

**INTIMATE PARTNER STALKING  
FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF FAMILY  
SUPPORT SERVICES, FORENSIC MENTAL  
HEALTH, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND  
WELFARE SERVICES**

**Final Report**

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**Brianna O'Shea**



## **TILES Mission:**

To conduct and promote evidence based research to improve the quality of law enforcement and enhance community safety.

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**Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies**  
**Private Bag 22**  
**University of Tasmania**  
**Churchill Ave, Sandy Bay, Australia 7001**

**Phone: (03) 6226 2230**

**Fax: (03) 6226 2864**

**E-mail: [tiles@utas.edu.au](mailto:tiles@utas.edu.au)**

**TILES website: [www.utas.edu.au/tiles](http://www.utas.edu.au/tiles)**

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## **THE AUTHORS**

**Brianna O'Shea** (BBehavSc, BAHons) is a PhD Candidate at the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies at the University of Tasmania.

**Sally Kelty** (BCom, BAHons, PhD) is a Research Fellow of the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies at the University of Tasmania.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

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One in ten adults from Western countries are affected by stalking at some time in their lives [1]. There is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes stalking between current and former intimate partners. There are currently no national uniform stalking laws in Australia. In Tasmania, stalking is a type of family violence which involves repetitive following or harassment. This project describes intimate partner stalking as a complex issue that has detrimental effects on the psychological, social and occupational functioning of the victim/s and their families.

The Tasmanian Department of Justice has created social policy called “Safe at Home” which is the Tasmanian Government’s response to family violence. Safe at Home provides a range of services for victims and perpetrators of intimate partner stalking, such as family violence counselling and support, police prosecutions and offender intervention [2]. This is consistent with family violence research which argues that “simple interventions based upon *either* therapy *or* criminal justice interventions are not suitable on their own” [3]. Safe at Home aims to “protect and support victims of family violence, including young people and children, while making offenders responsible for their behaviour” [4].

The most common victim profile for stalking is a “woman who has previously shared an intimate relationship with her (usually male) stalker” [5]. In Australia, a higher proportion of females (195,400) than males (110,700) reported experiencing stalking within the last 12 months [6]. Intimate partner stalking victims experience the widest range of harassment methods [5]. Past research has shown that intimate partner stalkers “generally pose a greater threat than stranger or acquaintance stalkers” [7]. However, a study revealed that the majority of men and women in Australia perceive that the threat is greatest when the stalker is not known to the victim [7]. Therefore, the perceptions of Australian men and women do not reflect the actual threat associated with intimate partner stalking.

Although there are theories for understanding family violence, there is currently no broad theoretical framework to understand intimate partner stalking. The Duluth Model is the most commonly used intervention for family violence in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Sweden and Australia. It was designed for male perpetrators of family violence towards their current female partners [8]. However, stalking may be perpetrated by men or women who are current or former partners [9]. The Power and Control Wheel is a visual representation of the 8 central themes outlined in the Model (As shown in Appendix A). This project aimed to determine whether the Duluth Model and the power and control aspect of their intervention programs is applicable post separation and to the experiences of victims and perpetrators of stalking regardless of gender.

## PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

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Criminological research on intimate partner stalking is necessary for the evaluation of frameworks and guidelines used to describe family violence, such as the Power and Control Wheel (As shown in Appendix A).

The project had three main aims:

1. To identify the range of behaviours involved in intimate partner stalking;
2. To critically analyse the usefulness of the Power and Control Wheel in describing intimate partner stalking; and
3. To outline the similarities and differences between the perspectives of multiple agencies on stalking.

## METHOD, DATA ANALYSIS AND ETHICAL APPROVALS

### Participants

The participants were 17 representatives from 4 professional groups who had knowledge and experience in working with victims and/or perpetrators of intimate partner stalking. The 4 professional groups were family support services, forensic mental health, law enforcement and welfare services. The number of individuals and their job descriptions for each professional group are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Type and Number of Participants

Type of participant		Number
Family support services	Counsellor	1
	Family violence worker	1
	Team leader	1
Forensic mental health	Psychiatrist	1
	Psychologist (clinical and forensic)	2
Law enforcement	Constable (Victim Safety Response Team)	2
	Senior constable (general duties officer)	1
	Sergeant (Victim Safety Response Team)	1
Welfare services	Refuge/shelter worker	5
	Team leader	2
Total number of participants		17

### Procedure

The data from the 17 participants was collected during digitally recorded one-on-one semi-structured interviews ( $n = 9$  interviews) and focus groups ( $n = 3$  focus groups). The interviews and focus groups ranged from 30 minutes to 45 minutes in duration. The interviews and focus groups began with a discussion about which behaviours the participants considered to be stalking and moved on to the usefulness of the Power and Control Wheel in describing intimate partner stalking. The semi-structured approach allowed for participants to choose which cases of intimate partner stalking they discussed and what issues they considered to be important. However, the participants were prompted to discuss incidents involving both male and female perpetrators.

### Qualitative data analyses

All of the recordings from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed into Word documents. Recordings were erased following verification of the transcription. The interviews and focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis to identify the central themes of intimate partner stalking.

### Ethical approval and considerations

This project was granted ethical approval by the Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee based at the University of Tasmania. This project was also granted approval by the Department of Police and Emergency Management. Consent to participate in this study was freely obtained and no rewards were offered. No participants withdrew from the study. To provide confidentiality to the participants, names were replaced with codes such as A1. The codes are used in presenting the key findings below.

## KEY FINDINGS

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The number of cases of stalking discussed by participants ranged from 1 to 9. In total, 63 cases of intimate partner stalking were analysed. Of the 63 cases of stalking, 58 were perpetrated by a male with a female victim and only 5 were perpetrated by a female with a male victim. This was consistent with Australian criminal justice statistics which showed that females were more likely to report victimisation by male stalkers.

The findings from each of the three aims are presented below.

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2. To critically analyse the usefulness of the Power and Control Wheel in describing intimate partner stalking; and
3. To outline the similarities and differences between the perspectives of multiple agencies on stalking.

### **Aim 1. To identify the range of behaviours involved in intimate partner stalking.**

**Finding #1.** The Power and Control Wheel in its current form is outdated and cannot describe contemporary patterns of stalking behaviour.

Two additional themes to those outlined in the Power and Control Wheel of family violence were identified in stalking cases. Firstly, perpetrators of intimate partner stalking were found to be “using technology” (As shown in Figure 1).

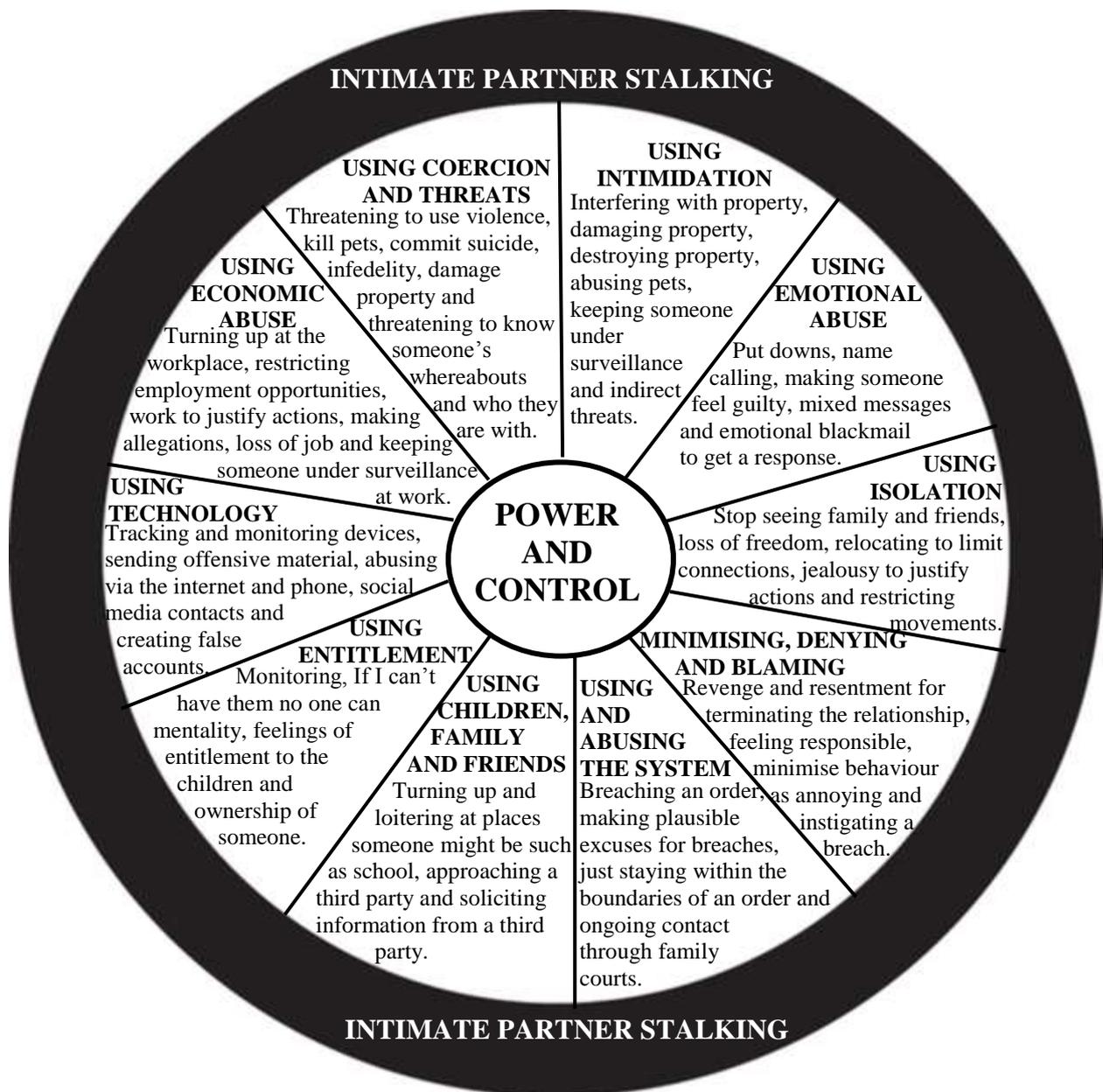
*I think it doesn't really fit the broadness we see with stalking and how stalking, particularly with Facebook ... has changed. I think it's missing the elements of what stalking now can look like. (H8)*

Secondly, perpetrators of intimate partner stalking were found to be “using and abusing the system” (As shown in Figure 1). Some aspects of the system included abusing family violence orders, making plausible excuses to law enforcement for breaches or using the court as a form of ongoing contact.

*So just going through the court process I think that that's a theatre that perpetrators use to continue on their abuse and their threats. (H8)*

An amended Power and Control Wheel can be seen in Figure 1 below. In this amended Model two new central themes were created to describe stalking behaviours in 2014, these are using technology; and using and abusing the system.

**Figure 1:** The Amended Power and Control Wheel



## **Aim 2. To critically analyse the usefulness of the Power and Control Wheel in describing intimate partner stalking.**

**Finding #2.** The Duluth Power and Control Wheel was useful in describing some aspects, but not all, of intimate partner stalking.

The study identified 6 of the 8 central themes of the Wheel in the stalking cases analysed. The 6 themes were using intimidation; using emotional abuse; using isolation; minimising, denying and blaming; using economic abuse; and using coercion and threats. The theme “using children” did not encompass the wide range of individuals who can be affected by cases of stalking.

*If the offender can't directly get to the victim you know they use their friends and their family to get to them so they'll just happen to run into them in the supermarket and say ... 'oh can you talk to her, tell her I love her'. (K11)*

Therefore, the theme “using children” was renamed as “using children, family and friends” (As shown in Figure 1).

The theme “using male privilege” was renamed as “using entitlement” so that the Wheel could be used for female and male victims of stalking (As shown in Figure 1).

*Mostly it is men that [use entitlement] but I'd say that ... women do it too to a likely lesser extent, obviously not with that same amount of physical threat. (E5)*

However, research has shown that male and female perpetrators of stalking have equivalent rates of violence associated with their behaviour [1]. The majority of participants stereotyped the female as the victim when describing stalking behaviour. The amended Wheel avoids the use of gender-specific terms such as “she” or “her”.

## **Aim 3. To outline the similarities and differences between the perspectives of multiple agencies on stalking.**

**Finding #3.** Professional groups in Tasmania defined an intimate partner differently.

The differences between the 4 professional groups and how they respond to stalking incidents are presented below.

### ***Family support services***

Intimate partner stalking was described by family support services as “quite wide ranging and it can encompass a whole variety of different types of stalking” (C3). This was consistent with the finding that victims stalked by a former intimate partner experienced the widest range of harassment methods [5]. Professionals from family support services emphasised that intimate partner stalking behaviour was persistent and intimidating. Family support services considered stalking to occur between current and former intimate partners. F6 explained a case where “in the relationship they were being messy when they were sort of being together, not together, together”. In practice, defining intimate relationships according to current and former intimates may be far more complex than demonstrated in past family violence research. The following example was representative of the concerns of family support services regarding the legal construction of stalking.

*It's important for us to be able to recognise stalking for what it is because ... our legislation can't articulate every possible strategy that a stalker might think up. (C3)*

This supported the argument that anti-stalking laws in Australia often required amendments as “more innovative stalkers come up with new behaviours” [10]. In addition to the legal construction, family support services used frameworks and guidelines such as the Power and Control Wheel to recognise stalking behaviour.

### **Forensic mental health**

All of the professionals from forensic mental health described intimate partner stalking as “*unwanted contact*” (D4, I9 & H8). D4 defined intimate partner stalking as “*making unwanted ...contact with an individual in a way that causes psychological distress or would be expected to do so*”. This was consistent with amendments to the legal construction of stalking which only required the behaviour to be “*likely to cause the other person physical or mental harm, apprehension or fear*” [11]. It was found that forensic mental health professionals considered stalking to occur between current and former intimate partners. Forensic mental health professionals attempted to categorise stalking into types of behaviour, such as “*direct contacts*” (H8), “*approach behaviours*” (D4), “*indirect contacts*” (H8) and “*contacts by proxy*” (H8). The majority of forensic mental health professionals did not use the Power and Control Wheel in their work with perpetrators of intimate partner stalking. H8 explained that the Power and Control Wheel was “*a good descriptor but it doesn’t give me that sort of risk management profile that I can use*”. Therefore, forensic mental health professionals preferred risk assessment guidelines such as the Stalking Risk Profile [12].

### **Law enforcement / police**

An intimate partner was defined by law enforcement personnel according to the significant relationship component of the Family Violence Act (2004) [13]. L12 defined a significant relationship as “*a spouse or partner, someone who’s in a significant relationship so it might not be that they’re married but caring for each other, sharing finances, living as though they were married*”. However, there were found to be inconsistencies among law enforcement personnel in regards to what constituted a significant relationship:

*I know when this was first enacted we were told basically a one night stand would be classed as a significant relationship. (K11)*

Tasmania Police were the most active in their involvement as “*police are turning up and making a decision about who the victim is*” (L12). Law enforcement personnel emphasised that they were proactive in breaching or granting orders if family violence had occurred or was likely to occur. In practice, innocuous stalking behaviour often required law enforcement personnel to provide unorthodox responses as demonstrated in the following example.

*We followed him following her in plain clothes and we had to record everything. Where she was, where he was, what distance apart they were. (J10.11)*

The Police Manual and Case Law offered law enforcement personnel practical guidelines for using their power in prosecuting offenders.

### **Welfare services**

Welfare services emphasised the individual experience of victims when describing intimate partner stalking. This was demonstrated in the definition of an intimate partner as “*somebody that is close to you like a romantic attachment, husband [or] de facto*” (G7.7). Professionals from welfare services considered intimate partner stalking to occur between current and former partners. The following example was representative of the difficulty that welfare services had in discussing cases of intimate partner stalking perpetrated by females.

*Women want to know about the new partner and what he’s doing. They can’t tend to let go. They need that bit of drama still in their life. (A1)*

It would be reasonable to suggest that this was because the refuges and shelters who participated in the study worked with and supported women and their children. Welfare services also emphasised that victims construct intimate partner stalking differently:

*Red roses mean different things to different people. If you’re getting red roses in your letter box it basically means you are going to get killed. (B2.22)*

Therefore, welfare services responded to intimate partner stalking in consideration of the

meaning attributed to the behaviour by victims. Professionals from welfare services used their own knowledge and skills in combination with the Power and Control Wheel to provide support for victims of intimate partner stalking.

## **CONCLUSION AND PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS**

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This project explored the complex issue of intimate partner stalking in its own right rather than as a component of family violence. Interviews and focus groups with multiple agencies provided insight into the usefulness of the Duluth Model's Power and Control Wheel to describe the dynamics involved in intimate partner stalking. This project suggests that the Power and Control Wheel did not describe the experiences of male victims or the families and friends of victims. Modern stalking behaviours which utilised technology and current criminal justice responses were not described in the Wheel. The project found differences between 4 professional groups (police, family support services, welfare services and mental health) in the way intimate partner stalking is understood.

Based on the findings from this project, two recommendations are proposed to improve the usefulness of the Power and Control Wheel to stalking incidents.

### **THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Recommendation 1**

- To consider the ability of the Power and Control Wheel to become a gender-neutral Model of family violence that also recognises violence perpetrated by women towards men.

#### **Recommendation 2**

- To broaden the victim-oriented nature of the Power and Control Wheel to consider the effects of intimate partner stalking on perpetrators. This would allow for professionals to recognise the dynamics between the victim and perpetrator, such as instigating breaches of orders.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: The Original Power and Control Wheel



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