed	1.9%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%
	Unwanted emails	5.7%	1.6%	1.8%	1.3%
	Doxxing	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

As can be seen from Table 3b, overall prevalence over the last year in males is highest in the 41-50 age group (14.3%) and lowest in the 50+ age group (7.5%). For younger male age groups, unwanted emails that caused fear, alarm or distress was the most prevalent form of stalking (5.4-6.0%), while for older males unwanted phone calls that caused fear, alarm or distress was the most prevalent form of stalking (5.2-9.1%). For females, overall prevalence over the last year is highest in the 18-20 age group (16.2%) and lowest in the 50+ age group (6.1%) and unwanted phone calls that caused fear, alarm or distress was the most prevalent form of stalking in all age groups. The key difference between males and females was that loitering was a common problem for females under 30 only.

Table 4 Relationship	Ex-partner	Friend/Colleague	Acquaintance	Stranger	Debt collector	Other
Overall	2.5%	3.9%	1.4%	89.1%	0.4%	2.8%
Unwanted letters	4.4%	4.4%	0.0%	88.9%	0.0%	2.2%
Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%	97.1%	0.7%	0.7%
Loitering	8.0%	20.0%	4.0%	56.0%	0.0%	12.0%
Followed	4.5%	0.0%	9.1%	77.3%	0.0%	9.1%
Unwanted emails	2.2%	2.2%	0.0%	93.5%	0.0%	2.2%
Doxxing	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 4 shows that, with the exception of unwanted gifts (which was only reported once and involved acquaintances), strangers were the dominant relationship with the stalker, although friend/colleague was also important for loitering and doxxing.

Table 5 Timing	This year	1 year ago	2 years ago	3 years ago	4 years ago	5+ years ago
Overall	31.7%	13.7%	13.0%	8.8%	1.8%	26.8%
Unwanted letters	0.0%	33.3%	15.6%	13.3%	2.2%	15.6%
Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls	40.1%	9.5%	12.4%	8.8%	2.9%	24.1%
Loitering	20.0%	4.0%	8.0%	12.0%	0.0%	56.0%
Followed	18.2%	0.0%	9.1%	4.5%	0.0%	68.2%
Unwanted emails	50.0%	19.6%	17.4%	4.3%	0.0%	8.7%
Doxxing	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	37.5%

Table 5 shows that for loitering and followed, 5 or more years ago was the most common timing, while for unwanted phone calls, emails and doxxing, the current year dominates. This suggests some change due to technology facilitating phone and internet-based stalking.

Table 6 Frequency	less than monthly	1-5/m	6-10/m	11-15/m	16-20/m	21+/m	
Overall		10.9%	67.6%	6.3%	2.5%	1.8%	9.9%
Unwanted letters		11.1%	64.4%	6.7%	2.2%	2.2%	13.3%
Unwanted gifts		0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls		11.7%	68.6%	6.6%	2.2%	1.5%	9.5%
Loitering		12.0%	68.0%	4.0%	4.0%	0.0%	12.0%
Followed		4.5%	77.3%	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	0.0%
Unwanted emails		13.0%	56.5%	10.9%	4.3%	2.2%	13.0%
Doxxing		0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 6 shows that the most common frequency for all stalking behaviours was 1-5 per month, although overall, about one in 10 were very intensive (more than 20 times per month), especially unwanted letters, emails, phone calls and loitering.

Table 7 Period	<1m	1-6m	7-12m	1-2y	2-3y	3+y
Overall	50.0%	27.5%	3.2%	10.6%	1.4%	4.2%
Unwanted letters	55.6%	26.7%	0.0%	13.3%	2.2%	2.2%
Unwanted gifts	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls	43.8%	29.2%	5.8%	8.8%	2.2%	5.1%
Loitering	60.0%	24.0%	0.0%	12.0%	0.0%	4.0%
Followed	59.1%	31.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%
Unwanted emails	50.0%	21.7%	2.2%	19.6%	0.0%	4.3%
Doxxing	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 7 shows that most stalking incidents last for 6 months or less, but there are over 4% overall which last more than 3 years.

Table 8 Times	1-5 times	6-10 times	11-15 times	16+ times
Overall	63.7%	12.7%	3.3%	15.1%
Unwanted letters	71.1%	13.3%	2.2%	8.9%
Unwanted gifts	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls	58.4%	11.7%	4.4%	16.8%
Loitering	64.0%	28.0%	5.0%	4.0%
Followed	72.7%	9.1%	0.0%	18.2%
Unwanted emails	60.9%	10.9%	2.2%	23.9%
Doxxing	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 8 shows that while the majority of incidents involved at most 5 times, for unwanted phone calls, emails and being followed, these incidents involved more than 15 events about 20% of the time.

Table 9 Harm	Any harm	Was the harm physical?
Overall	20.1%	14.0%
Unwanted letters	20.0%	11.1%
Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls	16.1%	9.1%
Loitering	28.0%	42.9%
Followed	40.9%	22.2%
Unwanted emails	15.2%	14.3%
Doxxing	37.5%	0.0%

Table 9 shows that being followed, doxxing and loitering were the most likely types of incident to lead to harm, while loitering was the type where the form of harm was most likely to be physical.

Table 10 Feelings	Annoyed	Anxious	Frightened	Helpless	Depressed	Sick	Others
Overall	20.4%	22.2%	32.4%	5.3%	1.8%	13.7%	26.8%
Unwanted letters	22.2%	17.8%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%	22.2%	37.8%
Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls	24.8%	21.2%	24.8%	5.1%	0.7%	10.9%	31.4%
Loitering	8.0%	16.0%	76.0%	8.0%	4.0%	8.0%	8.0%
Followed	13.6%	36.4%	68.2%	4.5%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Unwanted emails	17.4%	19.6%	26.1%	6.5%	0.0%	21.7%	30.4%
Doxxing	12.5%	62.5%	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%

Table 10 shows that for most types of stalking incidents, frightened, anxious or annoyed are the common feelings in response.

Table 11 Places	Online	Home	Work/School	Public	Others
Overall	32.7%	25.0%	11.3%	14.1%	22.5%
Unwanted letters	64.4%	17.8%	6.7%	8.9%	13.3%
Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls	6.6%	41.6%	9.5%	4.4%	41.6%
Loitering	8.0%	8.0%	44.0%	48.0%	4.0%
Followed	0.0%	13.6%	18.2%	68.2%	0.0%
Unwanted emails	97.8%	2.2%	2.2%	4.3%	0.0%
Doxxing	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 11 shows that the places link in the obvious way to the type of stalking, with emails and doxxing online, loitering and followed in public places, unwanted phone calls at home.

Table 12 Reason Why	Retaliation	Control	Unstable	Attracted	Keep	Attention	Blackmail	Thought I liked	Others
Overall	4.6%	1.8%	12.3%	3.9%	1.4%	2.8%	7.4%	0.4%	41.2%
Unwanted letters	4.4%	2.2%	4.4%	2.2%	2.2%	6.7%	13.3%	0.0%	31.1%
Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls	1.5%	0.7%	16.1%	0.0%	0.7%	2.2%	4.4%	0.0%	50.4%
Loitering	20.0%	4.0%	16.0%	24.0%	4.0%	8.0%	0.0%	0.0%	28.0%
Followed	4.5%	4.5%	22.7%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	40.9%
Unwanted emails	2.2%	2.2%	4.3%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	15.2%	0.0%	37.0%
Doxxing	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%	12.5%

Table 12 shows that those reasons why the respondents thought they had been stalked were very inconsistent, with unstable the most common reason overall but with only 12.3% of responses.

Table 13 Reported/Stopped	Reported	Security	Boss	Police	Others	Stopped
Overall	9.9%	32.1%	25.0%	32.1%	17.9%	57.1%
Unwanted letters	8.9%	25.0%	25.0%	50.1%	25.0%	25.0%
Unwanted gifts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Unwanted phone calls	6.6%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	11.1%	22.2%
Loitering	36.0%	33.3%	33.3%	11.1%	22.2%	77.8%
Followed	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Unwanted emails	6.5%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	100.0%
Doxxing	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 13 shows that most incidents were not reported to the authorities, with the highest rate of 36% for loitering, while of those incidents reported, all the followed and unwanted emails stopped, while the majority of loitering incidents stopped.

In addition to the prevalence calculations mentioned above, logistic regression models were examined to examine how prevalence depends on victim characteristics (the sample size is sufficient to detect an odds ratio of 1.5 at a power of 90%). However, none of the variables

were statistically significant as predictors of prevalence at 5% statistical significance, after controlling for gender and age group and correcting for multiple testing.

Phase 2: Qualitative Interview

One of the major objectives of the research is to identify the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. We also proposed to conduct the qualitative interviews with reference to the current categorization of stalking perpetrators (i.e. stalking by debtor, intimate partner, co-habitor, no prior relationship). Based on our in-depth interviews with the victims of stalking, we have identified four main types of stalking - stalking by debtor, intimate partner, acquaintance and stranger. In each of these categories, we describe and discuss the basic demographics of the victims, their stalking experience (duration and frequency; nature of stalking; relationship with the stalker) and responses (reaction/impacts and how they responded to the stalking). We then explore how the victims perceived stalking before and after their stalking experience. Their suggestions on anti-stalking policies, protection and support for victims of stalking will also be covered.

Stalking experience and responses

1) Stalking by debt collectors

Eight out of (male, n=5; female, n=3) our twenty-eight respondents, had been a victim of stalking related to debt collection. Respondents were aged between 17 and 77 at the time of their first stalking experience. It should be noted that none of the victims of this type of stalking is a debtor themselves. Only one of the respondents (#21) had a direct link to the debt collection. He was asked by the debt collector to pay the annual fee of a hotel club. However, he only remembered he went to that hotel but not if he had joined the club. Other respondents, however, did not have a direct connection to an alleged debt, and were, in many instances, a third party.

Table 14 - Victims' relationships, duration, frequency and nature of stalking incidents by debt collectors

Case number	Relationship with debtor(s)	Duration and frequency	Nature of stalking incident
#07	Stranger using his address	Around 6 months; 1 letter every 1.5 month	Debt collection letters
#11	Domestic worker	3 months; 1 letter and call per month	Debt collection letters
#18	Domestic worker	1-2 months; 3 domestic workers	Debt collection letters, phone calls, bell ringing
#20	Previous tenant	2-3 years; a few letters over the whole period	Debt collection letters
#21	Himself	Around 4-5 days; 1-2 calls per day	Debt collection phone calls
#22	Mother's elder brother	15 years till now; from daily to occasional in later years	Debt collection notice, phone calls to home and workplace, waiting at workplace

#24	Previous landline number's user	Around 10 years till now; several times in a month to 1 call per month over time	Debt collection phone calls, bell ringing
#28	Father	Around 1 year; daily phone calls and other frequent stalking behavior	SMS & phone calls, debt collection notices

Nature of stalking incidents

As shown in Table 14, the duration and frequency of the stalking behavior varied depending on the relationship between the victim and the debtors. According to victims, the closer the relationship, the longer and the more frequent the stalking behavior occurred. Debt collectors were able to contact the victims as the latter's personal information is exposed either because they were made the guarantor without consent or their information was provided as employment proof by someone they know. In some instances, some victims' information was used by someone they did not know personally, for the purpose of obtaining a loan.

The stalking involved a range of actions from written, verbal, to face-to-face interactions, and typically entailed an escalation in threats. For written debt collection behaviors, this could be in the form of a letter or notice. For instance, #20 received letters, asking him to pay the debt of the previous tenant who used his address to borrow money. Eventually, they threatened to post debt collection warning notices if payment was not forthcoming. #11 and #18 first received debt collection letters addressed to their domestic helper, and subsequently received letters addressed to themselves with demands for them to clear their helpers' debts. The escalation peaked when they received threatening and verbally abusive phone calls (both #11 and #18), followed by the debt collector ringing the building doorbell to disturb them (#18). In a similar fashion, #24 received phone calls made to her home number to collect debts from the previous landline number's user. The debt collection phone calls later escalated to debt collectors ringing her doorbell to collect debts.

Victims with a closer relationship to the debtors experienced more severe debt collection threats. For example, #28, whose father had an outstanding loan, suffered from SMS and phone call disturbances in the middle of the night. The debtors even posted debt collection notices outside the home she shared with her younger sister. #22's mother was made the guarantor of her elder brother without consent. The debt collectors began with posting debt collection notices with her personal data outside their home, and then proceeded with making phone calls to their home and her mother's workplace. At its peak, the debt collectors waited outside her mother's workplace.

Reaction/impacts

The emotional reaction and the severity of the impacts faced by these stalking victims varied also depending on their relationship with the debtors. For those who experienced debt collection disturbances due to strangers, they usually felt puzzled, angry, annoyed and aggrieved.

“It was really annoying. Because they kept mailing me - it's scary because the address is correct. It makes you tense... They already have my address - I'm just scared they'll cause trouble.” [#07, M, aged 71¹]

¹ The age of respondent when interviewed is indicated behind the case number after each quote.

“Yes, but I’m aggrieved. Usually you can freeze the phone number for three months. I’ve already endured for one year, two years, but this behaviour is probably a long-term one... over ten years.” [#24, F, aged 53]

Victims whose domestic workers had outstanding debts, reported feeling fearful initially, and gradually this turned into annoyance and anger.

“I was afraid that the debt collectors would come and cause trouble. At the time... we lived in... it was okay, security-wise, but it was still scary because you don’t know what dirty plays they’d pull.” [#11, M, aged 50]

“Of course I was mad. Can she be that stupid? I warned her so many times about it. But she just keeps taking out the loans. It’s a vicious cycle.” [#11, M, aged 50]

“[His wife] was angry when it happened for the first time, less angry the second time, and got used to it the third time.” [#18, M, aged 64]

Victims, who had a close relationship with the debtors (e.g., family members as debtors), generally suffered more emotional trauma with lasting impact from the stalking experience. The stalking experience affected their daily activities and had enduring effects on the level of trust in other relationships.

“We were worried about that because we had never consented to being the guarantor... I knew what was happening. My worry did not directly originate from the creditors. Instead, I felt anxious because they made my mother panic.” [#22, F, aged 32]

“Every day... there were lots of things that made me feel distressed. The first thing was that I didn’t know how much trouble my father was in. I didn’t know who they were (i.e., the debt collectors). I worried a lot. They knew my phone number and called me by name.” [#28, F, aged 30]

“I categorize people into several levels. The level of trust or how much I can tell this person... and I don’t know if it’s because of the things happened in the past, I won’t tell all my things to one person only, but tell different people different parts of the story.” [#28, F, aged 30]

With the experience of their personal information being misused, some of the victims (n=3) became more aware and sensitive to the protection of personal data.

“And ask for my information, then I won’t. Actually when you call for an interview, I worried that you’d ask for my information or something else. I think I won’t... I won’t leave my information.” [#21, M, aged 61]

“I’m not as anxious as my mother regarding the privacy issue, but I’ll be more careful of the personal information disclosed to the third party. For example, I’ll make sure I won’t give them my ID number.” [#22, F, aged 32]

Response

All of the victims (n=8) resorted to different or even multiple means to settle the debt collection nuisances. Five of our respondents (#18, #20, #21, #22, #28) chose to report to the police. They turned to the police for different reasons:

“I just had to report to the police. If they came again, I would ask the security guard to find the police.” [#18, M, aged 64]

“At first we did not do anything but later when the issue got more serious, we called the police. It got so serious that the creditors even went to my mother’s workplace and disturbed her.” [#22, F, aged 32]

Three respondents (#07, #20, and #24) sought assistance from relevant formal organisations and departments as they believed these people would provide immediate help, stop the current stalking nuisances or even prevent future stalking disturbances in the future.

“I went to the Housing Department – at first, we told them that the recipient didn’t live there... I told security that if these kinds of people come for me – you have to track them down and escort them.” [#07, M, aged 71]

“Why... why after I had told you the truth and after that I had called the telecommunication company to complain, they said they couldn’t help as the number was frozen... They just emphasized that the number they offered to customers must be the number that had been frozen by three months or more. It was what they told me at that time.” [#24, F, aged 53]

Some of them sought help from informal networks and/or found other solutions which they found efficient and effective.

“He asked to install a pinhole camera... The footage could connect to my TV - so I could see everything outside... For instance - if you put it right there, by the latch on the door.” [#07, M, aged 71]

“And...we wanted to resolve the issue, but...she keeps taking out loans, and she’s late on repayment, and they keep calling. So, we start getting aggravated. The debt collectors are actually scared of us. Around the 3rd or 4th call. I told them I’d call the police if they kept harassing us. They dared us to, so I told them about my connections with police, with business crime investigators, and that I could easily locate their number and information.” [#11, M, aged 50]

“From then onwards, we’ve changed the phone setting so that people have to enter a password in order to call us. For example, if you call by a landline phone, you will be asked to enter a password so that your call can be transferred to us.” [#22, F, aged 32]

2) Intimate partner

Four out of (male, n=0; female, n=4) our twenty-eight respondents, whose ages ranged from 19 to 30 at the time when they were first victimized, had been a victim of stalking nuisances from their intimate partners. Only one of the respondents (#08) could not clearly identify the perpetrator as she had been receiving silent phone calls while the other three respondents (#02, #09, and #27) could state who and how their intimate partner stalked them. For the sake

of consistent and accurate discussion, we will exclude #08, who could not provide much information and details about the stalking, in the following analysis.

Table 15 - Victims’ relationships, duration, frequency and nature of stalking incidents by intimate partners

Case number	Relationship	Duration	Nature of stalking incident
#02	Heterosexual (ex-)partner	6 months	Texts, calls, physical and psychological abuse
#08	Suspected to be former friend (admirer) or ex-husband	2 years; 1-2 calls per month	Silent phone calls
#09	Ex-boyfriend	3-4 years	SMS, calls, letters, physical stalking and assault
#27	Same sex (ex-)partner	Around 2 years	Texts, calls, physical and sexual abuse

Table 15 shows that the duration of the stalking lasted from six months to four years. However, the victims found it difficult to recall the exact frequency of the stalking incidents as they varied depending on specific contexts and how the relationship developed. According to these respondents, the worst experience entailed multiple stalking incidents within a day.

Nature of stalking incident

Both #02 and #27 met their partners on friendship apps and developed an intimate relationship along different pathways. One commonality among these two victims was that they were unable to identify traits from the perpetrator that would expose them to be potential victims. For example, #27 had started in-depth conversations via in-apps direct messages and then text messages with the perpetrator when they first met on dating apps. She found the perpetrator having similar interests and thoughts. As #27 described:

“I also thought that she’d probably be a normal person. Oh, I remember the posts were about some essays and fictions. We discussed about arts and literature at first and we decided to meet each other in person later.” [#27, F, aged 29]

Concerning the stalking behaviour, for #02 and #27, their partners started the stalking behaviour during the relationship and after they broke up. For #09, the stalking began after she broke up with her boyfriend. When stalking occurred during the relationship, #02, for example, she felt conflicted and confused, unable to assess whether some instances were expressions of devotion or as crossing the line into stalking.

Victim: He did pick me up after work.

Interviewer: Did you think it was a nice act, or something annoying?

Victim: Ehh...it’s a bit clingy, but...it’s not stalking, because...we were in a relationship, we hadn’t broken up yet... I can’t say that it’s stalking, because that’s not an appropriate description. [#02, F, aged 22]

#27 also had a similar problem with whether naming the nuisances as stalking as she attributed her way of handling the relationship before they officially became partners as one of the reasons of the nuisances.

“She was still trying to approach me. She had asked if I’d like to be her partner. I bore some responsibility as well as I didn’t state our relationship clearly.” [#27, F, aged 29]

Similar to debt collection stalking behaviours, stalking arising from intimate relationship also changed and/or escalated in forms and frequency. Very often, the escalation (or sometimes descent) of stalking was triggered by the status of the relationship as well as the responses from the victims. For instance, #09’s ex-boyfriend started the stalking with physically following her and sent her text messages hinting that he was doing this to her. He moved on to approaching her friends and family, whom he had grown close to prior to the break up. Later the stalking became threatening as he said would commit suicide. #09 did not give any response to her ex-boyfriend and he changed to stalking her with phone calls, sending her mail and phone messages. With no response received from #09, the perpetrator waited for her at her workplace, and gave her perverted items including condoms and even physically attacked her.

For stalking that occurred during the relationship, both #02 and #27 experienced an escalation in its severity when the relationship was deteriorating. For instance, every time #02 requested to break up as the boyfriend had an affair with someone else; he escalated the threats of self-harm including attempted suicide by trying to jumping from heights, hurting himself by cigarettes and running onto a road in order to make the victim stay with him. #02 explained how the perpetrator used this self-harm stalking tactic to keep the relationship:

“I guess he realized he could use these tactics to threaten me – so I would forgive him or stay with him. So he kept repeating these crazy acts. We’ll be fine, but then he’ll grow tired and impatient, and I really want to leave him” [#02, F, aged 22]

When #02 firmly requested a break-up and blocked him on phone, the perpetrator even physically entrapped her on the street for hours.

“It’s insufferable. So...I blocked him on everything, and we never contacted each other. It lasted a long time that night though – we were on the street arguing, and he kept clinging onto me, so I yelled for help. It lasted 3 hours until the early morning and no one came to help.” [#02, F, aged 22]

#27 also experienced escalation of stalking behaviours from her partner over their one year relationship. She described, “From the time when we were still in the relationship until we broke up in the end, he always behaved annoyingly and gradually he escalated his stalking to the next level.” The stalking behaviours ranged from phone calls and texts (at peak 100-300 calls per day), verbal violence, refusal to leave her home, checking on her phone, physical stalking, physical violence (e.g. scuffles) to sexual violence.

Both #02 and #27 continued to suffer from stalking behaviours from their ex-partners after breaking up, though the level of severity and frequency declined.

“That was the last instance – I never talked to him since. He tried to call me, or send me messages, but I never replied. I don’t have the time or patience for it.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“At that time I blocked all of her calls so she called my friends instead. They had told her that I wouldn’t answer her call again and asked her not to call me again... She didn’t call them as many times as she called me. She only called them once or twice.”
[#27, F, aged 29]

Reaction/impacts:

All the victims suffered lasting impact from traumatic stalking experience which all involved emotional abuse and physical/sexual violence. They felt angry and scared at the moment they were stalked. Complications in emotions such as mental exhaustion, distress, depression or even self-blaming are exclusive to #02 and #27 who experienced more prolonged and severe stalking disturbances.

“I just got really scared of him. I don’t know how to describe this – it’s not love, it’s just taking you hostage with his life. What am I supposed to do? I can’t breathe.”
[#02, F, aged 22]

“I was really scared, to be honest. Because I didn’t know what he’d do to me. He didn’t threaten me per se, but he claimed that he’ll commit suicide and stuff... So...and I’m the type of person to completely break off after a breakup. I don’t care whether or not he commits suicide – he can go ahead with it.” [#09, F, aged 38]

“Her appearance made me felt frustrated and worried about my personal safety. I wouldn’t know what she was holding in her hands... I thought of all these when I was with her. I was frightened and distressed.” [#27, F, aged 29]

In terms of behavioural reactions, all these victims became more sensitive and careful in developing new relationships. They also adopted a very cautious approach, mindful and aware of places where the stalker frequented, and more generally, when they are out in public places.

“I mean, at the start, obviously it affected things because I’m more sensitive to these issues. Especially because, in the beginning, we don’t know each other well, so...I feel as though...I’ll be more observant of him, and to track his reactions. I’ll probably be a lot more observant and alert when he’s emotional.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“Mong Kok, places like that. I was scared of frequenting those areas. He used to work in Tsim Sha Tsui, so...I’ll be more alert when going to those places.” [#09, F, aged 38]

“Um...now I learned to let go and I have become more mature. If you ask me if I will be fearful when she call me, I think I’ll be scared to some extent but not at a loss. I know how to confront her. I know how to protect myself and safeguard my surrounding people from danger.” [#27, F, aged 29]

Response

All of these victims avoided telling their family about their stalking experience when it first happened as they believed they could manage the situation and could end the relationship. However, #02 and #27 found it difficult to continue as the stalking continued and as it escalated.

“I couldn’t stand it – so at the very end...it was another instance where I requested a breakup. I called his mother, or...I’m not sure if it was the other way around, I don’t remember. The point is, I was on a phone call with his mother. I asked her to look after him – I don’t know if he told his mother about what was happening – but she asked me to be nice to him. What do you want me to do?” [#02, F, aged 22]

“I moved to my sister’s place. Even though he knows where she lives as well...I guess he didn’t know I moved out. I’m a really routine person – I’ll be walking this particular road after work, to take a bus home, and I’ll walk the same road home after that. He’ll know everything, all the patterns. He didn’t know that I moved to my sister’s place, so he couldn’t stalk me when I was going to work. After work though, he’ll follow me until I take the bus. I’ll detour, and take the bus from another station.” [#09, F, aged 38]

“I told her that I couldn’t stand it anymore so let’s calm down and stay apart for a while. She couldn’t stay calm after that, but it was hard to maintain our relationship in this way and it affected me greatly. Meanwhile I decided to change my job and I worried she’d go to my office suddenly and make a scene. I quit my job in order to evade her.” [#27, F, aged 29]

All of them did not report the stalking to the police due to different reasons:

“Right – I wanted a peaceful ending. So I didn’t report it to the police. I did think about it though.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“If I reported it to the police, my family members would know about it too. And I didn’t want them to know.” [#09, F, aged 38]

“She would be left with a criminal record. That’s why I didn’t want to take this last step as we had been lovers before.” [#27, F, aged 29]

Only #27 sought help from an NGO as she had been experiencing serious and prolonged emotional and psychological disturbances. She sought help from Rainlily for professional counselling services and participated in art therapy for self-healing.

3) Acquaintance

Nine out of (male, n=4; female, n=5) our twenty-eight respondents, whose ages ranged from 12 to 47, at the time of their first victimization, had been a victim of stalking by an acquaintance. The settings of prior relationships between perpetrators and victims mainly occur in social media, school and workplace. It should be noted that the age of victims when they were first victimized are mostly below 20, except for two of the respondents (#03, #13). The two respondents (#03, #13) experienced stalking incidents in the workplace by co-workers, while other respondents with stalking experience in the workplace are stalked by superiors.

Table 16 - Victims’ relationships, duration, frequency and nature of stalking incidents by acquaintances

Case number	Relationship	Duration and frequency	Nature of stalking incident
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#01	Secondary schoolmate	Less than 1 month; occasional messages	Friend request, direct messages on social media
#02	Colleague	Around 1-2 months	Physical stalking, sexual harassment
	Colleague	Around 2-3 months; 5-6 incidents	Sexual harassment
#03	Colleague	1 incident	Physical stalking
#04	Coach, supervisor	6 months; 2-3 times per week	Physical stalking, sexual harassment
#05	Current partner of her friend's ex-partner	1 incident	Direct messages on social media
#06	Teen met in the same study room at the public library	Around 4 months; 1 call every 2 days	Silent and obscene calls
#13	Suspected to be former colleague	More than 5 years; 1 call per night	Silent calls at office landline
#15	Boss	A few months; 2 times	Sexual harassment
#22	Schoolmate	Around 6 months; occasional	Letters, physical stalking
	Acquaintance met in interest class	Few weeks; a few times a day	Texts, calls
	Classmate	Around 1 year; occasional	Texts

Nature of stalking incidents

Due to the relationship between victims and acquaintances being associated with certain settings, the duration and frequency of the stalking behaviour varied depending on the victims' time spent and appearance specific to the contexts as shown in Table 16. It is observed that the longer time length where victims have prolonged appearance with the perpetrators, the more regular frequency of stalking the victim would experience. Such patterns could be seen specifically for victims experiencing stalking incidents in the workplace, as superiors and co-workers could develop a clear impression of the victims' work schedule and utilize their familiarity with the work environment to seek chances of victimisation.

The stalking behaviours could be written, verbal, physical stalking and sexual harassment, which certain types of behaviours are usually associated with specific setting as well as depending on the purpose of stalking. For acquaintances on social media, stalking is mainly in the form of direct messages and may also involve friend requests. In some cases (#01 and #05), respondents were stalked by people whom they have prior relationships but are not close enough to obtain their personal contact. Therefore, they are targeted and approached on social media. For instance, #01 received friend requests from a specific account on social media in which they shared mutual friends on the profile. He was further approached through continuous direct messages by "someone" who claimed to be his secondary schoolmate and would like to reconnect after graduating. Such situation lasted for a month even without his

reply. #05's was targeted as an audience for spreading rumours about her friend. Both respondents reflected that they first became aware of the stalking incident when they discovered that their close friends were experiencing similar situation by the same perpetrator.

For stalking behaviours by acquaintances in school, this mostly involved written and verbal stalking in the form of letters, text messages and phone calls, where one respondent (#22) had her experience escalated to physical stalking. For instance, #22 had repeated experiences in receiving letters, text messages and phone calls from admirers that show unwanted affections, care and concerns, where one of her experiences has escalated in following her around in the school campus. While a male victim (#06) experienced stalking behaviours in the form of silent and obscene calls as the perpetrator's purpose was to cause nuisance to personal conflict in a face-to-face context.

Stalking behaviours in the workplace could take various forms mostly depending on the power dynamics between the victim and perpetrator. Three victims (#02, #04, #15), out of five respondents who experienced stalking behaviours in the workplace, are of lower ranks than the perpetrators, experienced repeated physical stalking and sexual harassment during their employment period. Such behaviours ranged from inappropriate attention on victims' body parts to unwanted physical contacts. As #03 and #13 being colleagues of higher or same rank as the perpetrator respectively, their experience of stalking behaviours are of lower severity as compared to the three respondents above. For instance, #03 experienced a one-off incident where the perpetrator followed her after work, while #13 is a victim of regular silent calls at his workplace landline during his night shift. Despite the different power relationships in the workplace for four female victims, it is noted that female victims experienced certain degrees of physical stalking or even sexual harassment by male stalkers.

Reaction/impacts

Victims of this type of stalking had diverse emotional reactions. The severity of impact also varied due to the difference in the medium where victims experienced the incident and the severity of the stalking behaviours. For those who experienced stalking on social media, respondents expressed more control over the situation compared to those who experienced in school and workplace. Emotional reaction was usually not triggered.

“I was puzzled...since I had never seen this name before.” [#01, M, aged 19]

For victims experienced stalking in real life settings, they usually have more detrimental emotions. This can range from feeling unsettled and frustrated to repulsive and distressing.

“I felt violated and angry – but to the point where I didn't say anything, because I didn't know how people would think of me.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“When he was inviting me, he took me to these...sort of...mini storage units, and we were one-to-one. Nothing happened, but...it's creepy.” [#04, F, aged 27]

These victims would also express behavioural reactions and impacts on daily activities resulting from more severe emotions during the time period of the stalking incident.

“Even now, 7 years later, I won't go in to buy food. That colleague is still there.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“I was scared – but I controlled it. Internally, I was scared – so it definitely affected my work. I felt uneasy.” [#03, F, aged 47]

“I didn’t sleep well, because I was scared of the phone ringing and getting the same calls. Nuisance calls – so...my sleep quality was terrible. I woke up easily, and didn’t get much deep sleep. It was so bad that I didn’t have enough energy in the morning. So I couldn’t really sleep – and I was so tired, but my exams were coming up. It definitely affected me academically, being sleep-deprived.” [#06, M, aged 55]

Some victims experienced stalking behaviours in the form of sexual harassment, and this traumatic experience had lasting impact. It is noted that for victims experienced stalking in the workplace, colleagues’ or superiors’ responses to their stalking incident had a strong and long-term impact on the victim. For instance, female victims were usually advised to leave their job or transfer their job position after reporting their stalking experience. Such impact had a significant effect on their daily activities, causing anxiety to their surroundings and affecting their level of trust in developing other relationships, especially romantic relationships.

“I was just a small potato, a part-timer. I told [her manager] about that colleague, I repeated the story. She just said “no way, he wouldn’t do that to me. I don’t believe you, maybe you misunderstood.” I thought – of course, you’re a fat old woman, just because he won’t molest you, doesn’t mean he won’t do it to me. I was the victim – I know what happened, I’m not stirring trouble. I just want justice, or a reasonable explanation. In the end, she did nothing about it, nor did she do anything with that colleague.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“Especially if they’re guys – I’ll maintain my distance. Having a laugh, having a chat – that’s fine. But I definitely won’t be close with my superiors. I’ll be more distant to them than the normal employee” [#02, F, aged 22]

“Opportunities aren’t so affected either – but...in terms of interpersonal relationships...that’s definitely an issue. Because...when there’s a group of people – they might be able to chat and mesh, but I just can’t blend in.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“And I wouldn’t wear... you know some people would wear something sexy, something that could show their breasts? I dare not. I cover myself even when I wear tank top.” [#15, F, aged 45]

Those victims who were victimised at a younger age are more likely to develop lasting emotional trauma, with some victims stating that they still felt the sensations and emotions when sharing their experience.

“To this point...I still get goose-bumps. Yeah. I don’t always bring it up – but when I do, the entire situation forms in my head.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“I was too young to remember. I dared not to look at him as I was scared... I told [her sister] about my experience, she asked “Why didn’t you tell us?” I mean after that...I was scared. I was so scared that my whole body was trembling.” [#15, F, aged 45]

Response

The majority of the victims (n=6) did not seek assistance to manage the situation despite these respondents experiencing repeated stalking over a period of time. Only three respondents (#02, #06, and #22) sought assistance relevant to their immediate environment.

“So...after that incident, I told my boss immediately – I’m not sure how long I waited but I told the manager of the restaurant.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“It was quite scary – I didn’t know who it was. After a while...I think it was after my A-level exams, I reported it to the police.” [#06, M, aged 55]

“Yes, I was on my own and there weren’t many people at school after lesson time. I was panicked but luckily I got my mobile with me. I texted my teacher and ask her to save me.” [#22, F, aged 32]

All of the female victims (n=3) who experienced stalking experience in the form of sexual harassment in the workplace quit their jobs, as superiors failed to provide assistance to deal with their immediate situation.

“I resigned – and avoided him. That was that.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“I didn’t want our relationship to end with such hard feelings, so...I needed to handle the situation. I didn’t join his classes ever again, after that session.” [#04, F, aged 27]

For victims of stalking experience on social media, they would rely on the feedback mechanisms and existing functions provided by the platforms, such as blocking the account, as a response to the situation.

“Because...if I remove them from the notification wall, they won’t pop up again. But if I click into Facebook again, I can still see them. I know it won’t cause any problem, so I just delete them.” [#01, M, aged 19]

“I don’t know who they are...so I ask them who they are. If the messages are read without a reply, I block them.” [#05, F, aged 19]

Apart from the resolutions to the stalking incidents, the majority of the victims (n=8) shared their stalking experience with close trusted friends, and only one respondent (#06) chose to discuss it with his family.

“Maybe, even if you tell your parents...they might not see it as an issue...perhaps it’s me, in not taking initiation to tell my parents. I only told my current boyfriend, at the time. Because...when I was 20, I needed to retake the exams to renew the lifeguarding license.” [#04, F, aged 27]

“There was another friend who we were very close with...we also told her about that. She asked the accused if she had offended anyone. At that time, the accused had not set her account as private...so we taught her to set it as private.” [#05, F, aged 19]

“I discussed it with my family, because...I was in my teenage years, so I didn’t have the experience.” [#06, M, aged 55]

Victims of non-sexual harassment related stalking in the workplace, sought support from colleagues and shared their emotions. This acted as a support system for the victims to manage the situation with better resilience.

“Yeah – my boss was seated next to me – my boss is male, so he came to help and to understand the situation because that colleague was so heated. He told me to keep working, that everything was fine. He took care of the situation and that was that.”
[#03, F, aged 47]

“[He and his colleagues] joked about it, telling each other to watch out when you saw some white mist...we told each other not to be afraid.” [#13, M, aged 50]

4) No prior relationship

Sixteen out of (male, n=12; female, n=4) our twenty-eight respondents, whose ages ranged from 7 to 80 at the time when they were first victimized, had been a victim of stalking by people whom they have no prior relationship. It should be noted that stalking by strangers are not limited to any settings or any form of behaviour, but no multiple forms of stalking behaviours could be observed in each individual case. Despite this type of stalking involving a wider range of victims in terms of the age and gender, victims who experienced online stalking in the form of friend requests, messages and emails are all males.

Table 17 - Duration, frequency and nature of stalking incidents by strangers

Case number	Duration and frequency	Nature of stalking incident
#01	Around 1 year; 4-5 requests per week	Suspicious catfishing, friend requests on social media
#03	1 incident	Physical stalking and assault
#04	1 incident	Physical stalking
	1 incident	Physical stalking
#05	1 incident	Physical stalking
	2 times	Silent calls
#10	1 call per month	Nuisance calls
#12	2 days; 1 conversation	Friend request, direct messages on social media
	Around 6-9 months; 2-3 emails per week	Extortion emails
#14	Around 1 year; 1-2 times per month to 2 times per week	Obscene calls
#15	1 incident	Physical stalking

	1 incident	Sexual harassment
#16	Forum posts over 1 week	Dox
#17	Around 6 months; 1 call every few days	Silent calls
#18	Several times	Nuisance calls
#19	Around 3-4 months; 1 call per week	Silent calls
#20	6 months; 1-2 calls per day	Nuisance calls
#23	1 incident	Nuisance calls
#25	A few calls	Obscene calls
	1 month; 2-3 times	Obscene social media group invitations
	1 incident	Physical stalking
#26	1 month; 1-2 calls per week	Obscene calls

Nature of stalking incidents

As shown in Table 17, the duration and frequency of the stalking behaviour by strangers varied depending on the form of stalking behaviours. It is observed that all cases of physical stalking (n=7) are one-off incidents, while the majority of stalking behaviours in the form of texts and phone calls (n= 12) would span over a period of time and have an identifiable frequency. However, when comparing the time length of stalking incidents by the victim-perpetrator relationships, the majority of the stalking experience by strangers has shorter durations. For the two stalking incidents (#01, #14) by strangers who have a relatively longer duration for around a year, both respondents expressed their incidents as a series of repeated behaviours, but they are both unsure about whether the perpetrator is the same person throughout the incident.

“I think it’s corporate. Maybe...it is a dude behind all these profiles, or, maybe still a woman, but not as attractive as those photos. It is to catfish males to chat with them and take their money. I think it was like that.” [#01, M, aged 19]

“I dare not to say he was the same guy, but...I think a year? On and off... we kept receiving calls from time to time.” [#14, M, aged 36]

The stalking by strangers could be written (in the form of text messages and emails), phone calls and physical stalking. Unlike other types of stalking experience, each case of this type of stalking is limited to only one form of behaviour, which multiple or changes in stalking behaviours can be observed. For written form of stalking behaviours, all respondents (n=3) experienced the incidents online, which include friend requests, group chat invitations, direct messages and emails. Apart from online mediums of this form of stalking behaviour, these

cases convey a common purpose in scamming the victim which involves threats and obscene contents.

“At first, I didn’t know the function of delete and block... When I ignored her, she threatened me. She sent me some photos that were sanguinary, and told me that the triad members would look for me...something like that. She named some triad clans in Hong Kong.” [#12, M, aged 59]

“Somehow I received an email...that they knew the password of one of my bank accounts. After reading that... “or else, we will delete everything in your computer!” I deleted that email later...I wasn’t bothered. I just ignored it...I don’t know how much Bitcoin they were blackmailing me for.” [#12, M, aged 59]

“I was added into certain chat groups suddenly, with no reason. The chat groups spread some... I’m not sure if it involved... prostitution or some pornographic messages.” [#25, M, aged 41]

The most common form of stalking by strangers was phone calls, which involved both mobile phones and landlines. From the descriptions by the victims, there are three main types of stalking through phone calls, namely silent calls, nuisance or spam calls, and obscene calls. Majority of the respondents are unable to track if repeated phone calls are coming from a single source as calls are either made without showing the caller identification or their landlines did not possess such function. Only one respondent (#05) was certain that the phone calls were coming from the same number.

Due to the lack of interactions for silent calls, there appeared to be no particular intent that can be concluded from this form of stalking behaviours; while common purposes could be observed in cases of nuisance calls and obscene calls respectively. For incidents involving nuisance calls, respondents usually correlated the behaviours as spam calls that are similar to cold calling, where some victims expressed doubt about the legitimacy of the organisations claimed by the caller. Some common services promoted in these phone calls include beauty products, trip planning, providing loans and overseas real estate.

Victims received obscene calls share similar experiences where the content of stalking behaviours involved sexual intent. Unlike physical stalking by strangers that involved opposite sex perpetrators, two male victims experienced such stalking behaviours by same sex perpetrators.

The majority of the victims who experienced physical stalking by strangers are female. Common settings for this kind of stalking would be public transportations, old housing estates and buildings. The behaviours can range from following the victim, intense attention to physical contacts and indecent assault.

“He’s maybe aroused and sensitive to some particular thing, but I don’t know what it was about me that caused that. I eventually realized that he was stalking me because he followed me wherever I walked.” [#04, F, aged 27]

“When I was in Form 4, I went home from school at 12pm something one day. Someone followed me and pulled down my underwear.” [#15, M, aged 45]

Reactions/impacts

Reactions and the severity of impacts faced by victims experienced stalking by strangers varied depending on the form of behaviours and the nature of such behaviour. For those who experienced nuisances in the form of phone calls, annoyance is a common emotion expressed by the respondents, which such emotional reaction may triggered only when similar and repeated incidents happen again.

“It happened to everyone from time to time. It was very common.” [#17, M, aged 54]

“Sometimes when they were too often, I would wonder if I did anything offensive to someone without knowing, etc. I became paranoid.” [#19, M, aged 21]

Mixed impressions were also conveyed by victims stalked in the form of spam calls. For instance, #10 believed that phone calls are just legitimate cold calling by some businesses; while #18 suspected these are fraudulent calls. This causes diverse emotional reactions to the victims, as the former is not disturbed but the latter has developed a cynical outlook.

“They called to ask if I wanted some loans. I said no, because I was old. They hung up instantly. They didn’t try to defraud me of anything.” [#10, M, aged 76]

“We didn’t have this need, so we found it annoying. Those calls...were frauds. This society is no longer the same as the one in the past.” [#18, M, aged 64]

Despite most victims of stalking behaviours in the form of phone calls could not recollect possible situations that they may have leaked their contact to the perpetrators, one common reaction was heightened alertness when providing their personal information to others.

“I felt as though some strangers got my number, so I felt uneasy.” [#05, F, aged 19]

“Actually...Mmm...If they were classmates who I was close with, it was fine...it was for homework discussion. Mmm...maybe I am more careful on internet. For [friends made online], I would really be more careful. I didn’t give it out so easily. After all, you wouldn’t know who was behind the screen. So I rarely gave out my phone number to those.” [#14, M, aged 36]

Unlike online stalking behaviours by acquaintance, victims received online nuisances by strangers have expressed higher severity in terms of emotional reactions. However, the time length that the emotions will last may depend on the duration that the victim is exposed to such behaviours.

“It was disturbing and repulsive. Because seeing them using their bodies as a commodity... and like I said, I tried to check their profiles to see who they were...I had a rough idea of what they were trying to sell...I think it was related to my sexual orientation? Every time I saw them, I was slightly attracted, since I was just a human, a male. Those negative feeling were more directed to myself, because I didn’t think I should be...” [#01, M, aged 19]

“I was a bit scared. After thinking for a while... it wasn’t like WhatsApp that your phone number was public; but for WeChat, it wasn’t necessarily connected to phone number.” [#12, M, aged 59]

“Later when there were incoming calls without caller ID, I’d think of this incident again. It didn’t distress me, but it popped up in my mind for a second and I’d wonder if this incoming call is a prank again. Then I just simply pressed the ‘reject’ button. I just recalled that incident for a moment. Vigilant... I became more vigilant but if you ask me whether that call has distressed me, the answer is ‘no’ under normal circumstance.” [#25, M, aged 41]

For victims who experienced physical stalking, severe emotional reactions and lasting impacts are faced from the traumatic stalking experience. Emotions, such as fear, distress and disgust, are commonly conveyed by the victims.

“So it’s really...this society is just filled with fear and worry – it’s been a shadow over my back since then.” [#03, F, aged 47]

“I thought I was in trouble – so I went to find my family for help. At least I’d be safe; I thought I’d have a security net. But instead my family said I was being too imaginative.” [#04, F, aged 27]

“I was scared. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t say a word when I was home.” [#15, M, aged 45]

In terms of behavioural impacts, victims became more sensitive and cautious in similar environments.

“It really felt disgusting...because he follows you everywhere – to the point where it’s harassing. He invades the entirety of your personal space.” [#04, F, aged 27]

“Like...telling the adults. I should have better awareness.” [#05, F, aged 19]

“One-off. But I was so scared every time I went home... Whenever someone passed by, I was scared.” [#15, M, aged 45]

Response

All of the victims (n=16) did not seek assistance from any formal organisations in managing their stalking incidents. Only six respondents sought assistance accessible to their immediate environment.

“I went to find security. I think other people asked for security as well, because he sped off really quickly – down the escalator. He was yelling that he wanted to kill people the entire time, stuff like that, so I think people called for security, or maybe the security heard it too – so they tried to look for him.” [#03, F, aged 47]

“He followed me on the train; so I called my boyfriend to tell him I’d get off at Prince Edward.” [#04, F, aged 27]

“I had asked my classmates whether they had received similar calls. During that period, I had applied for the swimming lessons of the Urban Council with my classmates. And then they also received similar phone calls so we guessed our

information was leaked by the swimming centre... My classmate told her mother about this and her mother talked to him. Later he didn't call again." [#26, F, aged 45]

Some of the respondents resorted to their own solutions which they found more efficient and effective in resolving the situation, which is especially prominent in victims of online stalking.

"Not sure where the calls were from. He/she didn't pick up, and then they blocked the number. My friend posted on Instagram, so I know." [#05, F, aged 19]

"That was why I covered my camera...my camera on my laptop. That was why I covered my camera...my camera on my laptop." [#12, M, aged 59]

Apart from not seeking assistance to resolve the stalking incidents, the majority of the victims are not willing to share their stalking experience.

"I don't want to share this with my family. Positive things are worth sharing, but this? I don't want to share unhappy things." [#12, M, aged 59]

"I was so scared, but dared not to tell my family until I was older. Much later. But we no longer lived there. We moved away." [#15, M, aged 45]

Perception of Stalking

Only five of our respondents reported no change in their perception of stalking even after having been stalked. Among the five, one even stated that he did not think any behavior should be considered as stalking as he personally felt at peace with the stalking experience. The other four respondents did not report a change in the perception were all victims of stalking by strangers in which most of the stalking behaviours did not involve physical contact.

More than one third of our respondents (n=12) indicated a clear change of their perception of stalking after their own experience. Two of them mentioned that they did not think about it as stalking was not a common thing. Five of them thought stalking as it is a very remote thing to them and have never thought about himself or herself would be a victim.

"I was far removed from it; I never experienced loans or debt collection or anything like that... I thought it was all gang-related, what you see on TV or in movies." [#11, M, aged 50]

"I never thought it would happen to me. I've heard it happening - nuisance calls - to my classmates. I just thought it was nothing special, it's just a phone call." [#6, M, aged 55]

After being a victim of stalking, some of them changed their perception of stalking because they found it involved a wider range of behaviours than they thought.

"The first thing about stalking that came to my mind was sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in office... (After being a victim) like threatening... its also stalking.

Threatening... and... making you hear things you don't want to hear. I think those stalking.” [#12, M, aged 59]

“When I was small, I thought ‘stalking’ only refers to the behaviour of somebody following me. But now, I think the act of creditors chasing people for repaying debts is also regarded as stalking.” [#22, F, aged 32]

Some respondents also reported changes in perception of stalking regarding the impacts of stalking could be on the victims.

“But... when it happened to me, I realized that it could be very severe. It made me emotional, and drained me of my focus for work.” [#6, M, aged 55]

“When I heard about it (stalking) from someone, I was like, ‘oh, spam calls. Okay. But... it’s just like many other things; once you have personal experience, you think it’s important. (Interview: You understand how disturbing it can be after experiencing.) Right.” [#8, F, aged 63]

“(After being a victim), I understand that this action can cause distress to other people. I realize that it could be scary.” [#23, M, aged 18]

Policy implications and recommendations

Implications:

From the quantitative findings, it is undeniable that stalking is a common problem, especially for younger people, with overall one-year rates of 12.6% for males aged 18-30 and 16.2% for females aged 18-30. The vast majority of incidents did not have a connection with a partner, ex-partner or debt collector, indicating that focusing only on the enhancement of domestic violence and debt collection legislation cannot address the range and very real problems in Hong Kong. Unwanted phone calls and emails causing alarm or distress are the dominant modes for both males and females.

From the qualitative and quantitative findings, it is clear that debt collection, domestic violence, workplace harassment, nuisance calls, email, social media and physical stalking all continue to be stalking mechanisms and that it is essential that the general public, human resource professionals, NGOs and police all receive the education, training and resources needed in order to address these problems. It is also clear that legislation to address problems outside debt collection and domestic violence needs to be re-examined, while being aware that this legislation should not impinge on press freedom or freedom of expression.

Given all the above, the following policy recommendations have been developed to address these issues.

Policy recommendations:

Given the implications of this study's findings, we offer the following policy recommendations, and particularly highlight victims' experiences as they offered insights into what resources and support would be useful to address stalking. We discuss a range of policies and resources in three sectors, including government, NGOs, and workplace, that are relevant in dealing with stalking in general and for different categories.

Government

There are a number of ways in which the government can address the challenges and problems related to stalking, including preventive education, stakeholder training, and legislation.

A. Education

(1) One key area to develop is public education and awareness of stalking, in general, and of the different types. As our interviews with victims indicate, this would provide the public with the knowledge needed to prevent and protect themselves from such incidents, as well as convey deterrence messages. This educational effort could also include a designated social media platform with ongoing updates.

“Ehh...campaigning – advertising. If the public has awareness on these things – people will help each other out in the event of such things happening. And...the offender will be more cautious because the public is more aware of these things happening...Otherwise, it'll help as a barrier against these kinds of stalkers.” [#04, F, aged 27]

“Factual stuff, and regular case reports...of what’s happening on email and social media, etc. I think...The public will be more alerted if they know more about the facts; or, the RTHK can shoot some simulation videos...etc. I think it’s good for the public.” [#12, M, aged 59]

“I think they should educate the public about ‘stalking’, like there are different kinds of stalking behaviours and how to minimize the impacts of being stalked such as the password settings of the phone. For example you don’t know about this function even you have conducted so many interviews.” [#22, F, aged 32]

While preventative education is a key place to start, we also underscore the fact that victims, across all stalking categories, had little knowledge about how best to respond to the situation. Therefore, we also recommend the provision of education on victims’ rights, the steps they can take to address the immediacy of stalking, and available resources.

“I think they can educate the public how to tackle the problem when they encounter these events. I admit that I didn’t know how to handle the incident at that time. There weren’t any specific channels... there wasn’t any information teaching us how to handle. For telling the family, it also depends on the family relationship. For example, for secondary school students, they tend to tell their classmates. However, their classmates may not be able to give them advices... good advices. I think they can do some preventive measures such as education, telling them there are such cases happening in society and what they should do to protect themselves when they face this problem. And so the victims know how to handle the incident. Otherwise, they’ll only be scared and unable to do anything.” [#26, F, aged 45]

(2) This research has found that a large proportion of stalking entails persistent unwanted phone calls and social media messages. As such, we recommend that the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCPD) provide education on how people can reduce the risks from phone, and emails. We do note that this is relevant to not only that type of stalking, but to all forms of online stalking. As observed from the qualitative analysis, it is common amongst victims of different types of stalking that they regarded the leaking of their personal data would be one of the major factors causing the stalking incidents. The education on preventing leakage of personal data provided by PCPD could be more specifically directed to stalking behaviors.

(3) We also urge school curriculum’s to include an educational component on stalking; this could be integrated into different areas of the existing curriculum. For example, based on victims’ stalking experiences related domestic or partner relationships or workplace harassment, we believe that existing sex education curriculums in schools, include practical measures such as how to protect yourself on public transportation, Additionally, whole person education could include training students from a young age to speak up when experiencing stalking incidents (all types of stalking), utilizing learning scenarios and role play.

“The government can step in with education... They need to teach kids – from the ground up – regardless of gender. They need to instill a sense of bravery, so they know not to stay silent, or to be scared of how society views the victim. You have to speak out – and that’s that. If we can achieve that – I’m sure – well, not really, but I

feel as though it would be a lot better for victims. If something like this really happens...” [#02, F, aged 22]

“I remember when I was in primary school and high school – in total, we only had four classes on sex education, and they weren’t even 30 minutes long. I think that there’s a lack of education if this awareness or information is only given to people in university, or after they’ve been through it themselves.” [#04, F, aged 27]

“Therefore, it should be incorporated in the school education, teaching them the concepts of domestic violence, stalking, etc. Most of the time stalking is included in the domestic violence cases. However, according to the Chinese mindset, it’s normal to punish their children when their children are naughty. I can do this because I’m your husband. I can do this because I’m your wife. You have to teach them that there’re some actions or behaviours that can’t be justified by intimate relationship. You have to instill this concept since they’re small. It doesn’t mean that you have to confront your family. It means you have certain responsibilities as a member of the family, and there’s a bottom line for everyone. Suppose there’s something unfortunate happened, how can victims seek help, especially when the victims are the children. It is because the children have no choice.” [#27, F, aged 29]

B. Funding and training for stakeholders

(1) Alongside a multi-prong public education effort, funding for NGOs and other relevant social institutions should complement the multi-prong public education effort. NGOs and other supporting institutions need to provide services to potential and actual perpetrators and victims. From the viewpoint of victims, some stalkers may have mental health difficulties.

V: Those people have mental problems...if so, the government should do something. The government should invest more on psychiatry... Shouldn’t the government spend more on psychiatry or...mental hospitals. It’s not enough...and many tragedies may happen.

I: Understood. So your opinion is...not just helping victim like you, but also those who have mental problems and making random spam calls. The government have to deal with them as well.

V: Yes. I’ve heard from people that some people who have mental issues making calls like that...I think for those calls...they have mental problems. I think they have mental problems. Why would they have mental problems then? Because they don’t have good treatment. If they have good treatment, they wouldn’t do such things. Right?” [#08, F, aged 63]

(2) A consistent theme for victims across all types of stalking, but especially those experiencing nuisance calls and physical stalking is the lack of where to turn to (e.g., hotline) and support services. We recommend the review and establishment of a unit to oversee and coordinate and/or provide support services to victims of all types of stalking.

“First of all, I think the government should allocate more financial resources to these organizations. It is the appropriate usage of using the public funds. Second, I think

more promotion work should be done. As a part of the younger generation, I know how to search for the possible support and resources online but for some older women, they may not know how to find them. In fact many of the lesbians don't know about the services and they are the group of people that are prone to the confrontation against and emotional blackmail by their partners.” [#27, F, aged 29]

This could include education and support services for domestic workers who may face the debt collection process, and their guarantors.

“That organization [for domestic workers] can help them – but what they can do is limited as a single organization with limited workforce. On the other hand, there's maybe 300,000 domestic helpers in Hong Kong.” [#11, M, aged 50]

(3) When victims do seek help, they may try to contact those on the frontline. As with the more general public education campaign, we recommend training for social workers and police officers on the specifics of each type of stalking and the appropriate and available resources and responses.

“Ehh...I think...the police investigations are an option. If the police can provide some updates on their investigations that would help the victim, mentally – it'll alleviate their sense of helplessness. With my case – after my report...the police didn't do anything afterwards. I felt so helpless.” [#06, M, aged 55]

“Yes. As a worker in the social welfare industry, I also take many courses to enrich myself because there'll be more and more cases, with different nature that may be out of my expectation. Apart from domestic violence, debt collections, we may also encounter other problems that we didn't expect in the past.” [#27, F, aged 29]

“I suggest the government should provide more training to the frontline police officers for listening to the calls. Be a good listener. When somebody suffers from domestic violence, or somebody who has been hounding by the creditors, they may not be able to provide all the details under certain circumstances. If the frontline officers who can be aware or notice there's something abnormal while listening to the statement of the victim, they may be able to save that person's life when they take action at the right timing.” [#27, F, aged 29]

C. Legislation

There are a number of legislative areas to consider in addressing different types of stalking. While some observers might argue that stalking in the context of domestic violence and partner disputes can be addressed within existing legislation, our findings suggest that victims may not necessarily report to the authorities, in part, out of fear of further repercussions from the stalker or for other considerations (e.g., feel that existing laws do not help in their situation). As such, this is an area which requires further review and consideration.

(1) One area for legislative consideration should be directed toward strengthening the regulatory process of the debt collection industry.

“They can somehow call me at any time. The government needs to...do something. I don't know, maybe there's a lot of loopholes they exploit, changing company names

or something. They need to legislate and improve, but I'm not sure how." [#11, M, aged 50]

"The government can help through legislation to reduce the loan sharks and debt collection agencies. Everyone benefits; domestic helpers and employers." [#11, M, aged 50]

"I think laws should be enacted to regulate the activities of creditors chasing after their debtors because I've heard many times that people are harassed by the creditors' behaviours." [#22, F, aged 32]

(2) We urge the government to e-examine legislative solutions to address stalking outside debt collection and domestic violence, particularly the harassment of persistent unwanted communication.

"I think the law can at least prevent some assailants conducting nuisance calling. But...the law needs to prevent...they need to prevent loopholes. If someone calls – and their intentions are not to harass others, but there's no signal or sound – as though it's harassment; there's a loophole there." [#06, M, aged 55]

NGOs

For stalking related to partners, friends and debt collection, we recommend training for social workers (as noted above) as well as counselling services.

(1) As victims have little understanding of where they can turn to (and if educational campaigns provide information about support services), it follows that counselling services should be promoted and available to victims and stalkers. This would include support for crisis handling and ongoing support. As we have described in relation to victims of domestic and friendship stalking, the experiences can be very traumatic.

"I really feel as though I needed a social worker to talk to, at the time, to deal with my emotional distress. I think we should deal with it that way. In terms of social support...perhaps there could be a hotline, telling me what to do, and how to handle my emotions." [#04, F, aged 27]

"NGOs can potentially provide help to victims of nuisance calls. Maybe they can give emotional counselling. It's a really helpless form of harassment because you don't know who is calling. If there's a caller ID, that's good, but a lot of the time it's hidden." [#06, M, aged 55]

"But it's a very initiative-based, self-operated organization. Not everyone knows to contact them. Would it be possible for NGOs or government organizations to create some support groups to help those in need? Especially for those who need support but who also need to hire domestic helpers." [#11, M, aged 50]

"NGOs...like...anti-suicide hotlines, Samaritans Hong Kong...maybe they can set up some organizations and hotlines...or like Hok Yau Club...to provide consultation service. They can...make referral to other institutions to have more in-depth, face-to-

face interventions...to have consultation...mental health consultation.” [#12, M, aged 59]

(2) NGOs could also provide preventative education to help victims develop strategies of how to respond to specific forms of stalking behaviours.

“I think NGOs can provide counselling, or support them in combating the next situation; to keep silent with the calls, or two cut the call within 2 seconds, or fight back. Swear back at them. I think NGOs can help victims with that. So...especially when victims come from low income families...or people living alone, when they don't have friends and family – they need help the most.” [#06, M, aged 55]

Workplace

As shown in this research, the workplace can become a site for stalking and harassment. Employees may feel distressed in reporting incidents to their employers for a range of reasons (e.g., fear of reprisal from stalker, fear of being terminated or labelled as a troublemaker, lack of workplace procedures).

(1) We encourage the development of stalking (and/or harassment) incident reporting system with clear guidelines on definitions and procedures to dealing with reports. This would include reporting and complaints procedures in staff manual that also addresses the potential problems with power relationships.

“If the system is absent – especially with anonymous reports – it's honestly mandatory. How can you report someone while worrying about your job? You have to have this sort of system to protect the victim.” [#02, F, aged 22]

“That's how it should be – there needs to be employee regulations. There's stuff that you need to know, intellectual property, employee safety, clothing safety...” [#02, F, aged 22]

In summary, our research indicates that moving towards a multi-level and multi-pronged approach with the help of government, civil society and the workplace, is the next step, and should be centered around disentangling the types of stalking, and identifying and responding to gaps in education and services, and loopholes in legislation.

Details of the public dissemination held

Because of COVID-19 affecting both fieldwork and public events, no public dissemination event has been held yet. Once COVID-19 is no longer limiting public events, we plan to have a forum to discuss the project and it will include a press release.

Conclusion

From the prevalence data, it is undeniable that stalking is a common problem, especially for younger people, with overall one-year rates of 12.6% for males aged 18-30 and 16.2% for females aged 18-30. The vast majority of incidents did not have a connection with a partner, ex-partner or debt collector, indicating that focusing only on the enhancement of domestic violence and debt collection legislation cannot address the range and very real problems of stalking in Hong Kong. Unwanted phone calls and emails causing alarm or distress are the dominant modes for both males and females.

Limitations

For the quantitative component of this study, the sample size of 1,050 is sufficient to ensure that the sampling error is not large (the 95% confidence interval overall is at most +/-3% for yes/no questions). The use of mobile phone numbers ensures that the coverage of Hong Kong adults is at least 95%. Hence the primary limitation is non-sampling error from non-contacts and refusals (the response rate shows that the rate of refusals was quite low once people accepted the call, but the low contact rate probably reflects many people blocking mobile calls from people they do not know), although weighting by age and gender should reduce the bias from this. We also did not adjust for multiple mobile phone numbers, in order to keep the questionnaire as simple as possible.

For the qualitative component of this study, we recognise that this is a small sample size and therefore may not be generalisable. However, as this is an exploratory study for which little is known about victims' experiences, so we feel this provides a good baseline. We also recognise that victims may sometimes have recall difficulties about time. However, we focused on the actual incidents and responses rather than on when it occurred, so this should be a minor limitation.

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