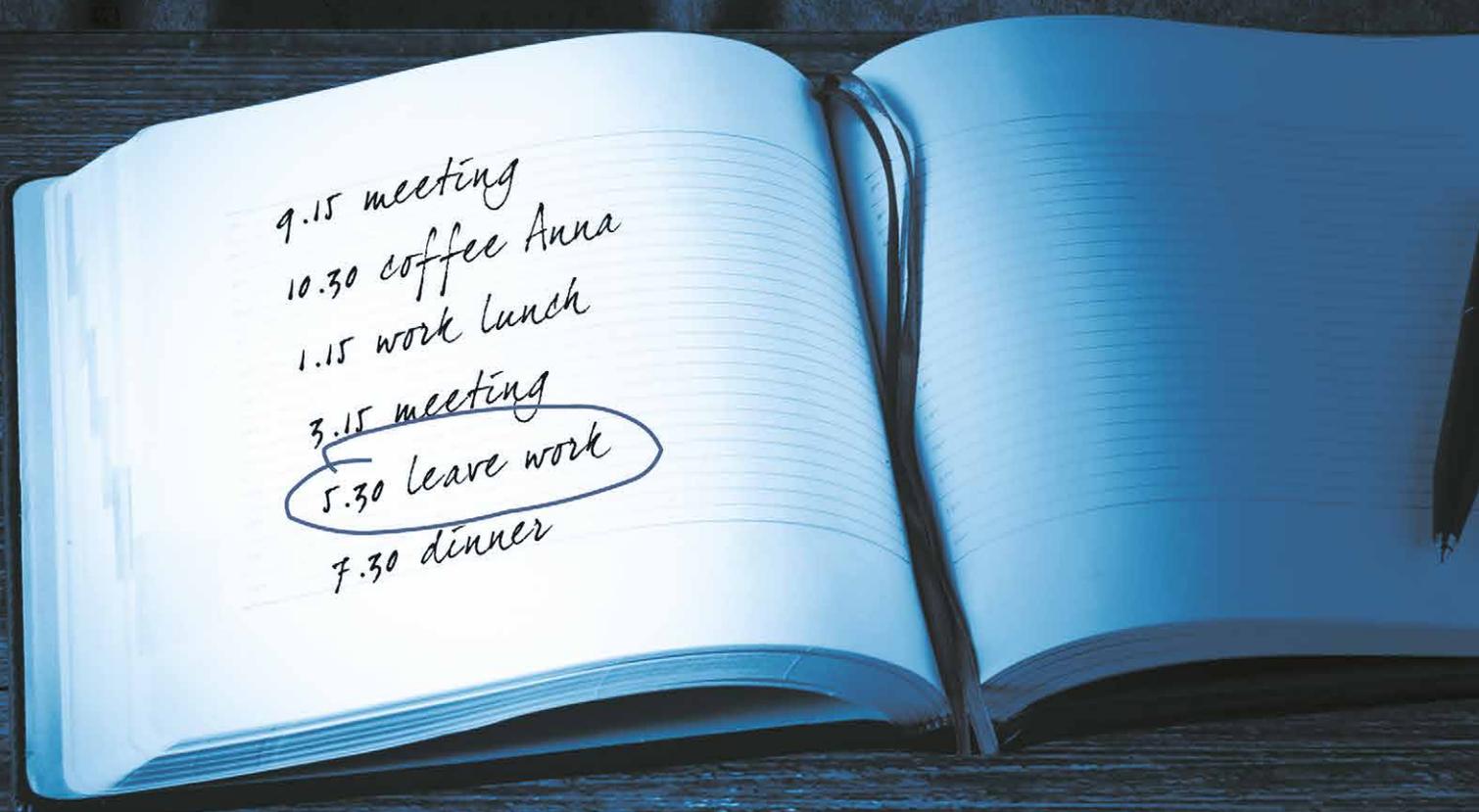


When stalking comes to work



9.15 meeting
10.30 coffee Anna
1.15 work lunch
3.15 meeting
5.30 leave work
7.30 dinner

We are all creatures of habit, and stalkers rely on this. The workplace can be one of the most dangerous places for victims of stalking. Rachel Horman explains how employers can safeguard against it

Stalking in the workplace may sound like the title of an American horror movie, but it's something that every employer needs to be aware of and have policies on. It would not be an overstatement to say that an employer's actions (or lack of) could make the difference between life and death for one of your clients, colleagues or employees.

As a stalking and domestic abuse lawyer and the Chair of Paladin, the National Stalking Advocacy Service, I have 20 years' experience of working with over 20,000 clients. This article sets out the scale of the problem, why employers need to be aware of it and how they can safeguard against it. Having worked with many victims traumatised by the experience of being stalked, I also offer practical advice for therapists and managers in organisations on how to support an individual being stalked in the workplace.

Setting the scene

Stalking is an increasingly reported problem, with recent statistics showing that one in five British women and one in 10 British men have experienced stalking in their lifetime.¹ On average, a victim will experience more than 100 incidents before they make a report to the police.² Statistics also show that in 75 per cent of domestic violence cases, the stalker will turn up at the victim's workplace and that 79 per cent of domestic violence stalkers use work resources to target their victim.³

While victims will stay away from their home while being stalked, for fear that the perpetrator will target them there, it is much more difficult to stay away from work. The stalker can be sure the victim will reliably appear at their workplace and if a stalker is an ex-partner or even a work colleague, they will know exactly where their victim parks their car, where they go for a coffee, and what time they tend to arrive at and leave work. We are all creatures of habit, and stalkers rely on this.

What is stalking?

Stalking in the workplace can take on many forms but includes the following unwanted contact:

- Waiting for somebody outside work
- Texting somebody at work

- Emailing somebody at work
- Ringing somebody at work
- Sending gifts to somebody at work
- Hacking their emails
- Making fictitious appointments for somebody at work
- Vexatious complaints about the victim
- Blackmail or 'revenge porn' incidents
- Threats
- Criminal damage

'...if a stalker is an ex-partner or even a work colleague, they will know exactly where their victim parks their car, where they go for a coffee, what time they tend to arrive at and leave work'

There have been countless examples of cases in the UK where victims of stalking have been seriously attacked and even murdered on work premises. Statistics from the US show that 76 per cent of women murdered by their ex-partners were stalked prior to being murdered⁴ and there is likely to be a similar pattern here in the UK. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 makes employers liable if they fail to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all of their employees. This includes those being stalked.

Stalking costs employers millions of pounds every year in lost days of work associated with being stalked, loss of productivity and the requirements to attend legal or medical appointments. The additional impact on an employee's productivity caused by the stress of being stalked, including loss of sleep, constant checking of their phone or appointments with professionals, such as the police, lawyers and doctors, is not to be underestimated.⁵ Unsurprisingly, many victims have symptoms similar in nature to those found in victims of post-traumatic stress disorder. The stalking may have such an impact on the



victim psychologically, that they are no longer fit to work, and indeed it may be too dangerous for them to attend work while being stalked, particularly if the stalker is a work colleague.

‘It is essential that we all take stalking seriously. At Paladin, we refer to stalking as “murder in slow motion”’

An employer is liable if a member of staff is stalking someone, regardless of whether the victim is an employee, and particularly if the stalker is using workplace resources in order to offend, such as the company telephone, internet or a work vehicle. It’s relevant that, in some professions, there is a greater likelihood that employees will be stalked by their customers or patients, and every employer has a duty to ensure that any risks are kept to a minimum. Examples of this include healthcare professionals who work extensively with the public.

It is essential that we all take stalking seriously. At Paladin, we refer to stalking as ‘murder in slow motion’. In too many cases we can see the risk escalating, allowing for multiple opportunities when the behaviour could have been stopped by interventions from professionals. Fifty per cent of domestic abuse stalkers will act on the threats they make to their victim, so it is essential that we pay attention and take action when an employee explains what is happening. A study conducted by clinical psychologist, Dr Lorraine Sheridan, showed that the average victim will have experienced over 100 incidents² before they even report stalking to the police. In stalking cases where the parties have had no prior relationship, the statistic in relation to threats is one in 10.⁶

Facts and figures

- Fifty per cent of victims have curtailed or stopped work due to stalking.⁷
- The majority of stalking victims (over 80 per cent) are female and the majority of perpetrators (over 70 per cent) are male.⁸
- In cases where the victim and perpetrator are not work colleagues, the perpetrator will attend the victim’s place of work in 50 per cent of cases.⁶
- On average, perpetrators will make contact with 21 other people associated with the victim – either to obtain information from them to assist in stalking the victim, to intimidate the victim further or to attempt to isolate the victim from their support network.

There are too many high profile cases of women who have been murdered by their stalker at their place of work. These cases are a sobering reminder of the need to take precautionary measures to support employees and keep them safe.

Jane Clough was a 26-year-old A&E nurse, who was suffering physical, sexual and psychological abuse from her partner and colleague, Jonathan Vass. Jane would sometimes be unable to attend work due to visible injuries caused by Vass and he would telephone the HR department and tell them that Jane couldn’t come to work as she had been drinking. This was an attempt to isolate her further by making it difficult for Jane to go back into work or explain why her partner had said those things about her. Work was an important feature in Jane’s life, somewhere where she could be herself as well as a place where she had a support network. Vass was trying to shatter this. After eventually separating from Vass, Jane was stalked by him. Jane predicted that Vass would murder her in one of her diary entries. Her prediction was right. On 25 July 2010, while on bail for seven counts of rape and several physical assaults, Jonathan Vass lay in wait for Jane when she parked her car at work and stabbed her 71 times before slashing her throat. Such was the extent of her injuries, that her colleagues in A&E didn’t recognise her until they found her identification card.

‘Stalking is about obsession and fixation, so a stalker will go to great lengths to feed their obsession, and changing a number will not prevent that’

How can employers help?

All employers should have a policy in relation to stalking in the workplace. In reality the vast majority do not, while too many have practices which put the member of staff at high risk in relation to stalking.

One of the most commonly given pieces of ‘advice’ is that victims should change their phone number so that the stalker can’t ring them. This can actually put them at greater risk as the stalker will have to escalate their behaviour to make contact so they may start approaching the victim directly. Stalking is about obsession and fixation so a stalker will go to great lengths to feed their obsession, and changing a number will not prevent that. It may mean that vital evidence is lost which may make a criminal prosecution more difficult.

Employers can make relatively small and inexpensive changes which have the potential to save the life of the victim. For example: changing their start and finish time; changing the location of their work; and ensuring that significant information about the victim is not revealed by other staff members who may be unaware of the problem and associated risks. Employers can arrange for the victim to park somewhere different and, if possible, to be escorted from their vehicle into the building.

Every stalking case is different and that’s why it’s essential that victims obtain expert legal advice and support in relation to their options and protective orders. While stalking has been a criminal offence since 2012, stalking is often not dealt with well by the police, who



sometimes deal with each separate incident in isolation, rather than joining them together to create a stalking charge. If the police aren't helping, a victim can be protected by the civil law by way of an injunction order known as a non-molestation order or restraining order. These orders prohibit the stalker from contacting or approaching the victim and can even cover their place of work. Breach of these orders is a criminal offence with a maximal penalty of up to five years in prison.

How can you help victims?

If you know someone who is being stalked or are working with a client who is being stalked at work, you can encourage them to begin gathering evidence. This can be difficult for victims who may want to rid themselves of unwanted communications or reminders. However, it is important that they do so, because for the police to prosecute, they will require evidence. Ensure that the victim keeps a diary of every incident and records any phone calls or messages. Take screenshots of any emails or messages and save copies. If possible, photograph or record the stalker.

At Paladin we recommend that victims of stalking tighten up their security at home, particularly to and from home and at work. They should consider changing the locks to their house and, if possible, install an alarm or CCTV. It's important to vary where they park their car as well as

their departure or arrival times. Be careful when giving out personal details on the telephone, dealing with credit card services, social networking sites and people the victim meets.

Staying safe online

Given how much of our lives are played out online, it's worth considering the following points for staying safe and reducing risk:

- Check your digital footprint frequently – the stalker may be writing about you or setting up fake profiles and you need to be aware of this.
- Change your password often and do not use the same password for everything.
- Check privacy settings on social networks and limit the amount of information you reveal.
- Be aware of geo-location and tagging on social networks to ensure that this is disabled on your smart phone, otherwise your location could be disclosed to your stalker.
- Keep your anti-virus software up to date.
- Report stalking to website administrators and the police.
- If you believe that your computer or smart phone has been hacked or compromised, stop using them immediately and take them to a specialist for advice.



- Do not open attachments on emails from unknown senders as they could contain spyware, enabling your stalker to read and send messages on your behalf and even activate the camera on your phone so that your stalker can see and hear you.

About Paladin and our work

Paladin is a charity set up in 2013 after the parliamentary enquiry into stalking recommended that a National Stalking Advocacy Service should be created in addition to criminalising stalking. We offer advice to all stalking victims and advocacy to high-risk victims of stalking, which can include speaking to the police to encourage the correct charges to be brought and the victim to be protected. We provide regular training to agencies, including the police and Crown Prosecution Service, and offer training, advice and policies to employers to ensure that the risks to their business and employees are reduced.

Working with high-profile stalking victims such as Lily Allen, we publicise the terrible impact on the victim of being stalked and the injustices facing the victim from inadequacies within the criminal justice system. Paladin offers advice to all victims, and if someone is classified as being a high-risk victim, we offer free advocacy on their behalf. In our work supporting stalking victims, Paladin has devised six golden rules, using the acronym REPORT, to consider what can be helpful to victims:

Report it as early as possible to the police, and tell others what is happening. Don't wait for 100 incidents to occur before you make a report. Only two incidents are required for a criminal prosecution.

Ensure that you get good practical advice from Paladin and specialist stalking solicitors.

Proactive evidence collection – keep all of the evidence of being stalked, such as screen shots, as they can be used in court.

Overview of what is happening – keep a diary to document what is happening and what the impact of the stalking is having on your health and day-to-day activities, as this is relevant in relation to one of the potential stalking charges.

Risk checklist – counsellors can complete the special S – DASH screening questions with the victim.⁹

Trust your instinct – if you feel uncomfortable about a person or a situation, then act cautiously and tell someone.

‘Stalking costs employers millions of pounds every year in lost days at work associated with being stalked, loss of productivity and the requirements to attend legal or medical appointments’

Closing thoughts

While stalking has been around for hundreds of years, we are now waking up to the dangers and its links to serious physical, psychological harm and also homicide. The law now recognises stalking as a criminal offence. However, there is still much work to do in training the police, Crown Prosecution Service and judges to deal with this devastating crime, effectively. There is a shift in social attitudes toward stalking as we publicise more examples of the terrifying campaign that victims are subjected to by their stalkers, thanks to brave victims speaking out and working with us.

Working with Alex Chalk MP, we have achieved the introduction of a bill in the House of Commons to increase the maximum sentence for stalking from five to 10 years to better reflect the seriousness of the crime and bring it into line with other crimes, such as fraud and criminal damage, which have far less impact on victims and are not a precursor to homicide.

If you know someone who is experiencing stalking, please pass on the details of Paladin, as it could save their life. Encourage your business to think about a stalking policy and have a trained point of contact who victims can speak to for help. Paladin can advise on this. We are a charity reliant on donations. If you or your company can help us in any way, we would be very pleased to hear from you.

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