

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Stalking Strain, Concurrent Negative Emotions, and Legitimate Coping Strategies: A Preliminary Test of Gendered Strain Theory*

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**Key Words:** Stalking, Reactions to Victimization, Gender Victim Survey, General Strain Theory

### Summary/Conclusions

Building upon previous research on stalking, this study examined whether there are any differences for females and males in the level of concurrent negative emotions (e.g. anxiety and helplessness) and whether any of the concurrent negative emotions lead to useful coping strategies. Females reported higher levels of concurrent negative emotions. Females were also much more likely than males to use helpful coping mechanisms. Lastly, female victims that experience anger as well as the emotion fear, anxiousness, or helplessness increased the likelihood of coping strategies of enlisting others or contacting the police.

### Limitations of Information

The study only examined what the authors termed "legitimate" coping mechanisms and not "illegitimate" coping strategies (e.g. criminal behavior, self harm, or substance abuse). While the study accounted for behavioral strategies of coping, there was no measure of emotional or cognitive coaching strategies included. The study examined stalking in its entirety and did not account for response from an individual stalking event.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

### Emotional Responses to Stalking

The current study sought to answer the different ways stalking affects females and males. Researchers were particularly interested in the level of concurrent emotions each gender experienced as well as how the concurrent emotions were related to coping strategies.

Researchers examined data from the National Crime Victim Survey from the 2006 Supplemental Victim Survey. The sample included 1,599 respondents who had been the victim of stalking within the previous 12 months. Aside from demographic questions, the respondents were asked to identify their emotional response to being stalked and whether they had utilized coping strategies (e.g. schedule changes, protective measures, enlist the help of others, contacting the police, or moving).

The findings concluded that males reported higher levels of anger than females; however, females reported higher levels of other non-anger emotions. Older males and younger divorced or separated females were more likely to be the victim of stalking. Females were more likely to utilize healthy coping strategies than males.

After analyzing the data to determine if any concurrent emotions led to beneficial coping strategies, researchers discovered that anger with anxiousness, fear, or helplessness were significantly associated with enlisting the help of others and contacting the police. Anger with illness or anger with depression

were not associated significantly with healthy coping. For males only anger and sickness was significantly related to changes in daily activities. They were almost ten times more likely to change their daily activities than males who did not experience the same emotions. Lastly, younger women were less likely to engage in effective coping strategies than older females. Female victims who were divorced or separated were more likely to change daily activities, move, or take protective measures. Being married was the only significant predictor of useful coping strategies (change schedule or call the police) in males.

### Practical Applications

- ✓ Be aware that individuals respond very differently to the same type of victimization.
- ✓ Don't make assumptions about who is being victimized. Of the 1,599 respondents, 531 were males.
- ✓ Offer victims empathy and understanding; they may not be ready to cope with their trauma.
- ✓ Discuss emotions when working with victims; some emotions are more likely to lead to healthy coping strategies.
- ✓ Try to follow up with young single females and older males. These groups were less likely to engage in safe coping strategies.
- ✓ Provide victims of stalking resources such as the website [www.nvrc.org/src](http://www.nvrc.org/src)

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