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## Intimate Partner Stalking and Femicide: Urgent Implications for Women's Safety

Judith McFarlane, R.N., Dr.P.H., F.A.A.N.,\*  
Jacquelyn C. Campbell, R.N., Ph.D., F.A.A.N.,  
and Kathy Watson, M.S.

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**This study describes the type and extent of intimate partner stalking and threatening behaviors that occurred within 12 months prior to a major assault or attempted or actual partner femicide and specifies which behaviors were associated with an increased risk of potential or actual lethality. The design was a ten-city case-control study of 821 women: 384 abuse victims and 437 attempted or actual femicide informants. Data were derived using a 16-item inventory. Logistic regressions, with adjustments for demographic variables, were used to identify the significant perpetrator behaviors associated with attempted/actual femicide. Women who reported the perpetrator followed or spied on**

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\*Correspondence to: Dr Judith McFarlane, Texas Woman's University, 1130 M. D. Anderson Blvd., Houston, TX 77030, U.S.A. E-mail: JMC FARLANE@TWU.EDU

Dr. McFarlane is Endowed Parry Chair in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, College of Nursing, Texas Woman's University. Dr. Campbell is Anna D. Wolf Endowed Professor and associate dean for doctoral education programs and research at School of Nursing, Johns Hopkins University. Kathy Watson is a staff statistician with the University of Texas Health Sciences Center in Houston.

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**them were more than twice as likely to become attempted/actual femicide victims. Threats by the perpetrator to harm the children if the woman left or did not return to the relationship place the woman at a ninefold increase in the risk of attempted/actual femicide. Conclusions are that certain stalking and threatening behaviors are strong risk factors for lethality, and women must be so advised. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.**

## INTRODUCTION

Stalking, as defined in the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey, includes repeated (two or more) occasions of visual or physical proximity, non-consensual communication, or verbal, written or implied threats that would cause fear in a reasonable person (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000). Using this definition, the results of the NVAW telephone survey of 8000 U.S. women and 8000 U.S. men found 1% of the women and 0.4% of the men reported being stalked during the preceding 12 months. Eight per cent of these same women and 2% of the men reported life-long prevalence of stalking (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000).

The NVAW survey confirmed that most female victims know the stalker; strangers stalked only 23% of female victims. Overall, 62% of female victims were stalked by a current or former intimate partner, with 38% of the women reporting stalking by current or former husbands, 10% by current or former cohabiting partners, and 14% by current or former dates or boyfriends. Acquaintances and relatives composed the remaining groups of non-intimate, non-stranger stalkers. Stalking by an intimate partner occurred before the relationship ended for 21% of the women, after the relationship ended for 43%, and 36% of the women said stalking occurred both before and after the relationship ended (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000).

### Stalking and Intimate Partner Assault

Eighty-one per cent of the women in the NVAW Survey who were stalked by a current or former husband or cohabiting partner were also physically assaulted by the same partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000). This supports other studies that have reported that stalkers are far more likely to be violent if they have had an intimate relationship with the victim (Coleman, 1997; Kohn, Flood, Chase, & McMahan, 2000; Meloy, 1996; Mullen, Pathe, Purcell, & Stuart, 1999). Another study found serious violence (defined as grievous bodily harm, wounding, attempted murder and murder) significantly associated with previous sexual intimacy between stalker and victim. Although serious violence occurred in 70% of the intimate partner stalkers, psychotic illness was present in only 20%. This study determined that serious violence, not psychotic illness, was significantly associated with intimate partner stalkers (Farnham *et al.*, 2000). When violent (aggravated) stalkers were compared with nonviolent stalkers on variables of demographics, psychiatric diagnosis, military experience, and relationship history with victim, only one variable approached statistical significance. Violent stalkers were more likely to

have had a previous intimate relationship, with ex-wives the group of victims most likely to be targeted by violent stalkers (Schwartz-Watts & Morgan, 1998).

Additionally, the NVAW Survey confirmed the link between stalking and controlling behavior. Ex-husbands who stalked were significantly more likely than ex-husbands who did not stalk to engage in emotionally abusive (e.g., shouting, swearing) and controlling behavior (e.g., limiting contact with others, jealousy, possessiveness). These same emotionally abusive and controlling behaviors clearly occur to women assaulted by intimate partners (Klein *et al.*, 1997).

In 1996, there were 840 000 incidents of rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assaults in the U.S. in which intimates victimized women. The highest percentage of intimate violence was among women aged 16–24 (Greenfeld *et al.*, 1998). The NVAW survey found 52% of the female victims of stalking were between 18 and 29 years of age. A strong connection exists between intimate partner stalking and assault, with younger women more often victimized by both practices (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

Although perpetrators stalk many more battered women than are actually killed, predicting who will be a stalker and what relationship stalking behavior has with severity of injury or death of the victim is not known. Experts on abuse warn that the most dangerous perpetrators can be identified by their stalking behavior (Hart, 1988). Psychologists believe that stalking behavior and obsessive thinking are highly related behaviors (Meloy, 1998). One study that profiled perpetrators of domestic violence by the presence or absence of stalking behavior found stalkers, compared with non-stalkers, tended to live alone, were less likely to be married, and used more alcohol (Burgess *et al.*, 1997). A profile of stalkers by Meloy (1996) noted that at least one-half of stalkers explicitly threaten their victims, and, even though most threats are not carried out, the risk of violence increases when there is a verbal threat. Meloy further noted that the frequency of violence among stalkers toward the person being stalked averages in the 25–35% range, with the most likely group of stalkers to be violent being those individuals who have had a prior sexually intimate relationship with the victim.

Authors agree that most victims of stalking suffer major life disruptions and serious psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, and symptoms of trauma (Hall, 1998; Pathe & Mullen, 1997). When stalking is coupled with a history of intimate partner assault, victims in one study experienced over three times as many anxiety symptoms as victims with no such histories. Additionally, these same victims experienced almost twice as many stalking behaviors as women with no histories of intimate partner assault (Nicastro *et al.*, 2000). Researchers recommend stalking be considered a risk factor for further physical abuse or a lethal incident just by virtue of the tenacious proximity seeking toward the victim, especially if the stalking occurs in combination with other high risk behaviors (Walker & Meloy, 1998).

### **Prevalence and Perpetrator Characteristics of Intimate Femicide**

Women are more likely than men to be murdered by an intimate. In 1996, nearly 2000 murders were committed by intimates, and in almost three out of four of these

killings, the victim was a woman (Greenfeld *et al.*, 1998). Women are more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than by all other categories of known assailants combined (Browne, Williams, & Dutton, 1999; Kellerman & Mercy, 1992). Over the last two decades women have accounted for an increasingly greater proportion of persons killed by an intimate. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1994), in 1977, 54% of the victims killed by an intimate partner were females. By 1992, the proportion of female victims killed by intimates had increased to 70%, and this proportion has continued to rise slightly through the 1990s to 75% in 1996 and 73% in 1998 (Greenfeld *et al.*, 1998).

More recent statistics, tracing intimate murders since 1976, document a decrease in intimate murders among men and blacks (both male and female) and murders involving firearms. A second study examined national trends in partner homicides from 1980 to 1995 by gender and relationship type (Browne & Williams, 1993). Overall, male victims experienced a greater decline in partner homicide victimization rates than did female victims. Married females were at greater risk than married males during the entire study period. For unmarried partners, female homicide victimization rates increased from 1982 to 1992, and then declined between 1992 and 1995; however, victimization rates for unmarried males declined throughout the entire period. Finally, a replication analysis examined the same data period (1976–1995) separately for spouses and ex-spouses (Puzone *et al.*, 2000), as prior research indicates that divorced and separated women may be at greater risk for intimate partner femicide compared with married women (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; Wilson & Daly, 1993) and are more likely to be killed by their ex-partners than married women are to be murdered by a husband (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997). Study findings concluded that femicide is decreasing for both spouses and ex-spouses. When stratified by both race and relationship type—all categories of race by relationship type, except for unmarried White females—have displayed downward trends in partner homicide victimization rates.

Partner femicides are frequently preceded by domestic violence and may involve the woman's recent separation from the relationship (Arbuckle *et al.*, 1996; Campbell, 1992; Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997). It is estimated that between 29 and 54% of female murder victims (i.e., femicides) are battered women (Felder & Victor, 1997). A study of 586 femicides in North Carolina between 1991 and 1993 used medical examiner files and law enforcement reports to document that 76.5% of partner femicides were preceded by physical assault (Moracco *et al.*, 1998). Male perpetrator behaviors that are repeatedly associated with partner femicide include perpetrator gun access and prior use, threats to use a weapon, previous serious injury inflicted towards the victim, extreme jealousy, threats of suicide and drug and/or alcohol abuse (Bailey *et al.*, 1997; Block & Christakos, 1995; Campbell, 1995; Moracco, Runyan, & Butts, 1998; Smith *et al.*, 1998).

### **Prevalence and Perpetrator Characteristics of Attempted Intimate Femicide**

Little is known about the prevalence and perpetrator characteristics of attempted femicide. A recent report using Bureau of Justice statistics estimated that, between

1992 and 1996, 51% of all female victims of partner violence were injured, with approximately 0.5% suffering a gun, knife, or stab wound (Greenfeld *et al.*, 1998). The same report estimated that about one million women are injured by an intimate partner each year, and an additional one million are assaulted but not injured. Using the 0.5 percentage of gun, knife, and stab wounds, this would indicate upwards to 5000 women each year experience serious violence.

A stratified non-probability sample of 91 hospitals in the U.S. that have at least six beds and provide 24 hour emergency service revealed the rate of non-fatal firearm injuries treated to be 2.6 times the national rate of fatal firearm injuries (Annest, Mercy, Gibson, & Ryan, 1995). This ratio of 2.6 non-fatal to one fatal was the same for males and females aged 15–24 years; however, the ratio of non-fatal to fatal gunshot wounds for African–American males and females, aged 15 to 24 years, was 4.1:1 and 4.3:1, respectively. Furthermore, 57% of these non-fatal firearm wounds required hospitalization.

There are few published reports that have described the prevalence of non-fatal firearm and stab wound injuries specific to abused women. However, a study of 329 pregnant Hispanic women revealed that 11% reported a knife or gun used against them within the last 12 months by the male intimate (Wiist & McFarlane, 1998). Another study of 90 abused women filing assault charges against an intimate revealed 24% had experienced a knife or gun used against them within the preceding three months (McFarlane, Willson, Lemmey, & Malech, 2000). Women who report a weapon used against them also report significantly higher levels of physical abuse, as well as higher scores on a lethality assessment scale (McFarlane *et al.*, 1998).

### **Stalking Preceding Actual and Attempted Intimate Femicide**

Using medical examiner records and interviews with law enforcement officers, information was obtained on 586 femicide victims in North Carolina. A current or former partner murdered half of the victims, and, of these, 23.4% had been stalked (Moracco *et al.*, 1998). The only other reported study of intimate partner stalking and femicide was a report of the preliminary analysis of the first two years of data from this same study. We found a statistically significant association between intimate partner physical assault and stalking for femicide victims as well as attempted femicide victims. Stalking was thus identified as a correlate of lethal and near-lethal violence against women and, coupled with physical assault, significantly associated with murder and attempted murder (McFarlane *et al.*, 1999).

Studies of the violence potential associated with stalking have mainly focused on stalking by non-intimates. With the exception of the two studies described above, none have focused specifically on stalkers who target intimate partners prior to murder or attempted murder. Clearly there is an urgent need for further research.

The purpose of this study is to report on the associations between intimate partner stalking, threatening behaviors, and femicide in a multisite national study of risk factors for femicide in violent intimate relationships compared with an abused cohort. We also examine the extent to which specific stalking and threatening behaviors are a potential risk factor for femicide.

## METHODS

### Sample

These data are part of a multi-city study to determine the risk factors of actual and attempted intimate partner femicide (Campbell *et al.*, submitted). The sample for this report is drawn from consecutive closed police, District Attorney, trauma center or medical examiner records of intimate partner femicides and attempted femicides from these ten cities between 1994 and 2000: Baltimore, MD; Houston, TX; Kansas City, KS; Kansas City, MO; Los Angeles, CA; New York, NY; Portland, OR; Seattle, WA; St. Petersburg/Tampa area, FL; and Wichita, KS. These cities were chosen based on size and geographic representativeness of the United States as well as existing collaborative relationships between university researchers and law enforcement and shelter agencies.

Sampling began following agency approvals and institutional review boards approval for human subjects. Inclusion criteria for an intimate partner were a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or same sex partner. Inclusion criteria for attempted partner femicide appear in Figure 1. A total of 263 femicides and 174 attempted femicides met the study criteria and formed the basis for this report. In addition, a control sample of 384 women reporting intimate partner physical abuse within the last year, but with no attempt on their life, was obtained from the same cities.

### Data Collection for Femicide Victims

Using closed police or medical examiner homicide records, one or more potentially knowledgeable proxy informants, such as a parent, sibling, or other close relative of the deceased woman, were identified and contacted by mail. Once contacted, a pre-screening questionnaire was administered to assess the length of time the informant had known the victim and the perpetrator and knowledge level about the relationship. Frequently this person did not feel qualified to answer questions about the relationship and referred the investigator to other potential informants. Once a knowledgeable informant was identified and consented, a brief demographic profile of the informant was completed followed by an interview questionnaire about the relationship between the deceased woman and intimate partner. Following demographic information, questions focused on the characteristics of the relationship, including type, frequency, and severity of any prior violence. To profile the relationship of victim and perpetrator within a close proximity to the lethal event,

#### 1. Inclusion criteria for attempted partner femicide

- 
- Gunshot or stab wound to the head, neck or torso
  - Gunshot directed at the woman
  - Hit with an object, kicked with a steel-toed boot, or otherwise beaten badly enough to cause death or result in loss of consciousness or internal injuries
  - Held under water with loss of consciousness or internal injuries
  - Strangulation with loss of consciousness
  - Victim suffered severe injuries that could have easily lead to death
-

questions focused on the 12 months preceding the femicide. The interview took about one to two hours. Approximately 10% of identified proxies refused to participate, at which point a second knowledgeable proxy was identified. A detailed account of field strategies for locating and interviewing proxies is presented elsewhere (Block, McFarlane, Walker, & Devitt, 1999). Following informed consent, interviews were completed in English or Spanish.

### **Data Collection for Attempted Femicide Victims**

Using the study criteria and closed records, women who had survived an attempt on their life were identified and contacted by mail. Once contacted and consent was obtained, a convenient time was arranged for the interview. As with the proxies, all interviews were conducted by prepared researchers experienced in conducting sensitive communications with victims of domestic abuse. The same questionnaire was used with the proxy informants and the attempted femicide victims. Safety protocols were followed for women still in fear of the perpetrator. None of the identified attempted femicide victims refused to participate. Interviews were completed in English or Spanish.

### **Data Collection for Control Groups**

A national survey research company conducted telephone interviews using a structured interview guide that paralleled the interview guide used for the attempted and actual femicide data collection. Proportionate sampling and random digit dialing was used in each of the ten cities to secure the control sample of 384 abused women. Once telephone contact was made with a female between the ages of 18 and 64, a series of qualifying questions were asked. If women reported physical assault or other acts of violence by an intimate partner within the last two years, they were considered abused. Similar to the attempted and actual femicide consent procedures, the consent form was read to all potential respondents and informed consent was obtained prior to the telephone interview. Up to six attempts were made to each randomly selected telephone number. Telephone interviewers completed sensitivity and safety protocol training for abused women. Interviewers were bi-lingual in Spanish and English.

## **MEASURES**

### **Stalking and Threatening Behaviors Inventory**

A 16-item survey (see Figure 2) was used to document the frequency and type of stalking and threatening behaviors by the intimate partner perpetrator during the 12 months preceding the attempted or actual femicide. The first six items deal with stalking and were developed by Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) as part of the Violence and Threats of Violence Against Women in America Survey (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). The definition of stalking used for this study is similar to the Model Antistalking Code for States (National Criminal Justice Association, 1993) and is

## 2. Stalking and threatening behaviors.

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Please answer yes or no to the following

During the 12 months before the attempted/lethal or worse incident did the perpetrator

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## Stalking

1. Send the victim unwanted letters?
2. Follow or spy on the victim?
3. Make unwanted phone calls to the victim?
4. Stood or sat in car outside victim's house, school, or workplace?
5. Tried to communicate with the victim in ways against her will?
6. Destroyed or vandalized the victim's property or destroyed something she loved?

## Threats

1. Frightened the victim with a weapon?
  2. Threatened to harm the children if the victim left (or didn't come back)?
  3. Threatened to kill the victim?
  4. Threatened to take the children if the victim left (or didn't come back)?
  5. Frightened or threatened the victim's family?
  6. Left scary notes on the victim's car?
  7. Threatened to report the victim to the authorities for taking drugs or other things the victim did not do?
  8. Left threatening messages on the telephone answering machine?
  9. Threatened to report the victim to child protective services, immigration, or to other authorities if the victim did not do what the perpetrator said?
  10. Hurt a pet on purpose?
- 

taken directly from the Tjaden and Thoennes (1998, p. 2) report as previously stated. Stalking is defined as '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.'

To operationalize fully the legal definition of stalking, ten questions relating to threatening behaviors (Figure 2, items 7–16) were selected from the Sheridan HARASS instrument (unpublished doctoral dissertation). All questions were limited to the 12 month period before the attempted or actual femicide incident. Respondents answered yes or no to each behavior. They also indicated approximately how often these behaviors happened on a Likert scale. In this study, reliability (coefficient alpha) of the entire stalking instrument was 0.81 for the attempted femicide women, 0.82 for the actual femicide victims, and 0.73 for the abused controls.

## RESULTS

This case-control study consisted of 821 women, 174 who had survived an attempt on their life by their intimate partner (attempted femicides), 263 who had been killed by their intimate partner (actual femicides) and 384 who had been physically abused or threatened with physical harm but no attempt on their life had been made (controls). An *a priori* decision was made to combine the two groups only if the attempted and actual femicides were similar with respect to demographic characteristics and stalking responses. Preliminary analyses of the characteristics and the responses to the six stalking behaviors indicated that the attempted and actual femicides were similar in demographics; employment was the only demographic



Table 1. Demographic characteristics for 821 women: 384 abused controls and 437 attempted/actual femicides

	Abused controls <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Attempted/actual femicides <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Statistic <sup>a</sup>
Age (years)	30.2 (8.6)	34.1 (11.3)	$t(798) = -5.51, p < .001$
Length of relationship (years)	4.5 (5.5)	7.1 (8.9)	$t(734) = -5.13, p < .001$
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	
Ethnicity			
AA	81 (22)	199 (46)	
White	183 (48)	120 (28)	
Latina	83 (22)	93 (21)	
Other	31 (8)	21 (5)	
Total	378 (100)	433 (100)	$\chi^2(3) = 61.9, p < .001$
Education			
<HS graduate	65 (17)	134 (32)	
At least HS graduate	316 (83)	284 (68)	
Total	381 (100)	418 (100)	$\chi^2(1) = 24.0, p < .001$
Employment			
Yes	292 (76)	270 (64)	
No	92 (24)	149 (36)	
Total	384 (100)	419 (100)	$\chi^2(1) = 12.8, p < .001$
Relationship status			
Current	270 (79)	306 (71)	
Former	73 (21)	126 (29)	
Total	343 (100)	432 (100)	$\chi^2(1) = 6.2, p = .01$

<sup>a</sup>Test of significance between abused controls and the attempted/actual femicides.

variable that was significantly different ( $p < .01$ ) with femicide victims less likely to be employed than attempted femicides. Of the six stalking questions, only one was significantly different ( $p < .01$ ): destroying or vandalizing the victim's property. Based on these findings, attempts and actual femicides were merged ( $n = 437$ ) and compared with abused controls ( $n = 384$ ).

Demographic characteristics and test statistics for both groups are presented in Table 1. When compared with abuse controls, the attempted/actual femicide cases were significantly older by almost four years and reported a relationship that lasted almost three years longer. The largest ethnic group of the attempted/actual femicides were African American (46%), whereas the majority of the controls were white (48%). Almost twice as many attempted/actual femicides did not graduate from high school. Controls were more likely to be employed. Although more than 70% of all women were in current relationships, the percentage of women in a current relationship was significantly higher ( $p = .01$ ) for controls than the attempt/actual femicides.

### Frequency, Type, and Extent of Stalking and Threatening Behaviors

Stalking, as defined by at least one episode of stalking behavior occurring twice or two different behaviors occurring at least once, was reported by 51% of the controls.

Table 2. Mean stalking and threats scores and percent of stalking and threatening behaviors experienced by the abused controls ( $n = 384$ ) and attempt/actual femicides ( $n = 437$ ) within the previous 12 months

	Abused controls	Attempt/actual femicides
	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)
Stalking score	1.4 (1.6)	2.4 (2.1)
Threats score	0.7 (1.2)	2.1 (2.0)
	Percent experienced	Percent experienced
<b>Stalking behaviors</b>		
1. Send the victim unwanted letters?	7.8	12.4
2. Follow or spy on the victim?*	29.4	55.6
3. Make unwanted phone calls to the victim?*	29.2	48.1
4. Stood or sat in car outside victim's house, school, or workplace?*	27.9	46.5
5. Tried to communicate with the victim in ways against her will?*	15.4	38.4
6. Destroyed or vandalized the victim's property or destroyed something she loved?*	26.6	41.4
<b>Threatening behaviors</b>		
1. Frightened the victim with a weapon?*	4.4	39.6
2. Threatened to harm the children if the victim left (or didn't come back)?*	0.8	12.6
3. Threatened to kill the victim?*	13.8	54.5
4. Threatened to take the children if the victim left (or didn't come back)?*	9.1	16.9
5. Frightened or threatened the victim's family?*	7.0	29.3
6. Left scary notes on the victim's car?*	2.1	9.6
7. Threatened to report the victim to the authorities for taking drugs or other things the victim did not do?	3.9	7.1
8. Left threatening messages on the telephone answering machine?	17.4	19.7
9. Threatened to report the victim to child protective services, immigration, or to other authorities if the victim did not do what the perpetrator said?	4.9	8.7
10. Hurt a pet on purpose?	9.1	10.8

\* $p < .003$ .

The occurrence of stalking was significantly higher ( $\chi^2 = 24.75$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ) among the attempted/actual femicides (68%). The reporting period was 12 months prior to the incident for attempted/actual femicides and 12 months prior to worst incident for abused controls. The type and prevalence of stalking behaviors reported by controls and attempted/actual femicide victims are shown in Table 2 (significant differences are asterisked) when controlling for demographic differences. Due to multiple comparisons, the Bonferroni technique was used to guard against type I error rate by limiting the study wide error rate to a .05 alpha level (Dunn, 1961). This alpha level was evenly distributed among the 16 chi-square tests conducted. Thus, the level of significance was adjusted to .003 (i.e., .05/16). Being followed or spied on by the perpetrator was the most frequently reported stalking behavior for all women. Other behaviors frequently reported by all women were unwanted phone calls and sitting in a car outside her home or work site. Five of the six stalking behaviors differed significantly ( $p < .003$ ) between controls and attempt/actual femicides. The perpetrator sending unwanted letters was the behavior least likely

to differentiate between groups. The percentage of each stalking and threatening behavior experienced by the abused controls and attempted/actual femicides is reported in Table 2.

To determine the extent of stalking experienced, the number of different stalking behaviors was calculated for each woman. The number of stalking behaviors reported ranged from zero to six for all women. The attempted/actual femicides reported a significantly higher ( $t = -8.28$ ,  $df = 808$ ,  $p < .001$ ) mean stalking score (2.4) than the mean score (1.4) reported by the abused controls. Mean values and standard deviations are reported in Table 2.

Among the threatening behaviors, threatening to kill the victim (54.5%) and frightening the victim with a weapon (39.6%) were the most common behaviors reported by the attempted/actual femicides, both significantly higher than controls. Leaving threatening messages on the answering machine (17.4%) and threatening to kill the victim (13.8%) were the most common behaviors reported by the abused controls. The behavior least reported (8.7%) by the attempted/actual femicides was the threat to report the victim to child protective services, immigration, or other authorities if the victim did not obey the perpetrator. The threat of harming the children was the behavior least reported (0.8%) by the abused controls. The attempted/actual femicides reported a significantly higher ( $t = -12.2$ ,  $df = 735$ ,  $p < .001$ ) mean threats score (2.1) than the mean score (0.7) reported by the abused controls.

### Physical Abuse and Stalking

When asked whether the intimate partner perpetrator had physically abused the woman within the year prior to the attempted/actual femicide, 69% of the respondents said yes. Because physical abuse or threats of physical abuse was the major criterion for becoming a control, 100% of the controls had this kind of abusive experience from a partner. Among attempted/actual femicide informants, abuse was shown to be significantly associated with stalking ( $\chi^2 = 38.314$ ;  $df = 1$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ), with 79% of abused attempted/actual femicides also reporting stalking, as compared with 49% of the nonabused attempted/actual femicides who reported stalking.

### Relationship Status and Stalking

The 63% of the attempted/actual femicide victims in current relationships (i.e., spouse, common law, boyfriend) who reported stalking behaviors by the perpetrator was significantly less ( $\chi^2 = 17.27$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than the 83% of victims reporting the relationship was former (ex-spouse, boyfriend). For controls, relationship status was not significant, with 45% of the women in current relationships reporting stalking, compared with 59% in former relationships ( $\chi^2 = 4.33$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .357$ ). Finally, when asked whether the woman had reported the stalking behaviors, 41% of the attempted/actual femicides, contrasted to 19% of the controls, answered affirmatively. The most common reporting agency for all groups of women was the police or sheriff (11% controls, 29% attempted/actual femicides).

## Stalking and Threatening Behaviors that Predict Attempted or Actual Femicide

Stepwise Multiple Logistic Regression (MLR) was used to identify and model stalking and threatening behaviors significantly associated with an increased risk of attempted/actual femicides. Criteria for predictors to be entered into the model were based on changes in the likelihood ratio statistic ( $p \leq .05$ ). The goodness-of-fit statistic of Hosmer and Lemeshow was used to assess model fit. Odds Ratios, unadjusted and adjusted for demographics (ORs and aORs), with 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs and aCIs), were used to describe the magnitude of the association between the behavior and risk of attempted/actual femicide.

The MLR results (see Table 3) showed that the stalking behaviors significantly associated with an increased risk of attempted/actual femicide were whether the perpetrator followed or spied on the victim (OR = 2.14, CI = 1.55, 2.96) and whether the perpetrator tried to communicate with the victim against her will (OR = 2.33, CI = 1.60, 3.39). Even after controlling for demographics (e.g., ethnicity, employment, education, relationship status, age, and length of relationship), results showed that women who reported being followed or spied on (aOR = 2.3, aCI = 1.6, 3.5) or women who reported that the perpetrator was trying to communicate with her against her will (aOR = 1.8, aCI = 1.1, 2.9) had nearly a twofold increase in the risk of becoming a femicide or attempted femicide victim. A third behavior, unwanted phone calls made by the perpetrator, was identified as significant (aOR = 1.58, aCI = 1.01, 2.47) in the adjusted model only. Results from the

Table 3. Unadjusted and adjusted Odds Ratios (ORs, aORs) and 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs, aCIs) from the stepwise Multiple Logistic Regression (MLR) of stalking behaviors on attempted/actual femicides by an intimate partner

Predictor	Attempted/actual femicides (unadjusted) <sup>†</sup>		Attempted/actual femicides (adjusted) <sup>‡</sup>	
	OR	95% CI	aOR	95% aCI
Follow or spy on victim	2.14	(1.55, 2.96)	2.35	(1.58, 3.51)
Tried to communicate with victim in ways against her will	2.33	(1.60, 3.39)	1.79	(1.10, 2.91)
Made unwanted phone calls to the victim	—	—	1.58	(1.01, 2.47)
Ethnicity: referent white				
AA	—	—	4.06	(2.68, 6.17)
Hispanic	—	—	1.43	(0.89, 2.31)
Other	—	—	1.50	(0.75, 2.98)
Education: referent HS graduate	—	—	2.81	(1.82, 4.36)
Employment: referent employed	—	—	1.30	(0.89, 1.90)
Relationship: referent current	—	—	1.34	(0.90, 1.99)
Age (in years)	—	—	1.04	(1.02, 1.06)
Length of relationship (in years)	—	—	1.03	(1.00, 1.06)

<sup>†</sup>MLR model unadjusted for demographics: Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness of fit—unable to compute,  $R^2 = .12$ , overall model prediction 62.9%.

<sup>‡</sup>MLR model adjusted for demographics: Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness of fit ( $\chi^2(8) = 4.44$ ,  $p = .815$ ),  $R^2 = .21$ , overall model prediction 71.8%.

Table 4. Unadjusted and adjusted Odds Ratios (ORs, aORs) and 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs, aCIs) from the stepwise Multiple Logistic Regression (MLR) of threatening behaviors on attempted/actual femicides by an intimate partner

Predictor	Attempted/actual femicides (unadjusted) <sup>†</sup>		Attempted/actual femicides (adjusted) <sup>‡</sup>	
	OR	95% CI	aOR	95% aCI
Perpetrator frightened victim with a weapon before incident	6.74	(3.72, 12.21)	5.89	(3.00, 11.55)
Perpetrator hurt a pet on purpose before incident	0.45	(0.24, 0.84)	0.49	(0.25, 0.98)
Perpetrator threatened to harm kids if victim left before incident	12.90	(3.46, 48.14)	8.99	(2.40, 33.7)
Perpetrator threatened to kill victim	3.56	(2.36, 5.39)	3.02	(1.89, 4.81)
Perpetrator frightened or threatened victim family before incident	2.47	(1.43, 4.29)	2.31	(1.27, 4.21)
Perpetrator left scary notes on victim's car before incident	2.86	(1.12, 7.31)	4.37	(1.61, 11.82)
Perpetrator left threatening messages on answer machine before incident	0.32	(0.19, 0.55)	0.43	(0.23, 0.78)
Ethnicity: referent white				
AA	—	—	3.54	(2.24, 5.58)
Hispanic	—	—	1.28	(0.75, 2.20)
Other	—	—	1.24	(0.57, 2.69)
Education: referent HS graduate	—	—	2.12	(1.30, 3.44)
Employment: referent employed	—	—	1.04	(0.69, 1.59)
Relationship: referent current	—	—	1.60	(1.03, 2.47)
Age (in years)	—	—	1.04	(1.02, 1.07)
Length of relationship (in years)	—	—	1.03	(0.99, 1.06)

<sup>†</sup>MLR model unadjusted for demographics: Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness of fit ( $\chi^2(5) = 5.34, p = .376$ ),  $R^2 = .37$ , overall model prediction 74.1%.

<sup>‡</sup>MLR model adjusted for demographics: Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness of fit ( $\chi^2(8) = 6.42, p = .599$ ),  $R^2 = .46$ , overall model prediction 77.6%.

adjusted model also indicated ethnicity and education were significantly associated with the risk of becoming a femicide victim. African American women were four times more likely (aOR = 4.1, aCI = 2.7, 6.2) than white women to become a femicide victim. Women who had not graduated from high school had a 2.8% (aOR = 2.81, aCI = 1.8, 4.4) increase in risk of becoming a femicide victim.

Based on MLR, seven of ten threatening behaviors were significantly associated with an increased risk of attempted/actual femicide (see Table 4). The threat to harm the children if the victim left was shown to have the strongest association (OR = 12.9, CI = 3.5, 48.1) with an increased risk of femicide. Other behaviors significantly associated with an increased risk of femicide were frightening the victim with a weapon (OR = 6.7, CI = 3.7, 12.2), threatening to kill the victim (OR = 3.6, CI = 2.4, 5.4), leaving scary notes on the victim's car (OR = 2.9, CI = 1.1, 7.3), and threatening or frightening the victim's family (OR = 2.5, CI = 4.3). Protective behaviors included hurting a pet on purpose (OR = 0.5, CI = 0.2, 0.8) and leaving threatening messages on the answering machine (OR = 0.3, CI = 0.2, 0.6).

The differences between the unadjusted and adjusted models were minimal. Even after adjusting for demographics, women who reported threats to harm the children if the victim left had a ninefold increase (aOR = 8.99, CI = 2.4, 33.7) in the risk of femicide. Women who reported being frightened or threatened with a weapon were nearly six times more likely (aOR = 5.9, CI = 3.0, 11.6) to become a femicide victim. Women who reported the perpetrator threatening or frightening the victim's family (aOR = 2.3, aCI = 1.3, 4.2), threatening to kill the victim (aOR = 3.0, aCI = 1.9, 4.8), or leaving scary notes on the victim's car (aOR = 4.4, aCI = 1.6, 11.8) were two, three, and four times, respectively, more likely to become femicide victims. Behaviors that resulted in nearly a 50% decrease in the risk of femicide were behaviors where the perpetrator intentionally hurt a pet (aOR = 0.49, aCI = 0.25, 0.98) or left threatening messages on the victim's answering machine (aOR = 0.43, aCI = 0.23, 0.78). African-American women had more than a threefold increase in risk (aOR = 3.5, aCI = 2.2, 5.6) as compared with white women. Women who had not graduated from high school were more than twice as likely (aOR = 2.1, aCI = 1.3, 3.4) to become femicide victims.

## DISCUSSION

This investigation is one of the only controlled studies of the relative risk for femicide or attempted femicide and the first to examine the associations with specific stalking behaviors. Limitations of the study include the exclusion of women not in large urban areas (except for the Wichita, KS, site) and women without phones in the control group. Additionally, this is cross-sectional data; therefore caution must be used in referring to stalking or threatening behaviors as predictors in interpreting the results. For the homicides, it is apparent that the stalking behaviors preceded the murder. However, it is possible that with controls or attempts that the stalking or threatening behaviors occurred after the attempt or 'worst incident'. Even with these limitations, we were able to demonstrate that stalking is common and extensive for both a population based sample of abused controls and attempted/actual femicide victims from the same cities.

This study found that 68% of attempted/actual femicides, and 51% of abused controls, experienced stalking within 12 months of the attempted/actual murder or most severe abuse incident. The most frequent type of stalking reported was following or spying, followed by unwanted phone calls, and surveillance by the perpetrator from a car parked outside the woman's house or work site. Only one of the six stalking behaviors, sending unwanted letters to the victim, did not significantly differ in occurrence between groups. Four of the ten threatening behaviors did not significantly differ in occurrence between groups. Two of these insignificant threats focused on reporting the victim to public authorities. With the exception of threatening telephone messages (context unknown), these four threatening behaviors (not significantly different in occurrence between groups) contain no threats of bodily harm to the victim.

Stalking was significantly associated with assault. Seventy-nine per cent of the abused attempted/actual femicide victims reported stalking during the same time period that they reported abuse compared with only 49% of the non-abused victims reporting stalking. Our findings indicate a strong association between stalking and

subsequent lethal/near lethal abuse. Findings of the NVAW survey (1998, 2000) and recent research (Brewster, 2000; Frieze & Davis, 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2000), reported that women separated from the abuser were at greatest risk of stalking. Our results concur for the attempt/actual femicide victims. Significantly more attempted/actual femicide victims reported the perpetrator as a former intimate. However, for abused controls, women reporting the abuser as a former intimate reported no more stalking than women reporting the abuser as a current partner. Clearly, prior physical assault coupled with a former or estranged relationship status plus stalking places women at greater danger of attempted/actual femicide.

However, it is important to note that there are variants of stalking that do not fit the usual domestic violence prototype of an estranged spouse following and contacting the ex-partner to try to get her to return. First of all, battered women are stalked even when they are not separated from their abusive spouses. Close to half (45%) of the abused controls reported stalking behaviors and more than half (63%) of the lethal or potentially lethal cases involved stalking. This scenario of a man following his partner even when she comes home to him at night is chilling and indicative of the serious controlling behaviors of domestic violence. That it occurred significantly more often amongst the deadly cases is an important issue for the criminal justice community to note. There were also the 15% cases of femicide and attempted femicide where there was prior stalking but no prior domestic violence. These atypical cases are important for both researchers and practitioners, as has also recently been found and noted by Mechanic and colleagues (2000).

Modeling, with control for demographic variables, revealed three stalking (Table 3) and seven threatening behaviors (Table 4) significantly associated with attempted or actual murder. Women reporting being followed or spied on had more than a twofold increase in the risk of becoming a femicide victim. Although threats with a weapon are consistently documented in the literature as a risk factor for femicide (Campbell, 1995), no citations were found regarding threats to harm the children or scary notes left on the woman's automobile. A recent study by Brewster (2000) found verbal threats of violence had a statistically significant independent effect on predicting physical violence against stalking victims. Our study was able to specify the context of verbal threats most associated with murder and attempted murder. Clearly, when a verbal threat includes harm to children, use of a weapon, or the threat is placed on the woman's car, the potential risk of severe abuse greatly increases.

A surprising finding was that not only was harming a pet on purpose not a risk factor for intimate partner femicide or attempted femicide, but it actually acted as a protective factor in multivariate analysis. Ours is the first controlled study to examine the risk of homicide associated with pet abuse. Although clearly, abuse to animals is a factor that may accompany intimate partner violence, and did in approximately 10% of our cases, it occurred more often in cases of abuse without lethality than in the more severe cases. Finally, recent research by Meloy (in press) reports that even when a woman is abused, and the victim of domestic violence stalking, her risk of intimate partner femicide is, at most, 1 out of 400. Meloy (in press) notes that, although a 1:400 risk is low, when placed in the context of annual U.S. homicide base rates of 7:100 000 this 1:400 rate becomes a 36 times greater risk of being killed than if she just lived in the U.S. ( $100,000/400, 250/7 = 36$ ).

## CONCLUSION

The conclusions are straightforward. During the 12 months before the attempted or actual murder of an intimate female partner, 68% of these women were stalked and 69% were assaulted. If we consider stalking as a form of intimate partner violence, 85% of our victims of intimate partner femicide or attempted femicide were actually victims of IPV before they were killed. Both intimate partner assault and stalking are strongly associated with lethal and near-lethal violence against women, especially when these two perpetrator behaviors occur together and the perpetrator is a former intimate. Not all stalking and threatening behaviors pose an equal threat. Following and spying on the woman, threatening messages on the victim's car and threats to harm the children were associated with a two, four, and nine times, respectively, greater likelihood of attempted/actual femicide.

Clearly, certain stalking and threatening behaviors are a threat to women's safety and longevity. Although not traditionally considered a risk marker for lethality, certain stalking and threatening behavior merits urgent consideration. Questions to victims about the perpetrator's following or spying action, threats to harm the children, or threatening messages left on the woman's automobile are definitely supported by this research. It is important that 49% of the attempted or actual homicide victims who were *not* physically abused *were* stalked, results suggesting how important it is to recognize the serious risk of deadly harm presented by stalking behaviors alone. Unfortunately, many jurisdictions do not consider stalking, without assault, as sufficient grounds for orders of protection, and antistalking laws are difficult to enforce for batterers. In similar fashion, one-third of the women were not assaulted within 12 months prior to the near lethal/lethal event. Clearly the use of physical abuse assessment is inadequate to identify all women at risk to potential lethality, and clearly stalking laws need to be strengthened if necessary and applied in domestic violence cases more uniformly and systematically so that women who are threatened, even if they are not followed or assaulted, can get the protection that the stalking statutes were meant to convey.

Although both stalkers and non-stalkers were extremely violent in this sample, not all stalking and threatening behaviors were associated with increased danger. Two immediate tasks confront us: to identify first, the singular contribution of stalking toward attempted and actual femicide, and second the specific stalking behaviors that most increase risk of severe injury. Risk profiles for lethality have not traditionally included stalking behavior, although stalking definitely can be considered a dimension of dominance and control. Certainly, stalking can be conceptualized at the extreme end of the continuum of controlling psychologically abusive behaviors; however, these behaviors tend not to be included on abuse assessment instruments that focus on physical assault.

Researchers must consider the impact of stalking on intimate partner attempted and actual femicide. Is there a severity and pattern sequencing to intimate partner stalking? Does public stalking precede or follow secretive stalking (i.e., hang-up phone calls, anonymous mail, and spying)? Does stalking precede or follow assault? How do stalkers who physically assault differ from stalkers who do not assault? What threat to bodily harm does the victim attach to specific stalking behaviors? Does justice action against physical assault, such as arrest and protection orders, decrease



stalking? Efforts are urgently needed to compile detailed information on stalking and intimate partner violence. It is essential to include stalking in risk models for intimate partner violence against women and in risk assessments to apprise women of their danger.

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