STALKING VICTIMIZATION: EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF VICTIM-

OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP ON VICTIM EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

by

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Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved by the Graduate College.

DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

Stalking victimization has received increasing attention in the media and research. Though research knowledge is growing there are still many aspects of stalking victimization that are not fully understood. This study aims to bring together two literatures relating to stalking: research on the role of victim-offender relationship and research on the emotional effects of stalking on victims. Using 2019 Supplemental Victimization Survey data (N=1,313), this study examines the direct relationship between victim-offender relationship and emotional distress. Findings indicate that victims who were stalked by a current intimate partner express more indicators of emotional distress than victims stalked by a personal acquaintance, a formal acquaintance, stranger or someone they were unable to identify. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
GST	General Strain Theory
NCVS	National Crime Victimization Survey
NVAWS	National Violence Against Women Study
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RECON	Relationship Context
RQ	Research Question
SVS	Supplemental Victimization Survey

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Stalking is increasingly recognized as a social problem in the United States, with an estimated 3.4 million people affected annually (Morgan & Truman, 2022). Stalking affects 12 to 16 percent of women and 4 to 7 percent of men during their lifetime (Sheridan et al., 2003). The CDC identifies stalking as one of four forms of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as well as the most common form of IPV (Worsley et al., 2017). Several studies have identified the most common form of stalking as being initiated by an ex-intimate partner (Davis et al., 2002; Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen et al., 1999; Racine & Billick, 2014; Zona et al., 1993). Stalking has many consequences, including physical, psychological, social, and economic repercussions. For example, victims of stalking are at risk of physical violence in situations when stalking escalates (Mullen et al., 1999); victims of stalking are more likely to report feeling depressed, angry, or have symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Bjerregaard, 2000; Hanson et al., 2010; Kraaij et al., 2007; Owens, 2017; Owens, 2016; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan et al., 2003); stalking victims have been found to socially and physically isolate themselves as a protective measure against their stalkers (Sheridan et al., 2003); and the economic cost of stalking has been estimated at $342 million in one year (Max et al., 2004). Although stalking is increasingly recognized as a problem, it is still a relatively new crime and area of study.

While stalking as a behavior is not new, it was not criminalized until the 1990s. In the 1990s, stalking received attention from legislators after a pinnacle event in California. Actress Rebecca Shaffer was murdered by her stalker, Robert John Bardo (Ben, 2000). Subsequently, the first state to enact stalking as a crime was California. Since then, all states have outlawed stalking, and although there is not a unified definition of stalking, criminal statutes illustrate some common elements including repetitive unwanted actions aimed at a single victim, that elicit fear (Mustaine, 2010).

The scholarly literature on stalking advanced throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Research has examined a range of topics, but initially focused on developing stalking typologies (Mullen et al., 1999; Mohandie et al., 2006; Zona et al., 1993). In concurrence with typology development, the victim-offender relationship has been an area of interest in stalking research (Logan, 2019; Ngo & Paternoster, 2013; Owens, 2016; Pathe & Mullen, 1997). The consequences of stalking and, of particular relevance to this study, the emotional impact of stalking on victims has also been an area of concentration (Logan, 2019; Mechanic et al., 2000; McKeon et al., 2014; Mullen et al., 1999; Ngo & Paternoster, 2013, 2016; Norris et al., 2011; Senkans et al., 2021; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012).

While prior research has considered victim-offender relationships, primarily in the context of typologies, and the emotional consequences of stalking, there is limited exploration of the direct relationship between victim-offender relationships and emotional consequences among stalking victims. The current study examines whether the emotional impact stalking has on its victims varies depending on the victim-offender relationship. This is done by assessing the presence and variation in emotional distress

dependent on the victim-offender relationship using data from the 2019 Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS) of the National Crime Victimization Survey. The literature review that follows first introduces stalking; second, summarizes the literature on stalking and victim-offender relationships; third, summarizes the literature on the emotional consequences of stalking; and finally, describes the potential link between victim-offender relationship and emotional distress among stalking victims. This is followed by description of the present study, methods, results, and discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to define stalking to understand the premise of the crime. Defining stalking is challenging for several reasons. As noted previously, the legal definition varies from state to state, and definitions used in research also vary making it difficult to draw comparisons across locations and studies. To further complicate criminal definitions of stalking, some underlying stalking behaviors, such as phone calls, sending gifts, and showing up without an invitation, are not illegal. Another issue in defining stalking is the close resemblance it has to harassment, as the behaviors can be similar.

Harassment is commonly referred to as intimidation or pressuring actions, whereas stalking involves the action or behavior happening more than once. Stalking is a more severe form of harassment due to its repetitive nature (Owens, 2016). Actions that constitute harassment can fall into the stalking category if the victim is fearful and the unwanted behavior is repetitive. There are three factors that distinguish stalking from harassment (Beatty, 2003; Mustaine, 2010): the actions must be (1) directed at one specific person; (2) elicit fear; and (3) fear-inducing actions must occur more than once (Beatty, 2003; Mustaine, 2010; Owens, 2016) In contrast, harassment does not need to elicit fear. For example, unwanted phone calls that do not frighten the individual would fall under the scope of harassment. If it is an isolated event but does cause fear, it would be considered harassment.

Identifying stalking is also challenging when victims define stalking differently than the law. Using data from the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), Tjaden et al. (2000) separated victims of stalking into four categories: victims who responded to both the legally and self-defined definition; victims' responses that only fit in the self-defined category; victims' responses that only fit in the legal defined category; and those who did not fit in any category. The legal definition used by Tjaden et al. (2000) comes from a model anti-stalking code, and is phrased "a course of conduct directed at a specific person that involves repeated visual or physical proximity, nonconsensual communication, or verbal, written or implied threats, or a combination thereof, that would cause a reasonable person fear, with repeated meaning on two or more occasions" (Tjaden et al., 2000, p.11). In contrast to victims who 'self-defined' described behaviors that were in line with stalking behaviors, but did not use the term stalking. Findings indicated that the prevalence of stalking increases significantly when respondents are allowed to self-define stalking. The prevalence of men stalking cases triples and women's prevalence increased by 50 percent. Findings such as this highlight the need for a more inclusive and less subjective definition of stalking.

Defining stalking is important as it has led researchers to look into the specific behaviors used in different types of stalking, commonly referred to as the stalking typologies (Mullen et al., 1999; Mohandie et al., 2006; Zona et al., 1993). The typologies explore the victim-offender relationship, as well as the behaviors of the stalker.

Stalking Typologies

The first phase of developing typologies came from psychiatry, with a focus on stalker's mental disorders. Researchers aimed to place stalkers in categories in order to

better treat them. As research on typologies progressed, it became clear that not all stalkers suffered from psychotic episodes as previously theorized, but rather that most stalkers were interested in romantic relationships. This shift led researchers to focus on the victim-offender relationship when studying the typologies (Racine & Billick, 2014; Miller, 2012). The victim-offender relationship is an essential factor in many typologies, as it predicts the risk of violence (Mullen et al., 1999; Mohandie et al., 2006; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012; Zona et al., 1993). Three typologies have been deemed the most influential in considering the victim-offender relationship and are described here (Racine & Billick, 2014).

Zona, Sharma, and Lane (1993) developed the first widely accepted typology for stalkers based on the victim-offender relationship. Zona et al. (1993) distinguished three separate types influenced by the real or desired relationship between stalkers and their victims. The first, simple obsessional, encompasses stalkers who are trying to retaliate against their victim after a fallout or a break-up and are described by Zona et al. (1993) as being the most dangerous. The other two categories, love obsessional and erotomaniac, are described as being delusional and believing there is a romantic relationship between themselves and their victims, when there is not one. Mullen et al. (1999) built off of Zona et al. 's (1993) typologies with additional types and provided the context and motivation behind the stalking. Mullen et al. (1999) identified five separate stalker types, including intimacy seekers, who stalk someone they wish to have a relationship with. Incompetent suitors, who primarily stalk people they wish to have a romantic relationship with. Rejected stalkers who stalk someone who has rejected them either romantically, or professionally, resentful stalkers stalk people as a way to scare them after they feel

wronged by the victim, and predatory stalkers who stalk before they plan to commit an assault on the victim. The stalking type was dependent on the relationship held between the victim and offender. The most recent typology comes from Mohandie et al. (2006) and is referred to as the RECON typology of stalking. RECON comes from separating stalkers into two categories, based on the (RE)lationship and the (CON)text of the stalking. According to this typology the relationship between the victim and the offender has an effect on the stalking behaviors (Mohandie et al., 2006).

In cases involving violence, relationships described as intimate had the highest percentage (74%) of violence (Mohandie et al., 2006). Results such as this demonstrate the importance of examining the victim-offender relationship in stalking cases. There is consensus across the typologies that intimate partner stalkers are the most dangerous and the most common (Miller, 2012; Racine & Billick, 2014; Zona et al., 1993, Mullen et al., 1999; Mohandie et al., 2006), though non-intimate stalkers may also pose threats and contribute to emotional distress among their victims. The typologies all incorporate victim-offender relationships and predict that known offenders are more common compared to unknown offenders.

Victim-Offender Relationship and Stalking

Stalking studies have considered victim-offender relationship for many reasons. As summarized above, the victim-offender relationship has played a role in classifying stalkers into typologies. As research surrounding stalking has grown, researchers have also examined the prevalence of victim-offender relationships in stalking cases, as well as the influence of victim-offender relationship in stalking outcomes. Findings regarding the prevalence of victim-offender relationship among stalking cases are summarized below.

Pathe and Mullen (1997) asked 100 stalking victims about their experiences, finding that 29 percent were stalked by an ex-partner, 25 percent reported meeting their stalker in a professional setting, 9 percent in other work-related contexts, 21 percent met their stalkers through social encounters or neighbors, and 16 percent did not know where they met their stalker. According to Tjaden and Thoennes (1998), of the women that were stalked in the NVAWS, 38 percent were stalked by a spouse or an ex-spouse, 19 percent were stalked by an acquaintance, 14 percent by a former date, 10 percent by a partner or ex-partner, and 4 percent by a relative.

In Mullen et al.'s (1999) study on stalkers in a psychiatric care unit, thirty percent of the 145 stalkers studied were ex-partners of the victim. Twenty-three percent of stalkers met the victim in a professional setting, casual acquaintances made up 19 percent of stalkers, and 14 percent had no previous contact with the victim. Sheridan et al. (2001) found, via interviews with 95 victims, the most prevalent stalker was an ex-partner, occurring in about 48 percent of cases. Thirty-seven percent of stalkers were identified as former acquaintances, and 12 percent had no prior relationship

Several studies have utilized the SVS, a supplement of the NCVS to examine stalking. It is common for studies using SVS data to merge the 26 victim-offender relationship categories into intimate, known, and unknown categories (e.g., Menard & Cox, 2016; Owens, 2016, Owens, 2017; Truman & Morgan, 2016). For example, Truman and Morgan (2016) found that 69 percent of victims reported being stalked by someone known to them. Of those, 20 percent of victims reported being stalked by an ex-intimate partner, about 17 percent reported being stalked by a stranger, and 13 percent were unsure of the relationship to the stalker. Menard and Cox (2016) collapsed the victim-offender relationship into the same three categories (intimate, known and unknown). By doing so, the results of the distribution of stalkers mirrored each other, with the largest grouping of stalkers falling into the known category (Menard & Cox, 2016). Owens (2017 collapsed the categories as (ex)intimate, known, or unknown. Twenty-eight percent of respondents reported being stalked by an (ex)intimate partner, 60 percent reported being stalked by someone known to them, and 11 percent recorded being stalked by someone unknown. While the intimate category is still a notable proportion, when other known relationships categories are collapsed, they become the most prominent in these data.

Looking at the victim-offender relationship has given insight into the most prominent stalking types, being (ex)intimate partners. A limitation to these studies is that the relationship categories are often collapsed into intimate, known and unknown categories. Collapsing categories may limit understanding the impact of victim-offender on victim outcomes. Thus leaving questions about the how a broader range of relationship categories may influence outcomes such as emotional distress. This is

another area of particular interest among stalking studies is victim outcomes, including emotional impacts experienced by the victims due to the stalking experience. Past studies have suggested that emotional outcomes vary based on the severity of the stalking, and severity may be linked to victim-offender relationship (Logan, 2019; Ngo & Paternoster, 2013; Owens, 2016; Pathe & Mullen, 1997). The research on emotional consequences is described below, followed by an explanation of how emotional consequences and victim-offender relationship may be directly linked.

Emotional Consequences of Stalking

Emotional outcomes have been broadly explored in many different settings. In reviewing general victimization literature, Hanson et al. (2010) found, that being victimized affects an individual's roles, including parenting and intimate relationship roles. After being victimized, individuals have a difficult time maintaining employment as well as discomfort in social situations due to the anxiety caused by the victimization (Hanson et al., 2010). The impacts of stalking victimization are similar to those experienced by victims of other crimes (Hanson et al., 2010).

Embedded in the consequences of stalking are both psychological and physical consequences. The consequences of stalking vary based on the severity of the stalking incidents and the victim's vulnerability based on past experiences (Sheridan et al., 2012). Negative psychological impacts tend to outlast physical injuries as the psychological outcomes can be chronic (Blaauw et al., 2002, Bjerregaard, 2000, Kraaij et al., 2007, Hanson et al., 2010, Owens, 2017, Owens, 2016, Pathe & Mullen, 1997, Purcell et al., 2008).

Pathe and Mullen (1997) found that victims reported having sleep and appetite disturbances, headaches, and persistent nausea. Further, they found that at some point in the stalking cases, 24 percent of victims reported suicidal thoughts, with 75 percent reporting feeling powerless. Blaauw et al. 's (2002) study showed that 78 percent of stalking victims had symptoms that indicate a diagnosable psychiatric disorder. Sheridan et al.'s (2003) review of the nature of stalking finds that the psychological impact on victims is extensive. Victims reported trouble trusting and feeling paranoid, confused, nervous, angry, and depressed; and women reported feeling more scared than men.

Since Sheridan et al.'s, (2003) review, additional relevant studies have found higher levels of fear and stress are associated with threats made by the stalker (McEwan et al., 2007). Ngo and Paternoster (2016) examined the negative emotions (anger, fear, and depression) experienced by stalking victims and compared the method of stalking to the negative emotion; the researchers then compared the negative emotions to legitimate coping mechanisms. The study used seven measures of negative emotional consequences including anxiety/concern, annoyance/anger, frightened, depression, helplessness, physical sickness, and suicide ideation. The findings suggested that while some stalking mechanisms result in negative emotions, others do not. Receiving gifts and being followed were among the stalking actions associated with more negative emotions (Ngo & Paternoster, 2016). The study also suggested that the negative emotions experienced can lead to positive coping mechanisms, such as reaching out to law enforcement or investing in more security measures. Given these findings, it is important to consider why stalking may be linked with negative emotional outcomes.

One possibility is that as the intensity of the stalking increases, so do the levels of distress (Logan et al., 2007). The presence of violence can be related to an increase in fear in stalking victims (Logan, 2019). Existing studies have identified predictors of violence and/or emotional distress, including victim-offender relationship. For example, Purcell et al.'s (2008) findings suggested that the closer the victim-offender relationship was, the higher the risk of physical violence taking place. As mentioned previously, an increase in stalking intensity (the risk of physical violence) acts as a predictor to increased levels of emotional distress (Logan et al., 2007; Logan, 2019). The risk of violence in stalking cases drastically increases as the duration of the stalking increases (Meloy, 1998; Miller, 2012). The duration of stalking is also correlated with the victim-offender relationship. Ex-partner stalking victims have been found to experience longer stalking duration than any other relationship group (McEwan et al., 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000). Increased stress levels are also related to longer durations of stalking (Johnson & Kercher, 2009). Given these study findings, the relationship between the victim-offender relationship and emotional distress warrants some additional attention. The link between stalking and emotional distress is supported in many studies (Bjerregaard, 2000; Hanson et al., 2010; Kraaij et al., 2007; Owens, 2017; Owens, 2016; Pathe & Mullen, 1997). The link between the victim-offender relationship and emotional outcomes has been explored indirectly as described above, but has only been studied directly in the context of intimate partner violence.

Intimate Partner Stalking and Emotional Distress

Sheridan and Lyndon (2012) note that the victim-offender relationship predicts both physical and psychological consequences of stalking, a claim that is supported in

other studies that focus on IPV or domestic violence (Amar, 2006; Brewster, 2000; Kurt, 1995; Logan, 2019; Logan et al., 2007; Logan & Walker, 2010; Maran & Varetto, 2018; Mechanic et al., 2000; Norris et al., 2011; Rosenfeld, 2004; Senkans et al., 2021; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012; Spitzberg et al., 2010; Worsley et al., 2017). As prior research has shown, ex-partner stalking is one of the most common stalking dynamics (Mohandie et al. 2006; Miller, 2012; Mullen et al., 1999; Racine & Billick, 2014; Zona et al., 1993) and also the most dangerous (McEwan et al., 2007) as (ex)intimate partner stalking is a risk factor for stalker violence (Miller, 2012).

Mechanic et al. (2000) conducted a study to assess the relationship between IPV and stalking. One hundred fourteen acutely battered women were recruited to participate in the study. Results indicated that the link between stalking victims and battered women is strong, meaning that victims of IPV are also at risk for stalking.

Fear as an emotional outcome is an important factor in studying stalking victims in connection to the victim-offender relationship, as fear is included in the definition of stalking (Owens, 2017, 2016; Tjaden et al., 2000). Using a sample of 120 either self or court-referred IPV offenders, Norris et al. (2011) found a positive correlation between the severity of the IPV and stalking behaviors. Norris et al. 's (2011) study on stalking offenders supports Mechanic et al. 's (2000) conclusions but adds that the length of time out of the relationship is a strong predictor of stalking. Studies have also found threats made by the stalker, either targeting the victim or those close to the victim, are more common in ex-partner stalking cases (Rosenfeld, 2004). In Sheridan and Lyndon's (2012) study, both male and female victims reported higher levels of fear when the stalker was an ex-intimate partner than when the stalker was a stranger. Logan (2019) found, when

comparing non-partners and ex-partner stalking cases, that ex-partners were more likely to threaten to hurt or kill the victim explicitly. Given that other research has linked threats with emotional distress (Rosenfeld, 2004), Logan's (2019) finding could support the idea that certain victim-offender relationship dynamics may influence the level of emotional distress experienced. While these studies support the link between IPV stalking and emotional distress, there was not consideration of additional victim-relationship categories. Examining the direct relationship between the victim-offender relationship and emotional distress in stalking victims has only been attempted one time (Stewart, 2011).

Victim-Offender Relationship and Emotional Distress Among Stalking Victims

Examining the direct effect of the victim-offender relationship on emotional outcomes has only been attempted once before in a dissertation by Stewart (2011). Stewart focused on negative health outcomes, rather than negative emotional outcomes. Stewart used current health, depression and current substance use as measures of negative health outcomes. Using the National Violence Against Women Study (NVAWS), Stewart examined the relationship between victim-offender relationship and negative health outcomes for victims of stalking, rape, and physical assault. Stewart (2011) used General Strain Theory (GST) as theoretical framework. In explaining the link between GST and negative health outcomes in victims, Stewart (2011, p.73) stated, "Stressful events, ones caused by the absence of positively valued goals, positively valued stimuli, and the presence of negative and noxious stimuli, lead to negative health outcomes and affective states." Stewart (2011) reasoned that by utilizing GST, the justification could be drawn that stalking, a negative stimulus, causes emotional distress.

Stewart (2011) hypothesized that intimate victim-offender relationships would have a more significant impact on health outcomes than acquaintance or stranger relationships due to the higher levels of trust, the amount of contact between the victim and offender, close proximity, and intimacy. Stewart (2011) used the NVAWS definition for stalking. If any respondent answered 'yes' to the behaviors stated in the screening questions and reported the behaviors occurring more than once, they were included. For the dependent variable, health outcomes, respondents were asked about their current health, depression, and current substance use. The dependent variable focused on broad negative health outcomes, meaning there was less emphasis on specific potential emotional impacts. For victim-offender relationship, Stewart (2011) included seven categories:1) current or ex-spouse, 2) current or ex-partner, 3) relative, 4) date, 5) acquaintance, 6) stranger and 7) two or more perpetrators.

Counter to expectation, Stewart's (2011) findings did not support the hypothesis that stalking victims in an intimate relationship reported more negative emotional health outcomes compared to victims not in an intimate relationship. Although the findings of this study indicate that victim-offender relationship may not influence negative emotional outcomes among stalking victims, given the potential for variation in study findings based on sample and measures - as well as the findings from studies examining IPV, emotional distress, and stalking - further study is warranted.

In sum, the emotional impact of stalking is immense. Depression, PTSD symptoms, anger, anxiety, and loss of trust are among the most common forms of emotional distress experienced by victims of stalking (Bjerregaard, 2000; Hanson et al., 2010; Kraaij et al., 2007; Ngo & Paternoster, 2013, 2016; Owens, 2017; Owens, 2016;

Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan et al., 2003). Early studies regarding stalking and risk

for stalking found that (ex)partner stalking is the most prevalent, as well as the most

dangerous (Mullen, 1999; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan et al., 2001; Tjaden &

Thoennes, 1998, 2000). Studies that have included the victim-offender relationship show

an increased severity of stalking in cases of intimate partner stalking (Amar, 2006;

Brewster, 2000; Kurt, 1995; Logan, 2019; Logan et al., 2007; Logan & Walker, 2010;

Maran & Varetto, 2018; Mechanic et al., 2000; Norris et al., 2011; Rosenfeld, 2004;

Senkans et al., 2021; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2010; Worsley et al., 2017; Spitzberg et al.,

2010). Only one study (Stewart, 2011) has explored the victim-offender relationship as a

predictor of negative health outcomes, inclusive of emotional distress indicators. Due to

the lack of attention given to the victim-offender relationship in relation to emotional

distress, the current study proposes to fill this gap.

CHAPTER THREE: CURRENT STUDY

Despite the prevalence of stalking among persons who know each other and research indicating that outcomes may vary in correlation with victim-offender relationships, exploring victim-offender relationships as a predictor of emotional distress is under-researched. The current study aims to explore two research questions connected to the victim-offender relationship and emotional distress. Justifications for their use in the current study are described below.

Research question 1: *Is there an association between victim-offender relationships and emotional health outcomes among stalking victims?*

There has not been a direct assessment using the SVS. Collapsing the categories has the potential to obscure some relationships. Based on research showing that (ex)intimate partner stalking is more severe than non-intimate partner stalking (Logan, 2019; Mechanic et al., 2000; Norris et al., 2011; Rosenfeld, 2004), and studies that suggest a link between the victim-offender relationship emotional distress there is justification for a study to examine the influence of the victim-offender relationship on victim emotional distress. It must first be established that there is relationship before other assessments can be made. Thus, further exploration is needed.

Research question 2: *What victim-offender relationship categories are associated with experiencing more types of emotional distress?*

If a relationship is found between victim-offender relationship and victim emotional distress, then the categories associated with the emotional distress can be assessed. Many studies that have examined the victim-offender relationship only include three categories, most commonly (ex)intimate partners, known, and unknown (Menard Cox, 2016; Owens, 2016, Owens, 2017; Sheridan et al., 2001). Studies that have used more categories include Tjaden and Thoennes (1998, 2000), Pathe and Mullen (1997), Mullen (1999), and Stewart (2011). By using more descriptive categories, differences can be seen across the victim-offender relationships. The impact on emotional distress by victim-offender relationship should be explored across a range of categories, in line with these studies. If a relationship between victim-offender relationship and emotional distress is found, then it is expected that the more intimate the relationship, the greater the emotional distress. Therefore, this research question is paired with a hypothesis: Victims who were stalked by a current intimate partner will report more indicators of emotional distress compared to victims who were stalked by an ex-intimate partner, relatives, acquaintances, strangers, or who were not able to identify their stalkers.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

Data

The data for the current study comes from the Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS) conducted from July to December 2019. The SVS measures nonfatal stalking victimizations for people 16 years and older in the United States. The SVS measures many factors in stalking, such as the victim's characteristics, reporting and stalking patterns, and preventive measures taken by the victim (NCVS, 2019). The SVS contains questions pertaining to the respondent's experiences of unwanted contact and other stalking behaviors, the victim-offender relationship, if other crimes or injuries occurred as a result of the stalking, and responses of the criminal justice system where applicable (Catalano, 2012). The unit of analysis is the individual. Funding for the SVS comes from the United States Department of Justice, the Office of Justice Programs, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The data is collected in a cross-sectional method. Once every six months, the respondents are interviewed (first face-to-face, then over the phone) for three years, resulting in seven interviews (National Crime Victims Survey, 2019). The SVS is given to respondents of the National Crime Victimization Survey who answered affirmatively that they have experienced stalking in the past year (a sample size of N=1,406). The respondents are asked five screening questions to determine if they have experienced stalking. The first part of the survey questions asks if in the past 12 months, the respondent had experienced unwanted behavior or contacts such as being followed, if

someone had snuck into their home, car or other places, had waited for them, shown up

unexpectedly, sent unwanted gifts, or asked family or friends about their whereabouts.

The survey also asks about cyber stalking methods, such as calling, leaving unwanted

messages on a phone, monitoring their activities using technology or social media,

tracking them using technology, as well as posting or threating to post personal

information on the internet. If the respondent says 'yes' to any of these questions, they

would move to part two of the survey, which asked about the repetition of the behaviors.

If it happened more than once, or if they experience two of the behaviors only once, the

respondent would move on to the third part of the survey, which asked about the fear or

emotional distress of being stalked, as well as questions pertaining to reasonable fear,

such as an attack, attempted attack or the threat of an attack to either the person, or

someone close to the person or a pet.

Missing Data

Respondents that fit into the SVS definition of stalking definition created a

sample of (N=1,406). Although the number of respondents that fit the SVS definition of

stalking is 1,406, the sample for analysis is reduced to 1313. Ninety-thee respondents

were excluded due to either 'refusal' to respond, 'residue' responses, 'do not know' or

'out of scope' responses. Respondents who refused to answer were recorded as 'refusal'

and those who did not know were coded as 'do not know'. According to the NCVS

codebook, the Literal Reclassification Process (LRP) was created by the U.S. Census to

facilitate the review and reclassifying or categorization of verbatim responses. If the

verbatim response was unique and did not have any responses that were similar enough to

create a new response category, the response is coded 'residue' to ensure privacy of the

respondent. Responses were recorded as 'out of scope' if the question did not apply to the stalking experience (United States, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019).

Measures

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable in the current study is the emotional distress experienced by the stalking victim. Prior research has defined emotional distress as characterized by bouts of depression (i.e., feeling hopeless or sad), anger (i.e., feeling aggravated or mad or annoyed), anxiety (i.e., feeling nervous or uneasy), and feeling frightened (i.e., feeling scared) or vulnerability (i.e., feeling helpless) (Kraaij et al., 2007, Ngo & Paternoster, 2013, 2016, Worsley et al., 2017) as well as measures of a lack of trust, physical sickness, stress, and feeling unsafe. The SVS includes items about depression, anger, fear, trust, safety, helplessness, worry/anxiety, anger/annoyance, and vulnerability in response to unwanted behaviors. For the purpose of this study, suicide ideation (having suicidal thoughts or attempting to) is also included as a measure of emotional distress, as this was included by Ngo and Paternoster (2016). Respondents answered 'yes' (1) or 'no' (0) to questions pertaining to the experience of emotional distress over the past year. The question is phrased as, "Considering all of these unwanted contacts or behaviors that have occurred over the past year, did you feel… "(NCVS, 2019, p.23).

A total of 11 items were used and the full list of questions is in Appendix A. In the sample, thirty-eight percent of respondent answered 'yes' to feeling sad or depressed. Eighty-six percent of the sample answered 'yes' to being angry or annoyed. Seventy-five percent answered 'yes' to being worried of anxious. Forty-four percent answer 'yes' to being fearful or terrified due to their stalking experience. Forty-nine percent indicated

that they felt vulnerable or helpless. Forty-five percent felt like they could not trust people after the stalking experience. Five percent said they felt suicidal due to the stalking. Twenty-five percent said they felt physically sick due to the stalking. Seventy-three percent said they felt stressed. Fifty-one percent of the sample said 'yes' to feeling unsafe due to their experience with stalking and four percent indicated a catch all for other emotions.

Using SPSS, an additive scale variable was created. The additive scale takes the responses to the relevant items and combines them to create a variable indicating a count of affirmative responses to these separate measures of emotional distress. In this variable, 0 indicates the lowest level of emotional distress experienced, meaning, a value of zero indicates a respondent answered no to all of the eleven questions about their stalking experiences causing emotional distress. Eleven indicated the greatest amount of emotional distress, meaning respondents answered yes to all questions about experiencing negative emotions. The Cronbach's Alpha for the additive scale is α=.81, showing the emotional distress scale is highly reliable. The emotional distress scale also has acceptable distribution. Meaning, there is necessary variability throughout the scale. The emotional distress scale has a mode of 7 and a mean of M=4.92 with a standard deviation of 2.7.

Independent Variable

The independent variable in the current study is the victim-offender relationship. In the SVS, the victim-offender relationship is measured by a survey question phrased, "What was your relationship with the person who committed these unwanted contacts or behaviors when they first began?" (NCVS, 2019). The SVS offers 26 options relating to

the victim-offender relationship. These responses are placed in two categories, relatives and non-relatives. The relative category includes spouses or partners, ex-spouses/ex-partners, parents/step-parents, children/step-children, siblings/step-siblings, and an option to specify. The non-relative category includes boyfriends/girlfriends, ex-boyfriends/ girlfriends, current romantic partners, former romantic partners, friends/ex-friends, acquaintances, in-laws or other relatives of spouse/ or of an ex-spouse, roommate/ ex-roommate, schoolmate, neighbor, customer/client, student, patient, supervisors, employee, co-worker, teacher/school staff, or a stranger. The SVS also offers an 'inability to identify the offender' option (see Appendix A).

Due to sample distribution, the current study merged several of these categories together while still retaining more relationship categories than the three commonly utilized in existing research. The categories include (1) current intimate partners (i.e., spouse, partners, boy/girlfriends), n=80 (2) ex-intimate partners (i.e. former spouses, partners, boy/girlfriends, dates), n=243, (3) relatives (i.e. [step]parents, [step]siblings, [step]children, and an option to specify the family member) n=65, (4) personal acquaintances ([ex]friends, acquaintance s, [ex]in laws or other former relatives of a spouse, roommates, n=277, (5) formal acquaintance (schoolmates, neighbors, students, employees, clients, co-workers, teachers, advisors), n=219 (6) strangers n=230, and (7) unable to identify their stalker n=199. Personal acquaintances were the most frequent, and relatives the least frequent, with the current partner category being the second smallest.

Control Variables

Control variables were determined by prior stalking emotional distress research. Catalano (2012) found that women, young people, non-white, and divorced or separated individuals are at higher risk of experiencing stalking, thus gender, age, race and marital status were controlled for in the current study. Ngo and Paternoster (2013) controlled for gender, age, race (white and non-white) and marital status. Ngo and Paternoster's (2016) study had the same control variables, however, race contained six attributes (White, Black, Asian, American Indian/Alaskan, Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander and mixed race). In the current study age is measured in years. Gender is dichotomous, with males coded (1) and females coded as (2). Race is coded as White (1), Black (2), Asian (3), and Other (4). Marital status includes those who are currently married (1) those who are currently widowed (2) those who are currently divorced (3), those who are currently separated (4), and those who have never been married (5). Based on the Menard and Cox's (2016) findings the rural or urban location has an effect on stalking victims, and as such, location was also controlled for with urban coded as (1) and rural as (2) (see Appendix A for a list of all variables).

Descriptive statistics show that, 28% were males and 72% females. A majority of the sample was white (82%). Eight percent identified as Black, four percent as Asian, and six percent as other races. Age ranged from 16-90 with a mean of 43.6. As for marital status, 33% were married, five percent were widowed, 23% were divorced, five percent were separated and 34% had never been married. Eighty-three percent experienced stalking in an urban setting and 17% in a rural setting. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all variables included in this study.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables (N=1,313)

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Emotional Distress Scale (DV)		
0	57	4.3%
1	117	8.9%
2	132	8.9%
3	143	10.9%
4	134	10.2%
5	147	11.2%
6	145	11%
7	171	13%
8	123	9.4%
9	112	8.5%
10	28	2.1%
11	4	0.3%
Victim-Offender Relationship (IV)		
Current Intimate Partner	80	6.1%
Ex-Intimate Partner	248	18.5%
Relative	66	5%
Personal Acquaintance	284	22.1%
Formal Acquaintance	226	16.7%
Stranger	232	17.5%
Unable to Identify	203	15.2%
Control Variables		
Sex		
Male	368	28%
Female	945	72%
Race		
White	1073	81.7%
Black	112	8.5%
Asian	50	3.8%
Other	78	5.9%
Marital Status		
Married	438	33.4%
Widowed	66	5%
Divorced	296	22.5%
Separated	70	5.3%
Never Married	443	33.7%
Urban	1085	82.6%
Rural	228	17.4%

Note: Emotional Distress Scale: Mean= 4.92; Mode= 7; Standard Deviation= 2.27; Variance= 7.44. Respondent age: M=43.6; Range=16-90; Standard Deviation=16.64

The analysis for the present study starts with a descriptive bivariate analysis to assess whether there is a relationship between the victim-offender relationship and the number of emotional distress outcomes experienced by the survivor, addressing research question two. A cross tabulation was conducted to see which victim-offender relationship categories are associated with the individual emotional distress indicators.

Of respondents who answered 'yes' to feeling sad of depressed 26% were stalked by an ex-intimate partner, 22% were stalked by a personal acquaintance, 17% were stalked by a formal acquaintance, 11% were stalked by a current intimate partner, ten percent were stalked by a stranger and seven percent were stalked by a relative or someone who was unidentifiable.

Of respondents who said 'yes' to feeling angry or annoyed, 22% were stalking by a personal acquaintance, 20% were stalking by an ex-intimate partner, 17% were stalked by formal acquaintance. 16% were stalked by a stranger. 13% were stalked someone who was not identified, six percent were stalked by a current intimate partner and five percent were stalked by a relative.

Of respondents who said 'yes' to feeling worried or anxious, 22% were stalked by a personal acquaintance, 20% were stalked by an ex-intimate partner 19% were stalked by a formal acquaintance, 17% were stalked by a stranger. 11% were stalked by someone they were not able to identify. Seven percent were stalked by a current intimate partner, and five percent were stalked by a relative.

Respondents who said 'yes' to feeling fearful or terrified, 23% were stalked by a personal acquaintance. 19% were stalked by an ex-intimate partner. 18% were stalked by a formal acquaintance, 16% were stalked by a stranger. Twelve percent were stalked by

someone they were not able to identify. Eight percent were stalked by a current intimate partner and five percent were stalked by a relative.

Of respondents who said 'yes' to feeling vulnerable or helpless, 21% were stalked by a personal acquaintance or ex intimate partner. Eighteen percent were stalked by a formal acquaintance or a stranger. Eleven percent were stalked by an unidentifiable individual. Eight percent were stalked by a current intimate partner and four percent by a relative.

Of respondents who say 'yes' to feeling like they couldn't trust people after the stalking experiences, 23% were stalked by a personal acquaintance. Twenty percent were stalked by an ex-intimate partner. Sixteen percent were stalked by a formal acquaintance or a stranger. Thirteen were stalked by an unidentifiable person. Nine percent were stalked by a current intimate partner, and four percent by a relative.

Of respondents who answered 'yes' to feeling suicidal, 21% were stalked by an ex-intimate intimate partner. Thirteen percent were stalked by a current intimate partner or a stranger. Twelve percent were stalked by a personal acquaintance, and 11% by a formal acquaintance. Ten percent were stalked by relative and two percent by someone who was unable to identify.

Of the respondents who indicated they had felt sick after the stalking, 25% were stalked by an ex-intimate partner 18% were stalked by a formal acquaintance. Twelve percent were stalked by a personal acquaintance, and 11% by a stranger. Ten percent were stalked by a current intimate partner. Seven percent were stalked by a relative and five percent by an unidentified person.

Of the respondents who said 'yes' to feeling stressed, 23% were stalked by a personal acquaintance. Twenty-one percent were stalked by an ex-intimate partner. Eighteen percent were stalked by a formal acquaintance, 14% were stalked by a stranger. Ten percent were stalked by an unidentified individual. Eight percent were stalked by current intimate partner and six percent by a relative.

Of the respondents who answered 'yes' to feeling unsafe, 21% were stalked by a personal acquaintance, 20% were stalked by a formal acquaintance. Nineteen percent were stalked by an ex-intimate partner. Seventeen percent were stalked by a stranger. Twelve percent were stalked by someone they could not identify. Seven percent were stalked by a current intimate partner and four percent were stalked by a relative.

For the respondents who said 'yes' to another emotion, 23% were stalked by a stranger. Twenty-one percent were stalked by an ex-intimate partner19% were stalked by a formal acquaintance. Twelve percent were stalked by a personal acquaintance or someone they could not identify. Eight percent were stalked by a current intimate partner, and six percent were stalked by a relative. Results are found in Table 2..

Table 2. Distribution of Affirmative Responses to Each Emotional Distress Indicator Across Victim-Offender Relationship Categories (N=1,313)

Victim-Offender Relationship	Current Intimate Partner		Ex-Intimate Partner		Relative		Personal Acquaint.		Formal Acquaint.		Stranger		Unable to Identify		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Sad or Depressed	55	11%	31	26%	39	8%	107	22%	82	17%	48	10%	34	7%	496
Angry or Annoyed	69	6%	28	20%	60	5%	246	22%	191	17%	185	16%	151	13%	1130
Worried or Anxious	65	7%	97	20%	52	5%	217	22%	183	19%	163	17%	105	11%	982
Fearful or Terrified	44	8%	11	19%	26	5%	129	23%	103	18%	91	16%	68	12%	572
Vulnerable or Helpless	49	8%	35	21%	27	4%	132	21%	113	18%	112	18%	70	11%	638
Untrusting	51	9%	17	20%	23	4%	135	23%	91	16%	95	16%	75	13%	587
Suicidal	6	10%	19	31%	6	10%	14	23%	7	11%	8	13%	1	2%	61
Sick	34	10%	80	25%	24	7%	38	12%	57	18%	36	11%	16	5%	325
Stressed	74	8%	205	21%	54	6%	217	23%	171	18%	137	14%	97	10%	955
Unsafe	49	7%	128	19%	27	4%	139	21%	131	20%	115	17%	77	12%	666
Other	4	8%	11	21%	3	6%	6	2%	10	19%	12	23%	6	12%	52
Total	455	100%	1362	100%	341	100%	1420	100%	1139	100%	1002	100%	700	100%	6464

Analytical Strategy

At the bivariate level an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test, was conducted to examine research question 1, regarding whether there is a direct relationship between victim-offender relationship and emotional distress. The post-hoc Scheffe test was used to examine which relationship dynamics matter. The Scheffe test, a post-hoc test used after the ANOVA, indicates which set of means are significant. The Scheffe test results address research question two. Next, multivariate OLS regression analysis was used to examine the relationship of interest while controlling for other potentially relevant factors (i.e. age, sex, race, marital status, and location). OLS regression is appropriate because the emotional distress scale is continuous; OLS estimates the unknown parameters in a linear regression model. OLS regression is also a robust statistical technique. The OLS regression also measures the strength of association and determines how much of the variation in emotional distress is due to the victim-offender relationship. The emotional distress scale has consistent variation moving from one score to the next and follows a normal distribution. OLS regression analysis was used to examine research question 2 and its corresponding hypothesis while controlling for other potentially relevant factors. Statistical analyses were conducted in STATA and SPSS. SPSS was used for coding and creating variables. STATA was used to run the ANOVA and the OLS regression. Listwise deletion was used in the ANOVA and OLS regression statistical models.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the means between the victim-offender relationship categories in regard to emotional distress. Table 2 shows the results of the ANOVA test. The means and standard deviation are presented in table 2. below. The ANOVA was significant at the significant at the alpha .001 level, ($F_{(6, 1309)} = 18.23$, $p < .001$). The eta^2 (.077) value indicates a weak to moderate effect. Meaning, 7.7% of the variance in the types of emotional distress experienced by stalking victims is somewhat being explained by the victim-offender relationship. Results of the one-way ANOVA test demonstrated that the effect of the victim-offender relationship was significant for emotional distress factors. Meaning, group membership matters, and between-group variance is explaining 18 times the variance in emotional distress as the within-group variance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. The victim-offender relationship does have an impact on the emotional distress experienced by stalking victims in the bivariate analysis.

Table 2 shows a summary of the emotional distress scale means distributed across the victim-offender relationship. Result shows the most distressing relationship to be stalked by is the current intimate partner group (M=6.25) followed by the ex-intimate partner (M=5.60). The relative group has an average emotional distress score of (M=5.25). there is a slight difference in the personal acquaintance (M=5.13) and the formal acquaintance (M=5.20) average emotional distress score, with formal acquaintances having a slightly higher score mean. Strangers had an average emotional distress score of (M=4.36) and the unidentifiable category (M=3.52) was the lowest score average.

Table 2. Summary of Emotional Distress Scale (N=1,313)

Victim Offender Relationship	Mean	SD	Frequencies
Current Intimate Partner	6.25	2.47	80
Ex-Intimate Partner	5.60	2.62	243
Relative	5.25	2.55	65
Personal Acquaintance	5.13	2.69	277
Formal Acquaintance	5.20	2.55	219
Stranger	4.36	2.69	230
Unable to Identify	3.52	2.73	199

R^2=0.077, Number of Observations= 1,313. Significance <.001

The Scheffe test table shows the difference between the victim-offender relationship categories by row and columns. The Scheffe test yields five significant differences (at the $p<.001$ significance level and a F critical value of 3.75) between the victim-offender relationship categories: current intimate partner and stranger (M=-1.893), meaning, there is a difference of 1.89 between the current intimate partner group and the stranger group. There is a significant mean difference between current intimate partner and unable to identify (M=-2.732). There is a significant mean difference between ex-intimate partner and unable to identify (M=-2.088). The mean difference between personal acquaintance and unable to identify (M=-1.604) is also significant as well as, formal acquaintance and unable to identify (M=-1.669).

Table 2. Scheffe Test: Comparison of the Emotional Distress Scale and Victim-Offender Relationship (N=1,313)

(Row M - Column M)	Current Intimate Partner	Ex-Intimate Partner	Relative	Personal Acquaint.	Formal Acquaint.	Stranger
Ex-Intimate Partner	-0.6451 0.726					
Relative	-1.0039 0.513	-0.3588 0.987				
Personal Acquaint.	-1.1281 0.076	-0.4831 0.623	-0.1243 1.000			
Formal Acquaint.	-1.0636 0.142	-0.4186 0.817	-0.0598 1.000	0.645 1.000		
Stranger	-1.8935* 0.000	-1.2448* 0.000	-0.7783 0.063	-0.8896 0.444	-0.8298 0.082	
Unable to Identify	-2.7324* 0.000	-2.0874* 0.000	-1.7286* .002	-1.6043* 0.000	-1.6688* 0.000	-0.8389 0.093

Note: *Significant at p < .05

In order to examine whether victim-offender relationship influences the emotional distress scale while controlling for age, sex, race, marital status and location, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis was conducted. To ensure there is no multicollinearity, (when the independent variables depend on each other) (Subramanian, 2021), a variance inflation factor (VIF) was conducted. The victim-offender relationship has a VIF score of 1, meaning there is no multicollinearity. To test for autocorrelation, which occurs when error values are correlated (Subramanian, 2021), a Durbin Watson test was conducted, resulting in a score of (2.015) indicting no autocorrelation. In order for OLS model to fit the date properly, there must also be a normal distribution of errors

and homoscedasticity (Subramanian, 2021). As all of these assumptions are met, OLS is an appropriate statistical technique. The results of the OLS regression model are shown in Table 5.

From the OLS regression, the R-squared coefficient determines what percentage of variation in emotional distress is explained by the model. The current model explains thirteen percent of the variance in emotional distress.

Results from the OLS model show that, stalking committed by personal acquaintances compared to current intimate partners (b=-0.95, p=0.005) predict less emotional distress. The emotional distress score for those stalked by a personal acquaintance is predicted to be .95 lower than those stalked by a current intimate partner. Formal acquaintances (b=-0.77, p=0.026) predict less emotional distress when compared to current intimate partners. The emotional distress score for those stalked by a formal acquaintance is predicted to be .77 lower that for those stalked by a current partner. Stranger (b=-1.44, p=0.000) predict less emotional distress when compared to current intimate partners. Meaning, for strangers, the predicted emotional distress score would be 1.44 units lower than for current intimate partners. The unable to identify category (b=-2.11, p=0.000) is also predicted to cause less emotional distress. The emotional distress score for those stalked by someone who was unidentified is predicted to be 2.11 lower than for those stalked by a current intimate partner. Meaning, of the seven categories, being stalked by a current intimate partner is associated with more emotional distress than being stalked by a personal or formal acquaintance, a stranger, or someone who was not able to be identified.

When looking at the significantly different categories, personal acquaintances, formal acquaintances, strangers, and the unable to identify relationship categories (each in comparison compared with the current partner category), the standardized Beta offers some additional insight. The standardized Beta indicates how many standard deviations the emotional distress scale changes given a change in the victim-offender relationship. Personal acquaintances have a weak effect, B=-0.14, meaning, changing from the current intimate to the personal acquaintance group is associated with a 0.14 standard deviation decrease in the emotional distress scale. Formal acquaintances also have a weak effect, B=-0.11, changing from the current intimate partner group to formal acquaintances is associated with a 0.11 standard deviation decrease in the emotional distress scale. Strangers, B=-0.20 suggest a weak effect as well, with a standard deviation decrease of 0.20 in the emotional distress scale. The unable-to-identify category, B=-0.28. meaning changing from the current intimate partner group to the unable -to-identify group is associated with a standard deviation decrease of 0.28 in the emotional distress scale, suggests a weak effect as well. Finding partially support the hypothesis that current intimate partners would produce more emotional distress indicators than other groups.

The control variables have significant findings. Moving from male to female predicts an (b=1.14, p=0.000), a marginal increase in emotional distress. When looking at the differences between men and women in relation to emotional distress, the standardized Beta indicates B=0.19, as one increase in the sex variable is associated with a .19 increase in the emotional distress scale.

Compared to married individuals, divorced (b=0.68, p=0.00), and never married individuals (b= 0.53, p = 0.00) score higher on the emotional distress scale. When

looking at the significant marital status variable, divorce B=0.10, and never married

B=0.09 are suggested to have weak relationships.

      There was no statistically significant finding for race on the amount of emotional

distress. Similarly, there was no statistically significant differences the amount of

emotional distress experienced when stalked in an urban or rural location.

Table 3. OLS Regression of Victim-Offender Relationship on Emotional Distress Scale (N=1,312)

Emotional Distress	Coefficient	Std. Err	P- Value	Beta
Victim Offender Relationship				
(*Current partner reference group*)				
Ex-Intimate Partner	-0.618	0.338	0.068	-0.0880
Relative	-0.692	0.440	0.117	-0.0551
Personal Acquaintance	-0.945**	0.335	0.005	-0.1415
Formal Acquaintance	-0.770*	0.346	0.026	-0.1054
Stranger	-1.442***	0.348	0.000	-0.2010
Unable to Identify	-2.113***	0.362	0.000	-0.2780
Age	-0.007	0.005	0.158	-0.0442
Sex				
Female	1.136***	0.165	0.000	0.1872
Race				
(*White reference group)*				
Black	-0.129	0.260	0.619	-0.1326
Asian	0.756	0.377	0.814	0.0053
Other	0.142	0.303	0.639	0.0123
Location				
Rural	0.2241	0.191	0.240	0.0113
Current Marital Status				
(*Married reference group*)				
Widowed	0.2631	0.353	0.456	0.0211
Divorced	0.6755***	0.202	0.001	0.1036
Separated	0.6457	0.346	0.062	0.0532
Never Married	0.5282**	0.200	0.008	0.0916

*Significant at $p < .05$ **Significant at $p < .01$, *** Significant at $p < .001$
Number of Observations= 1,313. $F_{(16, 1269)} = 11.69$, R-Squared = 0.126, Adjusted R-Squared= 0.115.
Root MSE = 2.5648

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

As literature on stalking has grown, special attention has been given to the victim-offender relationship as well as the impact that stalking has on the victim, but there is a gap in the literature regarding the effects of the victim-offender relationship on the victim's emotional wellbeing. Understanding the implications of the victim-offender relationship in stalking cases is important, as stalking intensity increases based on the relationship between the victim and offender (Bjerregaard, 2000; Hanson et al., 2010; Kraaij et al., 2007; Owens, 2017; Owens, 2016; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Research has assessed the victim-offender relationship in stalking (Mullen, 1999; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan et al., 2001; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000) as well as negative victim outcomes of stalking (Bjerregaard, 2000; Hanson et al., 2010; Kraaij et al., 2007; Ngo & Paternoster, 2013, 2016; Owens, 2017; Owens, 2016; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan et al., 2003), but only one prior study has examined victim-offender relationship as a predictor of emotional distress among stalking victims (Stewart, 2011). Thus, the current study set to examine the relationship between the victim offender relationship and emotional distress among stalking victims, using the most recent iteration of the Supplemental Victimization Survey data. These data allowed for measuring emotional distress through eleven items including experiences of depression, anger, anxiety, fear, vulnerability, lack of trust, physical sickness, stress, suicidal thoughts and safety. The SVS data also allowed for examining a more robust measure of

victim-offender relationship than explored in previous research. The present study separates current and ex-intimate partners and also examined family, personal acquaintances, formal acquaintances, strangers, and unidentified offenders.

In addition to answering two research questions: "*Is there an association between victim-offender relationships and emotional health outcomes among stalking victims?*" and "*What victim-offender relationship categories are associated with experiencing more types of emotional distress?*" it was hypothesized that victims who were stalked by a current partner would report more indicators of emotional distress compared to victims who were stalked by an ex-intimate partner, relative, personal or formal acquaintance, strangers, or someone they could not identify. Findings indicate there is a relationship between the victim-offender relationship and emotional distress among stalking victims. Victims who are stalking by a current intimate partner demonstrated more emotional distress than victims stalked by personal or formal acquaintances, as well as strangers and stalkers who were unidentifiable. The hypothesis was partially supported, as some of the victim-offender relationship groups produced less indicators of emotional distress, but not all groups. Ex-intimate partners, relatives where not significantly different from the current intimate partner group. While the indicators of emotional distress were lower for personal acquaintance, formal acquaintances, strangers and those who were unidentifiable, there is still substantial emotional distress among these.

There are several important findings that were identified in the current study. First is the importance of examining the victim-offender relationship with more distinct categories. Prior research has typically used intimate, known and unknown categories when assessing the victim-offender relationship (e.g., Menard & Cox, 2016; Owens,

2016, Owens, 2017). Separating the victim-offender relationships into specific categories provides detail on the forms or the previous known and intimate relationships and their impact on emotional distress. By doing so, the current study has shown that both personal and formal acquaintances, as well as strangers and those unidentifiable, are related with lower reported emotional distress than being stalked by a current partner.

Prior research pertaining to IPV and stalking suggests that high levels of fear are present when the offender is a current or past intimate partner (Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012). By separating current and ex-intimate partners, the current study found that being stalked by a current partner is not more significantly distressing than when stalked by a former intimate partner controlling for common individual factors. This finding aligns with prior research (Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012). While the average number of types of negative emotions was the highest among current intimate partners (M=6.25), this was not significantly higher than the mean for ex-partners (M=5.61). However, past IPV stalking literature (Mechanic et al., 2000; Norris et al., 2011; Rosenfeld, 2004) has not focused on the relationship status of the victim (current or former). Therefore, this distinction has furthered the conversation by adding that, the current study did not find the difference to be significant.

Further, by refining the acquaintance category into personal and formal acquaintances, a difference between personal and formal acquaintances can be seen. The acquaintance category encompassed both current and former friends, roommates, in laws, coworkers, teachers, students and employers. The current study separated personal acquaintances to include current and former friends, roommates, and in laws, and formal acquaintances to include co-workers, teachers, students and employers, similar to Morgan

and Truman (2022). This is relevant because it is possible that different types of acquaintance relationships differentially impact emotional distress among stalking victims. By doing so, the current study's findings indicate a significant difference between the current intimate partner and personal acquaintances as well as a significant difference between the current intimate partner and formal acquaintances. The relationship familiarity and boundaries differ between formal and personal acquaintances, as such, making the distinction between the two offers some insight. Neither are more emotionally distressing to be stalked by when compared to current intimate partners.

In many studies, the intimate partner category is usually the largest, as they account for both current and ex-intimate partners (Miller, 2012; Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen et al. 1999; Racine & Billick, 2014; Zona et al., 1993). In the current study, the largest group was personal acquaintances. The current intimate partner category was actually quite small, only accounting for 5.7 percent of the sample. Pathe and Mullen (1997) found that 29% of victims were stalked by an ex-intimate partner, with no mention of a current partner in their sample of (N=100) stalking victims. In Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) study using the NVAWS, 38% of victims were stalked by a current or ex-spouse and ten percent by a current or ex-partner, of the 38%. Of the victims stalked by a current or former intimate partner 21% indicated that the stalking occurred in the relationship, 43% indicated the stalking occurred after the relationship ended and 36% noted it happened both during and after the relationship ended. In Mullen et al. (1999), sample of 145 stalkers 30% of the sample was stalked by an ex-intimate partner, again with no mention of a current partner category. Sheridan et al. (2001) on stalking had a sample 95 stalking victims of which 48% were stalked by an ex-intimate partner, with no

mention of current partners. Truman and Morgan (2016) had 20% of victims stalked by a current and ex-intimate partner, with the groupings combined. Owens (2017) also used the SVS, and had 28% of victims stalked by either an ex or current intimate partner, also combining the groups.

Other findings in the current study were interesting when compared to prior studies. Race was not a significant predictor of emotional distress in the current study. However, Ngo and Paternoster (2016) found that non-white stalking victims were more likely to have higher levels of depression, feelings of helplessness, and physical sickness compared to white stalking victims. However, Ngo and Paternoster (2012) controlled for race and found similar findings to the current study, no significant differences. As for location, there was not a significant difference when comparing urban to rural settings when looking at negative emotional outcomes of stalking victims. Menard and Cox (2016) used location as a predictive measure, and thus found that a difference can be seen in rural and urban settings when reporting stalking to police. Marital status did have some interesting finding. When compared to married individuals, divorced and never married individuals indicated experiencing more types of emotional distress.

The results from the current study are in line with prior research on stalking victimization and extends current knowledge by including the victim-offender relationship as a predictor of negative emotional outcomes. Prior research indicates that the victim-offender relationship impacts the intensity of the stalking (Logan et al., 2007; McEwan et al., 2007; Purcell et al., 2008; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000) and as the intensity of stalking increases, so does the fear and emotional distress experience by victims (Bjerregaard, 2000; Hanson et al., 2010; Kraaij et al., 2007; Owens, 2017;

Owens, 2016; Pathe & Mullen, 1997). The current study results show that there is variation in the average number of emotional distress experiences across some victim-offender relationship categories. Victim-offender relationship does impact the number of negative emotions expressed.

This study presents opportunities for future research. The current study shows significant differences using current intimate partners as the comparison group, future research could make comparisons using all or some of the other categories to see if there are more significant findings. Further, this study did not find there to be a significant difference between current and former intimate partners. IPV research could benefit from studies examining whether this finding is replicated in other samples. Future studies should focus on the victim-offender relationship and further differentiating between a range of relationships, and look at the types of emotional distress separately to get a deeper understanding of the implications of stalking. Further, future research should consider the intervening mechanisms of stalking, such as the method of stalking, and time duration of the stalking in examining the impact of victim-offender relationship on emotional distress.

Policy implications should be made cautiously, but practitioners should understand the impact victim-offender relationship can have on outcomes for stalking victims. The victim-offender relationship may influence the amount of negative emotional impacts and thus may be a factor to consider when responding to the victim as well as the resources offered. Those working in criminal justice system should also move forward with the knowledge that the victim-offender relationship does have an impact on the victims' wellbeing in stalking cases. What may seem to be an innocent act, such as

leaving an unwanted gift can cause a victim emotional distress, and thus should be taken seriously. This study shows that the average measure of emotional distress is quite high among most groups, apart from the unidentifiable group. Further, victims stalked by a current or former intimate partner are able to seek resources through women shelters, but there is not the same sort of resources available for victims who are stalked by an acquaintance or strangers.

As with any study, there are limitations. The SVS comes with the same limitations linked with the NCVS and with self-report surveys in general. The data are collected using a cross-sectional method, meaning that causal inferences cannot be drawn. The SVS does not include data on those who are homeless or hospitalized. The SVS is also a long survey which can result in respondent fatigue. The SVS asks participants about their victimization over a year, thus, making it impossible to measure the stalking time frame (NCVS, 2019). The current study does not differentiate between stalking mechanisms or experiences, instead the study looks at stalking as a whole, thus, it cannot be determined what stalking elements lead to emotional distress. While the use of an additive scale variable offers strengths, it also does not offer insight into the variation among the individual emotional distress factors. Using an additive scale, there is a lack of depth in assessing the specifics of emotional distress, such as if a respondent has high levels of anxiety, but only responded yes to that one factor, leading to less understanding of the distress. This methodological choice was made due to the benefits it offers. When assessing the emotional distress, creating an additive scale offered insight into the quantity of emotional distress types experienced by the respondent, and whether

victim-offender relationship had an influence on the amount of emotional distress indicators affirmed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, stalking has been studied in various different forms and research has evolved with time. Intimate partner stalking is now viewed through an IPV lens, indicating the importance of the victim-offender relationship. Many studies have explored the victim-offender relationship (Mullen, 1999; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan et al., 2001; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000) and others have looked at the psychological consequences of stalking (Bjerregaard, 2000; Hanson et al., 2010; Kraaij et al., 2007; Ngo & Paternoster, 2013, 2016; Owens, 2017; Owens, 2016; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan et al., 2003). Only one other study (Stewart, 2011) has looked for a direct relationship between the victim-offender relationship and emotional distress. The current study is similar to Stewart's (2011) dissertation and examines the influence of the victim-offender relationship on stalking victims' emotional distress. Results indicate that the victim-offender relationship does impact the emotional distress level of a stalking victim. Significant findings show that when compared to current intimate partners, acquaintances (both personal and formal), strangers and stalkers who were unidentifiable do not invoke as much emotional distress. The consequences of stalking are significant (Bjerregaard, 2000; Hanson et al., 2010; Kraaij et al., 2007; Logan et al., 2007; McEwan et al., 2007; Owens, 2017; Owens, 2016; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Purcell et al., 2008; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000). Therefore, the negative emotional outcomes should be considered when responding to victims of stalking.

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APPENDIX A.

Appendix A. Description of all Variables

Appendix A. Description of all Variables

Dependent Variables: Negative Emotions
Considering all of these unwanted contacts or behaviors that have occurred over the past year, did you feel…
Sad or Depressed
  Yes
  No
Angry or Annoyed
  Yes
  No
Worried or Anxious
  Yes
  No
Fearful or Terrified
  Yes
  No
Vulnerable or Helpless
  Yes
  No
Like you couldn't trust people
  Yes
  No
Dependent Variable: Negative Emotions.
Suicidal
  Yes
  No
Sick
  Yes
  No
Stressed
  Yes

  Negative Emotions
  No
Unsafe

Yes

No

Other Emotion

Independent Variable: Victim-Offender Relationship

Boss

Teacher

Student

Patients

Stranger

Unable to Identify

Control Variables

Age

Gender

Male

Female

Race

White

Black

Asian

Other

Marital Status

Married

Widowed

Divorced

Separated

Never Married

Location

Urban

Rural