Intensive Case Management for Victims of Stalking: A Pilot Test Evaluation

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This mixed-method study evaluated the early development and pilot testing of Project IMPACT, an intensive case-management intervention for victims of stalking that incorporates victim-centered crisis intervention, advocacy, and multiagency service coordination. The sample includes all 36 clients who participated in the project, as well as the victim advocates who provided them with services. Results show that most clients noted an improved sense of well-being and safety; yet, numerous clients still experienced residual symptoms of trauma and had unsatisfactory interactions with the criminal and civil justice systems. Recommendations are made to further refine, develop, and evaluate the intervention. [Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention 4:323–341 (2004)]

KEY WORDS: stalking, victimization, case management, domestic violence, evaluation, crisis intervention, trauma symptoms, design and development.

The Stalking Phenomenon

During the past two decades, there has been a growing effort across numerous disciplines to document, explain, and address the problem of stalking. Early literature focused on celebrity stalking (Deitz et al., 1991) and erotomania, a relatively uncommon label given to a person who holds the delusion that he or she is loved by another (Meloy, 1989). In the past several years, however, researchers have begun to address stalking broadly, through studies with clinical and forensic samples of stalkers and college students engaging in stalking behavior. Other studies have examined the phenomenon empirically as it relates to victim populations (see Spitzberg, 2002, for a meta-analysis of this literature). The National Violence Against Women Survey showed that, on average, approximately 1 million women and 370,000 men are stalked each year and that 10% of Americans have been stalked at some point in their lives (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

Various definitions of stalking have been employed in the development of research and legislation. Legally, stalking is defined as the “willful, malicious and repeated following or harassment of another person” (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, p. 1). In an analysis of stalking-related literature, Westrup (1998) argued that the term stalking created “a conspicuous
lack of agreement” among users (p. 276). To address numerous concerns with earlier definitions (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1996; Harmon, Rosner, & Owens, 1995; Meloy & Gothard, 1995; Zona, Sharma, & Lane, 1993), Westrup proposed the following definition of stalking behavior: “one or more of a constellation of behaviors that a) are directed repeatedly toward a specific individual (the ‘target’), b) are experienced by the target as unwelcome and intrusive, and c) are reported to trigger fear or concern in the target” (p. 276).

A stalker, then, is “someone who engages in behaviors meeting these criteria” (p. 277). This definition is proposed to promote “practical communication efforts among academic, public, law enforcement, and legal communities” (p. 275). However, Westrup’s definition fails to exclude legitimate behaviors that would otherwise meet all criteria—for example, efforts by creditors to seek payment for defaulted loans. For this reason, Westrup’s definition should be amended to exclude legitimate behaviors and should thus be used as a standard definition for practice and research.

Intervention Design and Development

Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have noted the lack of available services for victims of stalking. The emergence of this issue provides an excellent opportunity for the application of a framework for developmental research (Rothman & Thomas, 1994). The design and development framework offers a metamodel from which to develop intervention models and is described as “a set of interconnected activities that are intended to guide researchers and practitioners to develop innovative interventions for effecting change in problem situations that relate to human service” (Thomas & Rothman, 1994, p. 6). This framework has been conceptualized to consist of six phases: problem analysis and project planning; information gathering and synthesis; design; early development and pilot testing; evaluation and advanced development; and dissemination. This framework was used to develop Project IMPACT, an intensive case-management program designed specifically for victims of stalking, which integrates victim-centered crisis intervention, advocacy, and multiagency service coordination. This study focuses on the early development and pilot-testing phase of this model and includes general background information on how the first three phases transpired. During the early-development and pilot-testing phase, evaluation was an ongoing process used to examine implementation, revise program components, and produce procedures for components yielding effective results. Although the project utilizes qualitative and quantitative methods, this study emphasizes qualitative–naturalistic inquiry (Patton, 1990).

Phase 1: Problem Analysis

The consequences of stalking can be overwhelming for victims and have been described as “soul-destroying” (Littel, 1999, p. 7). Victims report numerous oppressive and life-changing impacts—physical, social, and psychological—including symptoms of traumatic stress, hyper-vigilance, disruptions in employment and social interactions, and excessive fear and anxiety (Hall, 1997; Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 2001; Littel, 1999; Mechanic, Uhlmansiak, Weaver, & Resick, 2000; Pathe’ & Mullen, 1997).

Few communities have attempted to address the problem of stalking systematically, and existing antistalking programs have focused on the criminal justice aspects of intervention (Spence-Diehl & Potocky-Tripodi, 2001; Violence Against Women Grants Office, 1998). In a densely populated and ethnically diverse urban region of the southeastern United States,
a collaborative and interdisciplinary effort was established with the purpose of designing a coordinated community response to stalking. Individuals employed in criminal justice, social service, and university settings recognized that stalking victims were an underserved population and thus led the effort to analyze the problem and proceed with an intervention design. The project designers included authors of books and articles relating to stalking, as well as human service professionals with decades of experience in working with stalking victims and offenders.

**Phase 2: Information Gathering and Synthesis**

Information gathering for the development of Project IMPACT focused on several key sources. The project designers and other practitioners, prosecutors, victims, and law enforcement personnel participated in a focus group on stalking sponsored by the United States Office for Victims of Crimes (Littel, 1999). Focus group participants generally agreed that stalking was a traumatic experience for victims that required proper identification and intervention among criminal justice personnel, social service providers, and community organizations.

Project planners also conducted site visits with two of the nation’s first stalking intervention programs, housed in criminal justice organizations in southern California (for a description of these programs, see Boles, 2001; Wells, 2001). In both of these programs, prosecutors and law enforcement officers emphasized early identification and intervention. At both sites, victims whose experiences did not yet reach the legal definition of stalking were still monitored to reduce the likelihood of escalation, and individuals engaged in stalking behaviors were warned by law enforcement to cease contact.

At the local level, planners held numerous meetings with potential collaborators from criminal justice organizations and social service agencies. A formal “Memorandum of Understanding” was developed between a police department, a domestic violence shelter, and a university-based victim advocacy program. Informal agreements were established with the prosecutors’ office and the domestic violence court (which issue orders of protection).

A literature review examined research relating to stalkers, stalking victims, and anti-stalking policies. Theoretical development in the area of stalking is in the preliminary stages, though numerous typologies of stalking have been suggested (Harmon et al., 1995; Mullen, Pathe’, & Purcell, 2000; Roberts & Dziegelowski, 1996; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001; Wright et al., 1996; Zona et al., 1993).

Collins and Wilkas (2001) have proposed *stalking trauma syndrome* as an explanation for stalking-related crises—that is, disruptions from the victim’s previous level of functioning. In this syndrome, the repetitious nature of stalking causes victims to engage in a cycle of crisis where coping styles dictate whether the victims stay in a crisis state or enter a recovery period between the stalking events. Empirical testing of this theoretical model has not yet been reported in the literature.

White, Kowalski, Lyndon, and Valentine (2000) have proposed that stalking be framed as a problem of violence against women and that it be examined contextually at various levels of analysis, ranging from sociocultural phenomena to perpetrator characteristics. Though this approach does not account for male victimization—men constitute slightly less than one quarter of victims (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998)—it does respond to the etiological complexity of the problem by proposing a multilevel-systems perspective. Thus, it serves as a useful framework for a community-based intervention in that it allows for the analysis of a range of factors that might play a role in preventing, prohibiting, promoting, or maintaining stalking offenses.
Meloy (1997) and Dziegelewski and Roberts (1995) have suggested models for victim service provision. Meloy recommended an interdisciplinary team approach driven predominantly by the pursuit of justice-oriented interventions. However, Dziegelewski and Roberts suggested a crisis intervention model aimed at minimizing the psychological trauma resulting from victimization. Despite the differences in these models, Project IMPACT designers proposed that it would be possible to combine the components using a client-centered approach where victims determine which intervention goals they wish to pursue.

Given the lack of empirical research addressing intervention with victims of stalking, the project designers sought additional guidance from the general crime-victim literature, which has been evolving since the early 1970s. They reviewed publications that described general victim-assistance services, also known as victim advocacy (see Davis & Henley, 1990; McEwan, 1995; Roberts, 1990; Weed, 1995), and specialized services for victims of domestic violence (Hague & Malos, 1998; Tan, Basta, Sullivan & Davidson, 1995; Tutty, 1996) and sexual violence (Campbell, 1998). These sources included general descriptions of case management, crisis intervention, and community coordination models adapted for victims of crime.

**Phase 3: Intervention Design—Project IMPACT Case Management Model**

In intervention development, the design process involves the operationalization of “action constructs” into intervention components (Mullen, 1994). The constructs guiding this project focused on the pursuit of stalking victims’ immediate safety, long-term security, and bio-psychosocial well-being. The project utilized a generalist case-management model (Holt, 2000) an overarching intervention framework that included service components to address each of the constructs. In this model, victim advocates served as the primary coordinators of community-service delivery for victims of stalking. Working within a multi-agency network of services, a team of advocates offered intensive client-centered, task-oriented case management services. To compensate for the intensity of service delivery and the complexity of stalking victimization, the model dictated that each client be assigned two advocates (one staff person and one social work intern). The services provided through the project are listed and defined in Table 1.

Since stalking is a relatively new social problem, specific outreach activities were necessary to help community members to identify instances of stalking and make referrals to the project. Outreach efforts included professional and community training, newspaper advertisement, the establishment of formal and informal referral agreements among service network agencies, and a review of police reports to identify and contact individuals who appeared to be stalked or were at-risk for stalking.

In the context of a multiagency service-delivery network (Austin, 1991), the advocates were presumed to function in a boundary-spanning role where they assumed “the task of coordinating all professionals and sometimes informal resources” (Holt, 2000, p. 20). In most cases, and where permission was granted by the victim, the advocates were responsible for scheduling case review meetings among personnel representing stakeholder organizations, such as law enforcement, prosecution, probation, mental health, and so forth.

The formal assessment of victims’ needs and goal setting was considered an essential part of the stepwise process of service delivery. A needs assessment instrument was developed using an adaptation of DeVillaer’s Client-Centered Community Needs Assessment (1990). This process was conceived to be a shared (advocate–client) examination of a victim’s
strengths, resources, and opportunities, as well as a critical analysis of community factors contributing to the prevention or maintenance of the stalking situation. The needs assessment form was divided among seven dimensions: psychoemotional, social support, financial, legal, physical, academic/vocational, and safety. Using this model, advocates worked with their clients to identify services that would ideally meet the needs of the clients. These ideal services were then examined to determine if they were available or accessible in the community. Information about unavailable or inaccessible services were then aggregated, to be used later for community-wide advocacy efforts. During the goal-setting process, the ideal service plan was transformed into a realistic service plan, where goals were prioritized and tasks were established to meet those goals. Identified tasks were shared among the clients, the advocates, and other service-delivery network providers, with the advocates being responsible for monitoring the process. This multiprovider focus allowed for the evaluation of the clients’ community experiences, rather than focus solely on a single organization or place the perceptual burden of goal attainment on the clients themselves.

**TABLE 1. Project IMPACT Service Definitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intake</td>
<td>Process where needs are assessed, history is gathered, goals are set, and agreement for services is established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety planning/tools</td>
<td>Provision of safety-enhancement items (911 phones, locks, alarms) and discussion of tactics to improve personal safety.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crimes compensation</td>
<td>Assistance with completing application to receive financial reimbursement for costs resulting from victimization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Contact between advocate and community member where information is shared, services are brokered, and change is requested.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Process where information about available services is gathered from community members, Internet sites, and so forth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>Contact between advocate and client where progress on case is discussed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone counseling</td>
<td>Telephone contact between advocate and client where primary focus is on discussing the psychosocial impacts of stalking victimization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal accompaniment</td>
<td>Advocate accompanies client to meetings or hearings involving the civil or criminal justice system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coordination meeting</td>
<td>Multiagency meeting between advocates, community members, and clients to discuss case strategies and coordination of services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Court Preparation</td>
<td>Sessions where role-playing and psychoeducation are utilized to prepare clients for testifying in court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategizing</td>
<td>Process of assessing current case activity and planning how to achieve client goals. Also may include general problem solving regarding recent case events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompaniment Other</td>
<td>Advocate accompanies client to meetings that are not related to legal concerns, such as meetings with employers or family members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>Advocate provides face-to-face supportive counseling, addressing psychosocial impacts of stalking victimization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychoeducation</td>
<td>Advocate shares information about stalking and other community issues. Information is designed to assist victim in decision making surrounding his or her case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert consultation</td>
<td>The opinions of local experts are sought to help develop case strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>First phone call made to clients to offer service delivery.</td>
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Phase 4: Early Development and Pilot Testing

Early development and pilot testing form the process where the intervention is fine-tuned before rigorous testing and evaluation. Key activities during this phase include creating procedures for the intervention, implementing the project, and revising the program (Rothman & Tumblin, 1994). Process evaluation is “aimed at elucidating and understanding the internal dynamics of how a program, organization, or relationship operates” (Patton, 1990, p. 95), and outcome evaluation is used to gain a preliminary understanding of how the services affect clients.

In this study, five research questions were selected based on their ability to (a) describe the intervention’s implementation and results holistically and (b) provide data to compare against the initial intervention model and theoretical frameworks. Research questions, data sources, and methods of data reduction and analysis are shown in Table 2.

Methods

The sample includes all 36 clients who participated in the project between February 2000 and June 2001, as well as the 10 victim advocates (including staff and interns) who provided services. The majority of clients were females ($n = 33$), and the majority of their stalkers were males ($n = 29$) and ex-intimates ($n = 27$). Of the 36 clients, 2 were stalked by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Data reduction</th>
<th>Method of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What services are provided to Project IMPACT clients?</td>
<td>Case activity log, needs assessment, goal setting, intervention plan</td>
<td>Service database</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What aspects of the service-delivery process vary according to client, program, or situational factors?</td>
<td>Case activity log, goal setting, intervention plan</td>
<td>Chronological case narratives; open, axial, and selective coding; service database</td>
<td>Content analysis, chi-square analysis, Spearman rank correlation coefficients, phi</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Does Project IMPACT appear to improve the safety and security of stalking victims?</td>
<td>Stalking chronological log, victim interviews</td>
<td>Chronological case narratives; open, axial, and selective coding; client database</td>
<td>Content analysis, McNemar test, phi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Does Project IMPACT appear to improve the well-being of stalking victims?</td>
<td>Victim interviews, impact of event scale, goal setting, intervention plan</td>
<td>Goal attainment database; chronological case narratives; client database; open, axial, and selective coding</td>
<td>Content analysis, Wilcoxon’s Signed Rank Test, chi-square analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do Project IMPACT advocates succeed in brokering and coordinating services for stalking victims through boundary spanning activities in the multiagency service delivery network?</td>
<td>Case activity logs, goal setting, intervention plan</td>
<td>Goal attainment database; chronological case narratives; open, axial, and selective coding</td>
<td>Content analysis, chi-square analysis, Spearman’s Rho</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
strangers and 7 by acquaintances or relatives. The clients’ ethnic backgrounds were representative of the surrounding locality: 44% were Hispanic, 28% African American, 22% non-Hispanic White, and 6% mixed or other. At service initiation, clients had been stalked for an average of 20 months (median = 9 months). The majority had at least one child (n = 29), were employed (n = 27), and were classified as low income or working poor (n = 27). Their education ranged from 7 to 21 years, with a mean of 13 years (high school plus 1 year of college or vocational training). Most were followed (67%), sent unwanted communications (94%), threatened (94%), and victims of violence (much of which occurred during a relationship with the stalker, 72%).

Quantitative and qualitative data were drawn from

- forms in the clients’ case files—intake, needs assessment, goal setting, case activity logs, stalking behavior chronology, and so forth;
- administration of the Impact of Event Scale (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979) at intake and at 4–8 months;
- participant observation field notes; and
- interview transcripts.

The lack of controls involved with agency-based research frequently results in the incomplete collection of data from all subjects. In this data set, client records were available for all 36 clients. Data for one of the clients were removed from outcomes analysis since she was identified as a false victim. Of the 36 clients, 21 completed Impact of Event Scale pretests, and 11 completed follow-ups. At the end of the evaluation period, project coordinators made efforts to contact clients and advocates with more than 2 months of program experience, via telephone calls and letters sent to their last known addresses. Those who were located included 13 clients and 4 advocates (who provided the majority of services), all of whom consented to participate in semistructured qualitative interviews that lasted 1–3 hours. All interviewees received $20 dollars for their time.

Quantitative data were entered into three databases in which the units of analysis were clients (N = 36), services (N = 1,146), and goals (N = 149). Nonparametric procedures were used primarily for analyses of these data. Statistically significant findings accompanied by medium- or large-effect sizes (measures of association at .30 or higher) were interpreted as being substantively significant.

Content analysis was used to examine qualitative data via open, axial, and selective coding of text. Additionally, chronological case-study narratives were constructed for a subsample of 5 clients (purposively selected to represent common themes of the client experience) so that project-related influences as well as external influences (e.g., family support, or other ongoing activities and events) on case outcomes could be idiographically examined. Details of two case studies are included in the results section of this paper.1

Results

**Question 1: What Services Are Provided to Project IMPACT Clients?**

The case activity logs were coded according to the categories of services provided to each client (described in Table 1) and the time spent per service. A total of 1,146 service units were provided to clients during the 17-month evaluation period. The mean number of service units per client was 32, and the mean hours per client were 15.5. Table 3 shows the frequencies, percentages, and time spent within each

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1 To protect the identity of the project’s participants, the names used in the two case studies are pseudonyms.
category of service. The three most frequently provided services were follow-up (28%), advocacy (22%), and supportive telephone counseling (11%). The most time-intensive services involved accompaniment to meetings (legal, $M = 2.56$ hours; other, $M = 2.75$ hours) and completion of the intake (needs assessment, $M = 1.5$ hours).

**Question 2: What Aspects of the Service-Delivery Process Vary According to Client, Program, or Situational Factors?**

Spearman rank correlation coefficients were used to examine associations between client and service variables. High-service usage (mean units per month) was related to low-income clients (dichotomously coded, $1 = \text{low-income/working poor}; r_s = .389$, $p < .05$, $n = 35$) and to those lacking in social support (dichotomously coded, $1 = \text{low social support}; r_s = .326$, $p < .001$, $n = 35$). It was also linked to stalkers’ following ($r_s = .436$, $p < .05$, $n = 35$) and surveillance behaviors ($r_s = .419$, $p < .05$, $n = 35$). This is likely due to victims’ inability to remove themselves from their stalkers’ spheres of activity; that is, they couldn’t afford to leave the neighborhood or change jobs. Qualitative data revealed numerous cases where these clients became trapped in a downward spiral and one problem led to another. For example, one client’s stalker slashed all four tires on her car. The money spent replacing them put her behind on her apartment rent, which in turn created a crisis of potential eviction.

Approximately one third of the clients withdrew from services following the intake or brief service usage. Three service withdrawal clients were located for follow-up interviews. Two attributed their withdrawal to the apparent inexperience of their advocates. These withdrawals occurred during the first few months of the project, when advocates had received 40 hours of training but had not yet gained sufficient practice experience in the community. The other client had utilized basic referral services and stated that she did not realize the project could have helped her in other areas. Following their interviews, all
three requested to be reengaged in service delivery. Quantitative analysis showed that service withdrawal increased for African American clients, $\chi^2 (1, N = 36) = 13.57, p = .000$; $\varphi = .614, p = .000$, and for those whose needs assessments were not fully completed (ordinally coded; $r_s = -.518, p < .001, n = 35$). It is not clear whether cultural incongruities influenced this phenomenon since the African American clients were served by advocates representing multiple backgrounds (Hispanic, African American, and non-Hispanic White). However, several qualitative passages allowed for minimal speculation that inaccurate assumptions were made about the clients’ intentions and desired service outcomes—for example, in some of these cases, victims’ apprehension to involve law enforcement appeared to be interpreted as ambivalence about their overall desire for help.

Numerous inconsistencies in program implementation were found to be associated with personnel changes resulting from funding instability and the tendency for new advocates to over- or underemphasize certain program components. Qualitative analysis indicated that new advocates (staff and interns) tended to underutilize outreach and needs assessment activities while relying too heavily on particular microaspects of service provision, such as supportive counseling or information gathering. For example, case files that documented extensive time attributed to counseling activities frequently included incomplete needs assessments, few formalized goals, and low levels of goal attainment. When these clients were interviewed at follow-up, they often praised the emotional support they received but complained of continued unmet needs. It seemed that, regardless of previous related work experiences, advocates needed 2–3 months of supervision to learn the program model and implement its components. When advocates achieved a balance between the micro- and macrodimensions of the model (i.e., support-related versus boundary-spanning dimensions), client satisfaction and goal attainment tended to be high. The following example demonstrates such a case.

**Case Example: Karena.** Karena had separated from her husband a year and several months before seeking assistance from Project IMPACT. At the time, they had two children under 10 years old. During their 11 years of marriage, Karena was physically, sexually, and emotionally abused on a regular basis. On two occasions, she received physical injuries requiring emergency medical care. Upon separation, Karena applied for and received an injunction for protection against domestic violence. During the first year of separation, Karena continued to be threatened and physically assaulted, and she had her home vandalized by her husband. Three months before contacting Project IMPACT, Karena’s husband was arrested and charged with aggravated stalking. He was immediately released from jail. Following the arrest, he stopped engaging in overt stalking behaviors and shifted to covert activities, such as gathering information from the children and monitoring the activities of Karena and her children. He would then use the information out of context to harass her. For example, he obtained a court order to prohibit his son from participating in the Big Brothers / Big Sisters program after he discovered that the “big brother” took the family out to dinner (despite never being romantically involved with Karena). Around the same time, Karena began to actively pursue a divorce. She requested help from Project IMPACT in the midst of a series of hearings regarding child visitation, divorce mediation, and the progression of the criminal case. Though she was already in contact with local social service and court-related organizations (via court-related needs and therapy for herself and her kids), her
social support system was not sufficient to meet her needs at the time. She believed that she could not rely on family and had been put “on notice” at work.

Upon intake, Karena’s needs were assessed, and the following goals were developed:

1. ensure protection for herself and her kids via the terms of the divorce agreement;
2. increase tangible forms of social support, such as baby-sitting;
3. attain financial stability (she was several months behind on her mortgage);
4. attain crisis support and psychoeducation during the divorce and criminal court proceedings;
5. coordinate services among various providers;
6. promote physical well-being via healthy living changes;
7. identify low-cost child care options; and
8. identify low-cost health care options.

Her first 6 months of service delivery were notably intense and characterized by almost daily contact with her advocates. Most service contacts included units of crisis counseling, formulating strategies, and problem solving. The interplay between the civil and criminal justice systems, her health, and her work created circumstances where she continually needed to set priorities, seek outside support, and decipher mixed messages from service providers. For example, she was “advised” by her family court attorney to drop the aggravated stalking charges against her husband. The prosecutor informed her that she does not have the legal right to drop charges and could be charged with a crime if she does not cooperate with their office. Advocates played a key role during this process by helping Karena understand the nature of the conflict between the criminal and family court systems, helping her draft a letter to her divorce attorney explaining what her needs were and meeting with the prosecutor to engage his assistance with the civil matters. Advocates also role-played with Karena how she could address problems at work; they obtained financial support for her to pay past-due bills; and they helped her to develop a budget. At the end of the evaluation period, Karena reported a high satisfaction with the project, and the majority of her goals had been successfully achieved.

**Question 3: Does Project IMPACT Appear to Improve the Safety and Security of Stalking Victims?**

To assess victim safety, this question examined quantitative data relating to changes in stalkers’ behaviors and qualitative data relating to factors that may have influenced this behavior, such as victims’ involvement in the criminal and civil justice systems as well as advocates’ influence on those systems. Stalkers appeared to respond to criminal and civil justice–based interventions by reducing violent and threatening behaviors; however, covert behaviors frequently continued. The presence or absence of 10 types of stalking behaviors were assessed at intake and follow-up, and phi was used to evaluate the strength of these differences (see Table 4). Statistically significant reductions were observed in unwanted communication, unwanted face-to-face contact, surveillance, receiving unwanted objects, being followed, receiving threats, and being a victim of violence. Due to the small sample size, only unwanted communication (φ = −.548, p = .012, n = 21) and unwanted face-to-face contact (φ = −.331, p = .129, n = 21) had reductions associated with medium- or large-effect sizes. Covert behaviors such as information gathering and third-party/institutional harassment continued for numerous clients. This phenomenon was observed in qualitative passages showing several ways that
stalkers used pseudolegitimate means to harass their victims, including filing civil law suits, repeatedly scheduling court hearings to make minor adjustments in child custody and divorce agreements, and gathering information from third parties (employers, family) to gain knowledge of the victim’s whereabouts and activities.

Analysis of case narratives indicate that successful reductions in stalking activity were often related to multidisciplinary strategies and the persistent boundary-spanning efforts of advocates. Advocates arranged for multiagency case-review meetings 29 times over the course of the evaluation period, during which they shared information about the case and made efforts to promote empathy for their clients. In several cases, advocacy efforts seemed to influence criminal justice providers’ willingness to pursue further sanctions of stalkers, including making arrests, pursuing prosecution, and filing probation or protective-order violations. In other cases, advocacy efforts were either ineffective or insufficient to influence change—for example, advocacy efforts were halted at the first sign of a barrier. The following case study of Nadia demonstrates successful advocacy and coordination efforts.

**Case Study: Nadia.** Nadia contacted Project IMPACT after experiencing extensive stalking and physical violence from her ex-boyfriend. She was referred by the police, who had recently arrested her stalker for the fourth time on charges of domestic violence and aggravated stalking. At the time of intake, she had been issued two stay-away protective orders and a temporary injunction for protection that was due to end in 3 months. She is the mother of three children, with the youngest fathered by the stalker. Determined during the needs assessment meeting, Nadia’s goals were to seek the following:

1. relocation assistance from crimes compensation,
2. basic needs through local charities,
3. counseling,
4. legal representation, and
5. coordination of criminal justice activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>McNemar ( p ) values</th>
<th>Pre No Post No</th>
<th>Pre Yes Post Yes</th>
<th>Pre Yes Post No</th>
<th>Phi (( p ))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted communication</td>
<td>( p = .000^{**} )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted face-to-face contact</td>
<td>( p = .000^{**} )</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>( -.331 (.129) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveillance</td>
<td>( p = .000^{**} )</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>( .181 (.406) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted objects</td>
<td>( p = .008^{*} )</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>( .258 (.237) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information gathering</td>
<td>( p = .289 )</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>( .242 (.279) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following</td>
<td>( p = .002^{*} )</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>( .289 (.176) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td>( p = .000^{**} )</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>( .050 (.819) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>( p = .000^{**} )</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>( p = .070 )</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>( -.149 (.484) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalking through third parties and institutions</td>
<td>( p = .727 )</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>( .155 (.477) )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Dash indicates noncalculable data. For each category, \( n = 21 \), except for following and vandalism \( (n = 22) \) and information gathering \( (n = 20) \).

\(^{*} p < .05. \quad ^{**} p < .001.\)
Despite the previous four arrests, Nadia’s stalker had not been prosecuted.

In the 4 months following the intake, the advocate attended several meetings with Nadia and with personnel from the prosecutor’s office. Initially, they appeared to be committed to getting a prison sentence for Nadia’s ex-boyfriend. When they discovered that Nadia had been communicating through letters with her ex-boyfriend while he was in jail, they indicated to her and her advocate that the case was weakened. The advocate had been unaware of the communication between Nadia and the stalker. When confronted with this information, Nadia shared that she did not trust the system and believed that continuing communication with him would reduce the likelihood that he would harm her when released from jail. The advocate shared this information with the prosecutor in an attempt to build empathy for her client’s situation. Nadia’s ex-boyfriend was given a plea agreement to be released from jail and placed on a period of probation. One of the restrictions on his probation was that he was to have no contact with Nadia or her children. Within weeks of being released, the stalker sent a letter addressed to his and Nadia’s 2-year-old daughter. It did not contain any threats but expressed unhappiness about Nadia’s not wanting “anything to do” with him. Upon receipt of this letter, Nadia called her advocate, who then contacted the probation officer. The officer stated that she thought that the letter was “innocent” and indicated that she was unwilling to do anything about it. The advocate then contacted the police department. The first responding officer refused to take a complaint. The advocate pursued it with another police official, who advised that the letter was a violation of the stay-away order and as such was a criminal offense. A representative from the police department then contacted the probation officer and advised her that she needed to file a violation of the probation. The representative (a partner and consultant with Project IMPACT) expressed to the probation officer that he believed Nadia’s stalker was testing his limits and would continue to engage in more serious violations if this one was not directly addressed. As a result, the stalker was sent back to jail, and a probation violation hearing was set. At the hearing, the client, her advocate, and the representative from the police department all testified to their concerns for the client’s safety and the progressive violence she had been experiencing over the prior year. At the end of the hearing, the judge ordered the stalker to 3 years in state prison. At Nadia’s follow-up interview, she stated that she still received calls and letters from him in prison but that she feels safer and is happy to no longer worry about the safety of her children.

**Question 4: Does Project IMPACT Appear to Improve the Well-Being of Stalking Victims?**

Results showed that most clients noted an improved sense of well-being, though residual symptoms of trauma remained for numerous individuals. The Impact of Event Scale (IES; Horowitz et al., 1979) was used to measure intrusion and avoidance symptoms associated with trauma. The authors of the scale reported that it demonstrated internal consistency ($\alpha = .79-.92$). The IES was administered to 21 of the 36 clients at intake, where they showed a mean intrusion score of 23.2 and a avoidance score of 24.4. The mean norms reported by Horowitz and colleagues for clients seeking trauma treatment were 21 for intrusion and 20.8 for avoidance. Wilcoxon’s Signed Ranked Test was used to compare intake and follow-up administrations of the IES for 11 clients, and the results were nonsignificant for each subscale. In most cases ($n = 6$), one subscale increased while the other decreased (see Table 5). Qualitative analysis showed that these patterns were
generally linked to continued stalking behaviors or court cases, where the intrusion subscale increased and the avoidance subscale decreased. The opposite was true for those who were no longer being stalked nor involved with the courts. During follow-up interviews, several clients stated that they intentionally avoided reminders of their stalking experiences and perceived it as a positive coping mechanism.

Among the thirteen interviewees, the perceived improvement of personal well-being ranged from no improvement \((n = 1)\) to being “up and down” \((n = 9)\) to vast improvement \((n = 3)\). They were all asked to specifically describe their perceptions of how the project did or did not help them, how other community members did or did not help, and what they did for themselves to contribute to their well-being. The client who reported no improvement had withdrawn from services within 3 weeks of her intake and stated that she resumed consensual contact with her stalker because she feared that the violence would escalate otherwise. She reported that she did not believe that Project IMPACT had helped her in the areas that she was interested in receiving help (locating affordable housing and finding child care alternatives). These goals were documented, but her case file showed that her advocate’s efforts focused primarily on linking the client to the criminal justice system.

The majority of the “up and down” clients were still experiencing covert stalking behaviors, were engaged in divorce or child-custody proceedings, or had continued symptoms of trauma. Most had been linked to individual therapists, arranged by their advocates. The following quotes demonstrate the clients’ comparisons of “then” and “now”—that is, before and after Project IMPACT:

My life was total insanity. It was an emotional roller coaster. I went between terror and rage. . . . I’m still mad and hurt about [losing my job]. . . . This experience was hell . . . but in some ways [I’m] happier than ever.

It’s a lot different. [I’m] still going through a depression, but it is better than before. I’d cry in my car. I felt trapped . . . . Now I feel a sense of peace. I go about my business.

On a scale of one to ten. Before it was a 10 [the worst]. . . . Now it is a five because . . . [he is] capable of finding out where I am.

When asked specifically about how Project IMPACT helped them, clients lacking social support frequently utilized grandiose terms to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Intrusion intake</th>
<th>Intrusion follow-up</th>
<th>Intrusion change</th>
<th>Avoidance intake</th>
<th>Avoidance follow-up</th>
<th>Avoidance change</th>
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</thead>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
describe their advocates—such as “my savior” and “a godsend”—whereas those with adequate support networks described Project IMPACT as part of an overall helping system that included friends, family, employers, and others. The following quotes demonstrate two clients’ perceptions of these services:

A lot of emotional support. I started with [one advocate] and now [another advocate] is still wonderful. They accompanied me to court and gave me contacts. [The advocate] helped me with getting monies from [an organization]. The main thing was emotional support. It was everything.

Project IMPACT has been my salvation. Otherwise I wouldn’t have known what to do. . . . [I got an] immediate response from [an advocate]. She took time to listen to me. I wasn’t expecting that. . . . [She was] very interested in my case. She made phone calls to attorneys . . . offered to talk to pro bono attorneys . . . [It] made me feel at ease again.

Of the three clients who described “vast improvement” in their well-being, two had changed their identities and relocated, and the other had been stalked for only a few weeks and had no more problems. The clients who relocated described some ongoing problems associated with identity change, such as not having a credit history, but they nonetheless described their happiness in being able to live “normal lives.”

Interviewees’ comments about the project provided preliminary support for the use of several intervention components, including support services, psychoeducation, and safety planning. These services seemed to help clients cognitively reframe their perceptions of the stalking experience and gain a sense of empowerment over their circumstances. Numerous interviewees stated that after working with Project IMPACT advocates, they had a better knowledge of their safety options and no longer felt as though their stalkers were controlling their lives.

**Question 5: Do Project IMPACT Advocates Succeed in Brokering and Coordinating Services for Stalking Victims Through Boundary-Spanning Activities in the Multiagency Service Delivery Network?**

Clients and their advocates mutually set 149 goals, 124 of which were assessed for their level of achievement. The remainder were excluded because they were in process or were no longer desired by the clients. The 124 goals were divided among seven categories: legal (n = 40), financial (n = 29), safety (n = 25), social support (n = 12), emotional (n = 11), academic/vocational (n = 4), and physical (n = 3). The variable for level of achievement was measured on a 4-point scale including the categories no achievement, partial low, partial high, and full. Goals achieved at the partial high or full levels were considered to be satisfactory. A 67% level of satisfactory goal achievement was observed overall, though goals involving legal issues (rs = −.32, p = .000, n = 124) and boundary-spanning actions targeted toward justice-based organizations (rs = −.28, p = .005, n = 99) were correlated with low achievement. Qualitative data offered further details of inconsistencies in the enforcement of protective orders and state statutes. On several occasions, a protective order was granted in the domestic violence court but dropped when the case was transferred to a family court judge (in the context of a divorce or child custody hearing).

Of the 124 goals, 70% (n = 87) involved tasks that required boundary-spanning efforts, including linking clients to available services (n = 52), advocating for change (n = 19), or brokering a service that was otherwise unavailable (n = 16). The majority were associated with
satisfactory levels of achievement (81% linking, 75% brokering, and 58% advocating).

**Discussion and Limitations**

The diversity of data sources and types allowed for an in-depth analysis of the processes and outcomes associated with this pilot project. For the majority of clients who actively engaged in service delivery, goals were successfully attained, and safety and well-being showed improvement. When problems arose (such as service withdrawal and unsuccessful goal attainment), factors were identified and are thus useful for improvements in the program and its procedures. The data hold preliminary implications for practice and policy since the findings are not generalizable and since the methods utilized to examine outcomes do not control for threats to internal validity. Thus, recommendations are specific to the evaluated program, though they may be relevant in a general sense, given the lack of published research in this area.

The sample of Project IMPACT clients was skewed toward women stalked by former intimate partners. Since stalking is a broad social problem that includes nonintimate stalking and male victimization (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), it is important to recognize that the project’s outreach efforts were insufficient to attract these populations. Therefore, wider outreach mechanisms, such as broad media campaigns, might be more effective in identifying a better representative group of victims.

Personnel issues played an important role in the variability of the project’s implementation and delivery of services to clients. Advocate factors seemed to have influenced service withdrawal, client satisfaction, needs assessment, goal setting, and goal attainment. These inconsistencies seemed to fade as advocates gained experience and received supervision. The initial program design required that advocates receive approximately 40 hours of training. This model reflects the grassroots history of victim services and is commonly observed in nonprofit community-based programs where volunteers or paraprofessionals are trained to provide support services (Weed, 1995). Consequently, there seems to be a presiding assumption that the case management functions of victim advocacy do not require advanced skills—that is, they can be taught in a manner of weeks. In this study, however, the complexity of stalking victimization demonstrates the importance of having advocates with sufficient knowledge to assess a range of needs and skills to balance the micro- and macro-functions of case management (support oriented versus boundary spanning). In the latter months of the project, the preparation and supervision of advocates was improved by the development of an extensive training manual, the consistent use of weekly case review meetings, and the availability of increased opportunities to shadow experienced social workers.

The findings relating to service withdrawal also highlight the need to “start where the client is” and to recognize that many clients are distrustful of or uncomfortable with the criminal justice system. This is particularly important for victim advocates who are housed in police departments and who serve marginalized populations. If receiving crisis services is contingent on victims’ willingness to pursue criminal charges (as is frequently the case in justice-based programs; Weed, 1995), many opportunities for early intervention will be lost, and some cultural groups may be differentially affected. Even though Project IMPACT did not require clients to pursue criminal justice options, it appears as though some advocates strongly emphasized these choices and interpreted clients’ resistance as a general unwillingness to get help. In this study, the majority
of African American clients resided in inner-city neighborhoods, where mistrust of law enforcement is common. Thus, it is possible that the high rate of service withdrawal among African Americans was related to perceived pressure to file criminal charges or seek protective orders.

Several components of Project IMPACT appear to have resulted in positive outcomes for clients. The boundary-spanning activities of advocates resulted in the majority of clients’ goals being satisfactorily achieved. The psycho-education and crisis intervention services were perceived by victims as being validating and empowering. Clients attributed safety planning to increases in protective behaviors and re-framed perceptions of fear. The multidisciplinary strategies seemed to improve interagency coordination, offer a diversity of perspectives, and promote empathy for victims’ experiences and decisions. Additionally, the availability and personal support of advocates seemed to reduce clients’ perceptions of isolation and increase their support network during times of peak stress.

The relatively high IES scores at intake and the subscale fluctuations at follow-up demonstrate the severity of psychological trauma generated by stalking and the challenges for service providers to minimize those symptoms in the context of ongoing victimization. Despite the provision of crisis counseling and victims’ linkage to therapeutic services, no overall significant changes in intrusion or arousal symptoms were observed. Maslow’s conceptualization of a hierarchy of needs provides one interpretation of these findings. According to Maslow’s framework, the need to survive and achieve a sense of safety and security would precede the progressive needs for a sense of belonging, for self-esteem, and for self-actualization. Thus, one could hypothesize that the need to reduce symptoms of trauma would hold less importance until issues of safety, financial stability, and social support were addressed. Supporting this concept are the findings that show that the most frequently established goals were related to legal, financial, and safety issues. This ex post facto hypothesizing, however, should be recognized as conjecture and should thus signal the need for further research.

Future research should examine the continuance of covert stalking behaviors after criminal justice measures have been utilized. It should also investigate differential enforcement practices of antistalking statutes and protective orders among police and judicial personnel. This study showed that, even when stalkers appeared to no longer pose a physical threat, ongoing intrusions were often accompanied by negative psychosocial consequences. Thus, statutory definitions of stalking that mandate a clear, credible threat of physical harm will still legally permit stalking through covert behaviors, such as information gathering (or tracking) and third-party/institutional harassment (or proxy stalking; Mullen, Pathe’, & Purcell, 2000). Despite criticisms of these statutory criteria (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Violence Against Women Grants Office, 1998), numerous states restrict their definitions of stalking to behavior that poses a clear threat of harm.

The design and development framework (Rothman & Thomas, 1994) proved to be a useful guide for evaluating the early development and pilot testing of this intervention. Using a mixed-method design, the study was able to identify implementation problems, design flaws, intervention strengths, and areas of feasible procedure development. It was particularly useful in identifying the differential influences of the program design versus factors associated with program implementation. As such, a feedback loop has been established to help refine the design, minimize implementation problems, and prepare the project for more rigorous testing than that achieved here.
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