

EASI

Early Awareness Stalking Intervention

Evaluation Report
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Early Awareness Stalking Intervention (EASI)

Delivering early and brief psychological intervention with ex-partner stalking cases to encourage fundamental changes to how people deal with difficult internal experiences.



Foreword

I welcome this Interim Evaluation of the Early Awareness Stalking Intervention Project ('EASI'). Preventing, tackling and reducing the crime of stalking is a top priority. That is because it has a catastrophic and devastating impact on all aspects of a victim's life. In particular, it is critical to homicide prevention, because statistics illustrate that 76% of women, murdered by their former partner in the UK, were stalked prior to their death. Stalking is prevalent on both the homicide and suicide timelines.

The prevention of crime is always better than having to deal with the consequences of crime. That is why, here in the West Midlands, we have been successfully delivering an Early Awareness Stalking Intervention project. The earlier intervention takes place, to protect the victim and challenge and change the behaviour of the person engaging in stalking behaviour, the better.

By intervening early, utilising innovative psychological intervention, to challenge and change stalking behaviour and hold perpetrators to account, we can prevent further harm for the victim or future victims and break the cycle of abuse, as well as ensuring help and support for victims and survivors, who have experienced this dreadful crime.

All partners involved in the initial pilot delivery have evidenced positive benefits, with significant perpetrator engagement, completion rates and relatively low repeat stalking offences, during and after participating in the intervention.

The findings also illustrate the crucial importance of specialist victims support from the dedicated Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworker, at Black Country Women's Aid. However, it is clear that additional resources and easier, swifter access to therapeutic support for victims of stalking is needed, because of the detrimental impact stalking has on their emotional and psychological wellbeing and mental health.

EASI needs to become part of a wider multi-agency approach to stalking, with a view to improved identification and understanding; more effective prevention, tackling and reduction of this crime; and access to the right support, at the right time, in the right place, for victims.

I have commissioned the University of Derby to continue their evaluation of EASI, to enhance the validity of the study. This will allow for the analysis of recidivism over a longer period of time, so as to further evaluate the reduction in reoffending and other outcomes, contributing to the evidence-base of 'what works' in preventing, tackling and reducing stalking, as a crime type, closely linked with domestic abuse, as recognised in HM Government's 'Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan'.

I thank the University of Derby for conducting this work, the participants who contributed to the study and to our dedicated delivery partners whose collaboration, commitment and dedication have contributed to the success of this pilot project.

Simon Foster

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner

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Glossary

BCWA	Black Country Women's Aid
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CJS	Crime Justice System
FACT	Focused Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
HMPPS	Her Majesty's Prison & Probation Service
HO	Home Office
ISAC	Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworker
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference
NHS	National Health Service
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
SASH	Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment
SRP	Stalking Risk Profile
WMPS	West Midland's Police Service

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge and thank Cate-Webb Jones (WMPS) and Dr. Rachael Wheatley (HMPPS) for their hard work in designing and developing EASI. This includes a heavily detailed implementation guide which has provided a rationale for the psychological intervention aspect of EASI and also informed the basis of this evaluation. Their development of the project, logo and supportive documents were grounded in a rich evidence-base of research and practical experience.

We would like to thank all the people from EASI who participated in this research, for providing data, giving us their valuable time to be interviewed and for answering our (many) questions. Their thoughtful accounts and recommendations have been invaluable in identifying best practice and making suggestions for how things can be improved.

We would also like to sincerely thank the organisations and West Midlands Police who facilitated the involvement of their service users with this research – without their support, this project would not have been possible.

Finally, we would like to thank the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and the Home Office for funding this work and for their continued support throughout the design and fieldwork stage.

Executive Summary

This project was commissioned by the Home Office UK, and West Midlands Police Crime and Commissioner's Office to address the way in which the police identify and deal with stalking and harassment. This evaluation seeks to understand how the police are handling these offences throughout the West Midlands, given their recent piloted scheme - Early Awareness Stalking Intervention (EASI). The project is a multi-agency initiative between The Alice Ruggles Trust, Black Country Women's Aid, HMPPS Psychology Services Group, West Midlands Police, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner's Office and the University of Derby. EASI introduces psychological therapy as a remedy for ex-intimate stalking perpetrators who receive their first disposal for stalking, encounter the police, admit their guilt and agree to a referral into the project.

When commissioning the research, West Midlands Police requested a mixed-methods study that would collate the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders involved in the delivery of the programme, candidates who part-take in the EASI sessions and victims of stalking who had approached the police for assistance and were referred to advocacy services. The project was commissioned in August 2021 and the fieldwork for the evaluation ran from mid-February 2022 to the start of September 2022. In total, data from 42 participating EASI candidates (those engaged in stalking) were analysed. Eighteen people involved in EASI (ten candidates, three victims and five stakeholders), shared their direct experiences of the process via interviews. The following report presents the findings of this evaluation study according to three main themes: the delivery of the service by stakeholders, nature of intervention and how it was received by those who engaged in stalking, the impact of stalking and advocacy services on the victims' lives and key learnings for stakeholders.

The findings of the evaluation can be summarised as:

- It was merely too early in the study to determine conclusively if specific health interventions decreased re-offending; however, preliminary data analysis shows that it is promising. Specifically, we observed that perpetrators of ex-intimate stalking who completed all fACT sessions had fewer police contacts for further offending (stalking related or other types of offences) on average relative to a comparator group of stalking perpetrators with similar case characteristics to those who had undergone fACT.
- The pre-post intervention psychometric data to measure stalking perpetrators' psycho-social wellbeing delivered promising initial findings. Compared to measures at baseline (pre-treatment), EASI candidates who completed fACT self-reported significant improvements in their psychological flexibility post-treatment. There were also simultaneous reductions in self-reported psychological inflexibility and cognitive fusion among these individuals, following completion of fACT.
- Interviews with stakeholders and EASI candidates revealed a high level of satisfaction with the tailored fACT intervention offered, as well as a degree of confidence amongst EASI completers that they would be able to handle their emotions and fixations in the future.
- Victims were satisfied with the response from the police, and believed this contact raised their awareness about stalking and abusive relationship patterns. However, given the small number of victims who agreed to interview and engage with the service, this finding must be interpreted with care.

- Victims were generally satisfied with the assistance offered by Black Country Women's Aid. The ISACs kept encouraging victims to take control of their own safety and contribute to the investigation to improve their chances of positive criminal justice outcomes.
- According to stakeholders, a multi-agency strategy improved the response to stalking as a crime category. This was in terms of more proper and effective investigation, charging of cases, and information exchange was particularly beneficial for risk assessment and risk management in stalking situations. A shared motive and belief in the importance of stalking prevention also boosted individual workplace morale.
- ISACs reported that victims required additional resources for victim advocacy, and that there was a need for more mental health services to assist them cope with the lingering effects of being victimised.

1. Introduction

The Early Awareness Stalking Intervention (EASI) model is a proof-of-concept project that intends to create a multi-agency intervention strategy to respond to live stalking cases and lessen the risk of ex-intimate stalking and its effects on victims. This model incorporates an essential pathway that aims to address the fixation in individuals that may be leading to stalking offences while managing elements of effective support for victims and perpetrators simultaneously. The EASI pilot project has been funded by the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and the Home Office; it is delivered by West Midlands Police, HMPPS and Black Country Women's Aid with support from the Alice Ruggles Trust and evaluated by an independent research team at the University of Derby to measure the effectiveness and value of the intervention. EASI seeks to use knowledge and intelligence from the multi-agency spectrum to deliver clinical interventions to those who have stalked ex-partners, and to inform the risk management process involved in handling such situations.

Police forces in the UK were instructed to improve how they recognise and handle stalking in response to criticisms. To address these difficulties, many forces have sharpened their emphasis on recognising stalking, and three regions (Cheshire, Hampshire, and London), have delivered specialised multi-agency services demonstrating that an evidence-based, psychology-informed, multi-agency approach to managing stalking risks has positive outcomes¹. In the absence of these 'clinics' across the country, but with the available issuance of Stalking Protection Orders, options for diversion, education, and intervention need to be developed, tested, and rigorously evaluated.

Police warnings and arrests have been shown to be useful, however, there is a scarcity of evidence on what constitutes an effective policing response to stalking. This is troubling considering that, according to research findings, one in six people are victims of stalking and around half of the offender population will go on to commit a second offence in their lifetime². The effectiveness of psychological treatment for stalking behaviours is currently only supported by a very small body of research³. Considering that individuals who stalk vary widely in their psychopathology, motivations, and behaviours, a bespoke package of risk management and treatment has been proposed as an efficient way to manage and lower risks⁴. Due to these factors, the EASI pilot project aims for the highest level of homogeneity by using strict selection criteria and concentrating intervention on the most problematic individuals (the ex-partner, rejected stalker typology - not driven by serious mental illness, and those able to access the intervention through an admission of stalking and with cognitive functioning ability)⁵.

Public-sector responses to stalking must address the phenomenon's intricacies, ensuring that perpetrators are firstly successfully identified, after which the legal response is appropriate for the situation, minimising victim harm and re-offending by individuals who stalk. Since stalking is a unique crime with deep psychological drivers, this requires specialised knowledge. Such expertise is uncommon, and prior to EASI, it had only really become established in Cheshire, Hampshire, and London, with other police force areas eager to develop their capacity in this domain⁶.

1 Jerath, K., Tompson, L., & Belur, J. (2022). Treating and managing stalking offenders: findings from a multi-agency clinical intervention. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 1-24.

2 Mullen, P. E., Pathé, M., Pathé, M., & Purcell, R. (2009). *Stalkers and their victims*. Cambridge University Press.

3 Leigh, S., & Davies, J. (2022). A rapid evidence assessment of psychological treatment approaches for stalking behaviour. *The Journal of Forensic Practice*, 24(1), 48-62.

4 Wheatley, R. & Webb-Jones, C. (2021). EASI Implementation Guide. HMPPS and West Midlands Police Confidential Document: Access granted for the purposes of this report.

5 Ibid.

6 see Tompson, L., Belur, J., & Jerath, K. (2020). MASIP evaluation final report.

2. Rationale for Offender Psychological Intervention

“Intervening at the first signs of stalking offers the best chance of reducing stalking recidivism in the perpetrator, and arguably of stemming any progression to more entrenched or serious forms of interpersonal violence in later life”⁷.

Furthermore, the most robust approach to treatment for non-delusional stalkers is psychological intervention⁸ as it is conceptualised as a pattern of behaviours indicative of purpose and function⁹. Treatment for people who stalk from this perspective, is thought to require addressing personality issues as well as practical/situational issues and social skill deficiencies.

Larsen et al.¹⁰ state, ***“the most effective treatment of stalking behaviour is aimed at the client’s underlying problems that cause the stalking. A common theme is learning to understand oneself and others and improving the ability to regulate one’s own emotions”***. Implementing a criminal justice diversionary process which compels stalking offenders to recognise and address their behaviour by providing them with the tools to regulate their emotions and behaviour may empower them to take ownership of their own risk-management and provide the police with a cost-effective, long-term remedy¹¹.

Although Focussed Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (fACT)¹² has not yet been evaluated for those who have engaged in stalking behaviours, it has demonstrated appeal as a method based on clinical experience, doctoral research, and conversations with Dr. S. Hayes, the creator of ACT, and Assoc. Prof. T. McEwan, an international expert on stalking¹³. According to anecdotal data, ACT is an effective strategy to utilise with those engaged in stalking because it targets powerful thoughts and the fixations and obsessions that are frequently linked to stalking (HMPPS Psychology Service Midlands Advisory Stalking Hub). ACT seeks to provide psychological flexibility so that people can respond effectively when confronted with difficult thoughts and feelings. It is empirically supported for a variety of psychological and behavioural problems, including personality disorders¹⁴. For men who have been charged with intimate partner violence (including stalking), there is one strong study that offers early support for the viability and efficacy of an ACT-based group (ACTV)¹⁵. It demonstrated that significantly fewer ACTV participants were charged with any new offences, domestic assault, or violent offences. In comparison to individuals who attended Duluth/CBT sessions, ACTV participants averaged significantly lower charges throughout the course of the year following treatment.

7 Purcell, R., Flower, T., & Mullen, P. E. (2008). Adolescent stalking: Offence characteristics and effectiveness of criminal justice interventions.

8 McEwan, T.E., MacKenzie, R.D. & McCarthy, J. (2014). The problem behaviour program: Threat assessment and management in community forensic mental health. In R. Meloy & J. Hoffman (Eds.), *International Handbook of Threat Assessment* (S. 360-374). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

9 Siepelmeyer, O., & Ortiz-Müller, W. (2020). Stop-Stalking—but how. *Psycho-Criminological Approaches to Stalking Behavior: An International Perspective*, 309-334.

10 Larsen, L. L., Bomholt, D., & Hundahl, H. (2020). The Danish stalking centre, 2019. *Psycho-criminological approaches to stalking behavior: The international perspective*, 351-380; p. 369

11 Tompson, L., Belur, J., & Jerath, K. (2021). A victim-centred cost-benefit analysis of a stalking prevention programme. *Crime Science*, 10, 1-11.

12 Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change*. New York: Guilford Press.

13 Wheatley, R. & Webb-Jones, C. (n4)

14 Johnstone, L., & Boyle, M. (2018). The Power Threat Meaning Framework: An Alternative Nondiagnostic Conceptual System. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1, 18.

15 Zarling, A., & Russell, D. (2022). A randomized clinical trial of acceptance and commitment therapy and the Duluth Model classes for men court-mandated to a domestic violence program. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 90(4), 326.

3. The Early Awareness Stalking Intervention (EASI)

This section is strongly informed by the EASI Implementation Guide (pp. 4-8)¹⁶ which included research organised by the authors and used for the purposes of explaining the arguments behind such a project, the logic model and informing stakeholders of the proposed practical process.

The West Midlands Police trialled The Early Awareness Stalking Intervention (EASI), a cost and time efficient, targeted, and evidence-based intervention for those who are known to have engaged in stalking, delivered at the earliest stage possible for a 12-month period (August 2021 – July 2022). This was designed to be specifically targeted at ex-partner/rejected stalking perpetrators. It is not intended to serve as an "intense therapy intervention" that addresses stalking (or associated psychological and social vulnerabilities) in its entirety. Rather, EASI offers early positive intervention that includes easily available instruments to develop psychological flexibility, and possibilities for further signposting. EASI provides one-to-one sessions, consisting of stalking psychoeducation (increasing a person's awareness of their harmful behaviours) and therapy focussed on improving psychological well-being and resilience, relevant for addressing psychosocial deficits contributing to their stalking behaviour. It aims to increase, and develop hope, skills, and a commitment to change within participants with professional support. This intervention utilised the Focussed Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (FACT) treatment approach, which recommends 4-6 sessions.

3.1 EARLY

EASI is meant to act as a "circuit breaker intervention". It is aimed at those who have started stalking their ex-partners, but who are conscious of their issues and willing to receive assistance in overcoming those struggles. It is designed for those who have not yet displayed a consistent pattern of stalking, either with the same or different victims.

3.2 AWARENESS

The first training session delivered to all stakeholders (police, probation, victim support services, etc) covered a general overview of stalking, including its definition, several typologies, and methods of detection. It is this awareness that was utilised to identify appropriate cases for EASI and to be used during the section and consenting processes. Without adopting the "stalker" label, it is crucial that participants receiving the intervention recognise their actions as stalking in the strictest sense. Throughout the delivery of FACT sessions, these aspects may be referred to when/if relevant, however its key objective will be to improve awareness of their own internal experiences and improve psychological flexibility.

3.3 STALKING

On receipt of a stalking complaint police officers will be able to confidently identify stalking as "Fixated, Obsessive, Unwanted, Repeated," contact and ensure that the victim reasonably finds the behaviour unwelcome, that the alleged perpetrator ought reasonably to have known that, and that the behaviour can reasonably be regarded as posing a risk to the victim"¹⁷.

¹⁶ Wheatley, R. & Webb-Jones, C. (n4)

¹⁷ Home Office (2021). Stalking Protection Orders Statutory guidance for the police. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/951354/SPOs_statutory_guidance_English_with_changes__002_.pdf

3.4 INTERVENTION

A brief intervention based on the Focused Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (fACT) model is introduced to individual stalking perpetrators who are identified as appropriate participants. The aim of this is to reduce further stalking offending, improve psychological well-being linked to why the person may be stalking, and increase victim confidence in the police response to stalking. It intends to be offered as some form of conditional caution (Outcome 3) or following a charge of stalking (Outcome 1). It is provided individually and online by BPS Chartered and HCPC Registered forensic psychologists experienced in assessing risk in and delivering interventions with those who stalk.

fACT is a brief, but powerful behavioural intervention based on ACT widely used in the USA and Europe. ACT seeks to teach psychological flexibility to facilitate individuals to control/adapt their internal response to function when faced with challenging thoughts and feelings. Although there is a growing body of research on the efficacy of ACT for a variety of populations and disorders¹⁴ there is little research to date on the use of fACT; this is a new model of brief therapy that is a highly condensed version of a well-established longer-term treatment¹⁸. It is rooted in three overarching principles:

1. 'Opening up': unhooking from your thoughts and feelings and allowing them to freely come, stay and go in their own good time.
2. 'Being present': flexibly focusing attention where it is most useful and engaging fully in whatever you are doing.
3. 'Doing what matters': using values to motivate and guide effective behavioural changes

fACT sessions are complemented where necessary with psychoeducational elements related to What is stalking? Why do people stalk? And messages such as, "it's not your fault, but it is your responsibility" principles of relating to our thoughts, emotions, and inner scripts, and subsequent responses to situations. fACT teaches through experiential exercises to adopt new perspectives to view thoughts, emotions, memories etc, just as they are. Further, it emphasises a focus on connecting with values and engaging in committed actions. This means taking action that are values-based, flexible and ever-expanding. The focus shifts from trying to control/manage unwanted internal experiences onto ways to regain a desired quality of life.

¹⁸ Strosahl, K. D., Robinson, P. J., & Gustavsson, T. (2012). Brief interventions for radical change: Principles and practice of focused acceptance and commitment therapy. New Harbinger Publications.

4. Delivery of EASI

To support awareness raising and identification of cases for the EASI pilot, police officers were provided access to live (and recorded) online training sessions about stalking and about the project. This was delivered by West Midlands Police in conjunction with Black Country Women's Aid, HMPPS Psychologists and the Alice Ruggles Trust. A subsequent training session was provided to two dedicated police colleagues responsible for the identification, selection and consenting/contracting of participants for the intervention re the utility of the Stalking Assessment Indices (SAI). The SAI (victim and perpetrator) was used to inform risk judgements at the point of selection for the intervention, and for informing support given to the victims of the identified participants.

Police stakeholders were aware of available victim support services to signpost complainants to as business as usual (BAU). Dedicated EASI police specialist officers were to follow the guidance provided from the process map and EASI inclusion/exclusion criteria to aid selection, however some case discussions between stakeholders, regarding selection were required. EASI police specialist officers could also use the DARA (as BAU), and the SAI to help identify appropriate cases, and for evaluation purposes. Black Country Women's Aid ISACs completed the SAI for the same purposes. The key considerations here will be to assess if this diversionary outcome is appropriate given the risks posed to self and others; these assessments will provide information on the amount of time the person stalking spends on carrying out problem behaviours towards their victim, as well as risk levels.

The EASI initiative offers an option for police implementation to support rehabilitative element aspects of Stalking Protection Orders, within a contract for conditional cautions (outcome 3) and as a rehabilitative order upon 'guilty plea' convictions at Court. The opportunity to engage in EASI may also be offered on a voluntary basis to those who are sentenced to a community order with a behavioural change requirement. An open information sharing contract was in place with relevant CJS agencies in terms of progress and conditional caution/civil order/community order/ licence condition compliance, and awareness of the reporting of any heightened risk indicators (i.e. red flags, such as homicidal/suicidal ideation, last resort thinking etc.). There were also consent/contracting agreements with participants that victim details were not for discussion, and victim blaming would be challenged.

EASI FACT sessions were delivered by highly knowledgeable and experienced HCPC Registered/BPS Chartered Forensic Psychologists on an individual basis via remote online live sessions on Zoom (online platform and laptops provided by bidder as funded). This ensured provisions were more responsive, Covid-19 recovery compliant, cost effective, and that avoids detriment to a participant's existing routine commitments, such as employment and any corresponding impact upon income. Delivering psychological and therapeutic interventions online have become increasingly popular throughout the pandemic, without detracting from the benefits. The intervention was developed and delivered over six, one-hour sessions (as the recommended maximum) by FACT trained forensic psychologists experienced in risk assessing and working with people who stalk, and those who commit a variety of offences, including sexual and domestic abuse. (The intervention will have assumed intellectual property rights and copyright of its authors - Rachael Wheatley, (HMPPS) and Cate Webb-Jones (WMPS))¹⁹.

¹⁹ Wheatley, R. & Webb-Jones, C. (n4)

5. Evaluation

Following a process of competitive tendering, a research team at University of Derby (UoD) was commissioned to evaluate the EASI project. The pilot intervention was evaluated using mixed methods to investigate the effectiveness of the intervention using a variety of measures. This provided a thorough understanding of the outcome effects (compared to those who do not attend) as well as the experiences of those who have received the intervention. This report examines whether the initiative works and what that means for each respected agency involved, for whom it works and under what conditions.

Crucially, hypotheses outlined in the research bid that we aimed to test in the evaluation are reported here. As a result, the final report attempts to answer the following questions:

- Does the intervention (EASI) work, that is, does it achieve its goals?:
 - Improved knowledge and confidence in working with stalking offenders amongst Police and Victims Services
 - Improved victim safeguarding and support
 - Reduced re-offending rates amongst offenders
 - Improved psycho-social functioning amongst offenders
- Which mechanisms are involved in making the intervention work?
- What lessons can be drawn from the pilot project's implementation to guide the formation of similar partnerships in the future?

To answer these questions quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed. The structure of this report is as follows:

- Following this introduction, section 6 describes the quantitative analysis which involves pre and post psychometric data collected from EASI candidates who had participated in the intervention. This is followed up with reoffending data using comparison with a comparator group with similar case characteristics to the EASI group.
- Section 7.1 focuses on the analysis of interview data from EASI candidates and victims.
- Section 7.2 considers the experiential learning from stakeholders involved in the project, with regards to multi-agency working and the benefits this brought to case management.
- Section 8 discusses the collective findings in relation to the intended aims of EASI and the reflections of the evaluation team
- Section 9 offers some recommendations for the development of future practice in this field

6. Quantitative Findings

Methods

Quantitative data collection methods were used; these consisted of the collection and analysis of routinely collected quantitative data from the West Midlands Police database alongside pre-post intervention ACT related psychometric measures as described in this section.

Selection Criteria for EASI

For an individual to be eligible for EASI they were required to fulfil the following inclusion criteria :

- To be adults (men and women aged 18 years and above) residing in the West Midlands region of the UK who had engaged in ex-intimate partner stalking
- The stalking was not driven by serious mental illness
- Section 2A stalking cases – conditional caution or out of court disposal option agreed
- Section 4A stalking cases – offered on a voluntary basis to those charged with or convicted of stalking
- Admission of guilt for stalking behaviour during police interview
- To have observable cognitive functioning ability to benefit from the intervention

There were also corresponding exclusion criteria:

- A custodial sentence for stalking
- Individuals with learning disabilities and challenges that could make learning new abstract skills within a brief intervention too difficult
- Unwillingness to participate in EASI
- Substance misuse or medication interfering with the ability to complete EASI
- Individuals who need an interpreter

Suitable stalking cases were selected by West Midlands Police using the specified inclusion criteria. Of the 58 stalking perpetrators recruited into EASI during this original research phase (1st September 2021 until 15th June 2022), 16 did not provide consent to participate in the research. As such, non-consenting individuals were not invited to complete the pre and post psychometrics nor participate in the research interviews following completion of the therapy. Candidates were withdrawn from EASI if they were continuously absent from sessions after these were re-arranged and failed to appropriately engage with the therapy.

To investigate rates of re-offending, West Midlands Police identified a suitable comparator group of 55 stalking offenders from their database with similar case characteristics to those undertaking EASI. The comparator group also contained individuals who were eligible for EASI but were unwilling to participate or were offered an alternative out of court disposal intervention programme. The following selection criteria were used to identify the comparator group:

- To be adults (men and women aged 18 years and above) who had offended in the West Midlands region of the UK by engaging in ex-intimate partner stalking
- Section 2A stalking cases – conditional caution agreed or charged with either stalking or stalking related offences and entered a guilty plea
- Admission of guilt for stalking behaviour during police interview

Routinely Collected Information

The research team liaised closely with the West Midlands Police EASI specialist officers to collate routinely collected quantitative data obtained through their electronic police database. Information was collected on an individual basis and extracted from the database into an Excel spreadsheet by the specialist officers. Key demographic information on age, gender and ethnicity were recorded for EASI candidates and their victims who had consented to participate in the research. Anonymised available data were used for all candidates in relation to their involvement in EASI from the beginning of the intervention (1st September 2021) up until 15th June 2022. This included each EASI candidate's individual start date (i.e., the date of the first fACT session they attended), end date (i.e., the date of the final fACT session they attended), completion status (i.e., whether the candidate attended all six fACT sessions), reasons for non-completion or withdrawal. Data were transferred into IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 for analysis.

For evaluative purposes, re-offending in the EASI and comparator groups has been operationalised as all calls to service and re-offending reports on the West Midlands Police database since the date of an individual's Conditional Caution being authorised. For the EASI group, this includes re-offending recorded during the six fACT sessions. We selected these specific measures due to the importance of closely monitoring any recurring stalking behaviour or other offending of perpetrators within the short period of time (10 months) available to collate the police data for statistical analysis. It is acknowledged that stalking cases are often complex and difficult; it can take a lengthy period of time to collect and process new evidence and to investigate reported offences before an official outcome can be obtained. These measures of re-offending, although broad, allow us to examine the frequency of contact that police have with people who engage in ex-intimate stalking related to an array of reported incidents of further offending.

ACT related psychometric measures

The research team created an online questionnaire to examine changes in the psycho-social functioning of EASI candidates from Time 1 (start of the six fACT sessions) until Time 2 (end of the six fACT sessions). The West Midlands Police EASI specialist officers administered the online questionnaires at Time 1 and Time 2 via EASI candidates' email addresses. Only those candidates who had provided informed consent for the research were invited to complete the questionnaires at each time point. The questionnaires contained the following three ACT related psychometric measures:

Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II)

The AAQ-II is a brief 7-item self-report measure of psychological flexibility²¹. Example items include "Emotions cause problems in my life" and "I worry about not being able to control my worries and feelings." Participants respond to items of the AAQ-II using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = never true, 7 = always true). In the current research, the AAQ-II displayed excellent internal consistency reliability at Time 1 ($\alpha = .96$) and Time 2 ($\alpha = .95$). A sum score for each participant is computed by totalling the scale items. Higher total scores indicate reduced psychological flexibility whereas lower total scores indicate improved psychological flexibility.

²¹ Bond, F. W., Hayes, S. C., Baer, R. A., Carpenter, K. M., Guenole, N., Orcutt, H. K., Waltz, T., & Zettle, R. D. (2011). Preliminary psychometric properties of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire - II: A revised measure of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance. *Behavior Therapy*, 42, 676-688. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2011.03.007>.

Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire (CFQ)

The CFQ is a brief 7-item self-report measure of cognitive fusion²². Example items include “My thoughts cause me distress or emotional pain” and “I over-analyse situations to the point where it’s unhelpful to me.” Participants respond to items of the CFQ using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = never true, 7 = always true). The CFQ displayed excellent internal consistency reliability at Time 1 ($\alpha = .97$) and Time 2 ($\alpha = .94$). A sum score for each participant is computed by totalling the scale items. Higher total scores indicate greater cognitive fusion whereas lower total scores indicate reduced cognitive fusion.

Multidimensional Psychological Flexibility Inventory (MPFI)

The MPFI is a 60-item self-report measure of psychological flexibility²³. It is a multidimensional scale composed of six subscales designed to assess psychological flexibility (e.g., Acceptance: “I was receptive to observing unpleasant thoughts and feelings without interfering with them”) and six subscales that assess psychological inflexibility (e.g., Experiential Avoidance: “I tried to distract myself when I felt unpleasant emotions”). In the current research, a short version of the MPFI was used that contained the first two items of the flexibility subscales (12 items) and the first two items of the inflexibility subscales (12 items). Participants respond to items of the MPFI using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = never true, 7 = always true). The MPFI displayed excellent internal consistency reliability for its two main facets at Time 1 (Flexibility: $\alpha = .92$; Inflexibility: $\alpha = .94$) and Time 2 (Flexibility: $\alpha = .95$; Inflexibility: $\alpha = .86$). Composite mean scores are computed for each participant by averaging across the relevant items of each dimension. Higher scores indicate greater psychological flexibility and inflexibility.

Limitations

This part of the evaluation has key limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings:

- Demographic data are not currently available for the comparator group. Despite their best efforts, West Midlands Police EASI specialist officers were unable to recruit eligible stalking perpetrators into this group due to a lack of informed consent given for the research. Consequently, only offending data recorded on the West Midlands Police database for the comparator group has been shared with the research team and is included in the evaluation.
- Offending data for the EASI and comparator groups have been obtained from the West Midlands Police database only. As such, it is not possible to ascertain whether individuals included in the sample have additional offences recorded by police forces outside the West Midlands region of the UK.

22 Gillanders, D.T., Bolderston, H., Bond, F.W., Dempster, M., Flaxman, P.E., Campbell, L., et al. (2014). The development and initial validation of the Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire. *Behavior Therapy*, 45, 83-101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2013.09.001>.

23 Rolffs, J.L., Rogge, R.D., & Wilson, K.G. (2016). Disentangling Components of Flexibility via the Hexaflex Model: Development and Validation of the Multidimensional Psychological Flexibility Inventory (MPFI). *Assessment*, 25, 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191116645905>.

- Direct comparisons of re-offending data are made between EASI completers (i.e., those EASI candidates who fully completed all six fACT sessions) and the comparator group. These analyses investigated differences in the overall proportion of individuals who have re-offended in each group during the project period as well as differences in the frequencies of specific measures of re-offending. Analyses of re-offending for the EASI candidates presented in this report do not give a clear breakdown of precisely when calls to service and re-offending reports were recorded during the therapeutic process; in other words, we have not been able to differentiate between the numbers of EASI candidates who re-offended during the six fACT sessions compared to those whose re-offending occurred exclusively after all sessions had been completed.
- Finally, our analyses of re-offending data do not examine patterns of outcomes associated with calls to service and re-offending reports for individuals in either the EASI or comparator groups. Many of the calls to service will be recorded as re-offending but are not proven offences and subsequently filed No Further Action or classed as a Non-Crime (e.g., where the report was recorded to describe a Non-Molestation Order that had been issued). This has the effect of potentially inflating the actual re-offending rate.

Sample

From 1st September 2021 (start of EASI delivery) until 15th June 2022, a total of 58 stalking cases were recruited into EASI (hereafter referred to as the EASI group) during the research evaluation. Of those individuals who started EASI, 48 (82.8%) candidates had completed all six fACT sessions (hereafter referred to as the EASI completer group) and the remaining 10 candidates had not completed the intervention. The reasons for non-completion were due to candidates not having started the therapy after referral (5.2%, n=3), being withdrawn from EASI due to missed sessions and lack of engagement (10.3%, n=6), or not having completed all six fACT sessions (1.7%, n=1) at the time of data analysis.

The EASI candidates included 40 (93%) males and three (7%) females. The age of the EASI candidates ranged between 18-64 years with a mean age of 36.7 years (SD = 11.8). As shown in Table 1, the candidates were predominantly White British or British (73.8%, n=31) or White Other (2.4%, n=1). Five candidates were of Asian ethnicity (12%) and the ethnicity of a further five candidates (11.9%) were unknown. It should be noted that there are missing demographic data for 16 candidates who had not consented to participate in the research.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of EASI candidates

Characteristic	Range	Mean	SD
Age	18-64 years	36.7	11.8
	Type	N	%
Gender	Male	40	93.0
	Female	3	7.0
Ethnicity	White British	29	69.0
	British	2	4.8
	White Other	1	2.4
	Pakistani	1	2.4
	Indian	2	4.8
	Asian	2	4.8
	Not Known	5	11.9

Unfortunately, only 12 victims of the EASI candidates had consented to provide their demographic information as part of the research. EASI victims were all female and their age ranged between 20-57 years with a mean age of 38.7 years (SD = 10.7). Regarding their ethnicity, the EASI victims were White British (16.6%, n=2), White European (16.6%, n=2) and Black Caribbean (8.3%, n=1). The ethnicity of a further seven candidates (58.1%) were unknown.

Stalking behaviour of EASI and comparator groups

For each person in the EASI and comparator groups, the research team examined the individual stalking behaviours within the most recent offence that led to the Conditional Caution/Out of Court Disposal. Each offence description was binary coded using the 16 items of the Stalking Assessment Indices-Perpetration (SAI-P) screening measure²⁴ to identify the presence or absence of each form of stalking in the offence description. Most individuals in both the EASI (71%, n=41) and comparator groups (64%, n=35) had perpetrated at least two or more different stalking behaviours reflected in the SAI-P items. As shown in Table 2, the most prevalent stalking behaviours shared by individuals in the EASI and comparator groups consisted of: phone calls and text messages to the victim; communication via social networking websites; and showing up uninvited or waiting outside the victim's home. Contrary to the EASI candidates, two individuals within the comparator group had broken into the victim's home and six had been physically violent towards the victim or someone close to them.

24 McEwan, T.E., Simmons, M., Clothier, T., & Senkans, S. (2020). Measuring stalking: the development and evaluation of the Stalking Assessment Indices (SAI). *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 28, 435-461. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13218719.2020.1787904>. 25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191116645905>.

Table 2. The stalking behaviours of EASI and comparator groups

Stalking Behaviour	EASI Group N (%)	Comparator Group N (%)
Accessed victim's PC, phone, or online account(s) w/o permission	0 (100)	0 (100)
Broke into victim's home	0 (100)	2 (4)
Communicated with victim via social networking websites	9 (16)	9 (16)
Damaged or vandalised property of victim or someone close to them	2 (3)	4 (7)
Drove by victim's house, work or other places	2 (3)	1 (2)
Gave victim gifts or other unwanted items	4 (7)	1 (2)
Made threats to harm victim or someone close to them	11 (19)	4 (7)
Made phone calls or sent text messages to victim	47 (81)	34 (62)
Posted information about victim online	3 (5)	1 (2)
Sent emails to victim	11 (19)	4 (7)
Sent letters, cards or other written materials to victim	3 (5)	4 (7)
Showed up uninvited or waited outside victim's home, work or other places	29 (50)	31 (56)
Spoke or wrote to others about victim in ways that harmed their reputation	5 (9)	1 (2)
Tried to get information about victim from other people	5 (9)	1 (2)
Watched victim from a distance or followed them	1 (2)	1 (2)
Physically violent towards victim or someone close to them	0 (100)	6 (11)

History of Offending

Previous offending has been defined as all crime reports recorded against each individual candidate (EASI and comparator group) on the West Midlands Police database. Based on these criteria, 49 EASI candidates (84.5%) had at least one or more previous crime reports recorded, excluding the most recent offence that led to their EASI referral. In contrast, nine EASI candidates (15.5%) had no previous crime reports recorded. Independent t-tests revealed that EASI candidates did not significantly differ from the comparator group in the average number of previous crime reports recorded overall, $t(104) = -1.26$, $p = .210$, including those recorded for stalking, $t(103) = -.08$, $p = .936$, domestic abuse, $t(103) = -.46$, $p = .649$, and other offences not exclusive to stalking or domestic abuse, $t(103) = -1.58$, $p = .117$. It should be noted that Other Offences constitutes a broad category that includes a diverse array of offences such as theft, criminal damage and assault. These may have been part of the course of conduct constituting a stalking offence yet not identified as a pattern of abuse for crime reporting purposes. An overview of descriptive statistics for previous crime reports in relation to these general offence categories can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Previous crime reports for EASI and comparator groups

Crime Reports	EASI Group M (SD), range	Comparator Group M (SD), range
Overall	6.65 (7.12) 0-23	8.78 (9.95) 0-61
Stalking	1.66 (2.33) 0-11	1.69 (1.43) 0-6
Domestic Abuse	1.42 (2.09) 0-9	1.64 (2.69) 0-12
Other Offences	3.58 (4.14) 0-17	5.47 (7.74) 0-49

Based on previous crime reports, the research team also examined the proportion of individuals within the EASI and comparator groups whose offence history could be classified within and across these categories (i.e., at least one reported offence in each category = yes; absence of any reported offences in each category = no). As displayed in Table 4, candidates in both the EASI and comparator groups displayed a varied pattern of previous offending in which stalking behaviour was usually perpetrated in conjunction with domestic abuse and a range of other offences. Only a very small minority of candidates in the EASI and comparator groups had either stalking, domestic abuse or other offences recorded in isolation.

Table 4. Pattern of offence history for EASI and comparator groups

Offending Behaviour	EASI Group N (%)	Comparator Group N (%)
Stalking, Domestic Abuse and Other Offences	20 (40)	28 (51)
Stalking and Domestic Abuse	3 (6)	1 (2)
Stalking and Other Offences	3 (6)	15 (27)
Stalking Only	0 (0)	3 (6)
Domestic Abuse and Other Offences	4 (8)	2 (4)
Domestic Abuse Only	0 (0)	0 (0)
Other Offences Only	2 (4)	1 (2)

Psycho-Social Functioning

Thirty-one EASI candidates completed the Time 1 questionnaire (pre-treatment) and sixteen candidates completed the Time 2 questionnaire (post-treatment). Only fifteen candidates fully completed both the Time 1 and Time 2 questionnaires and whose data is included in the following analyses.

Table 5. Analysis of ACT related outcome measures

Measure	Pre-Treatment M (SD)	Post-Treatment M (SD)
Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II	26.27 (11.62)	20.33 (2.39)
Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire	29.40 (11.96)	22.00 (9.09)
Multidimensional Psychological Flexibility Inventory		
Psychological Flexibility	4.10 (1.07)	4.47 (1.08)
Psychological Inflexibility	3.08 (1.39)	2.60 (0.83)

Note: Decreases in scores pre-post treatment represents improved functioning except for the MPFI Psychological Flexibility subscale where increased scores are viewed as positive.

Paired t-tests were conducted on each of the outcome measures to examine changes in EASI candidates' psycho-social functioning pre and post treatment. As shown in Table 3, the AAQ-II revealed a significant increase in self-reported psychological flexibility at Time 2 compared to Time 1, $t(14) = 4.0$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.03$. The CFQ also demonstrated a significant decrease in EASI candidates' level of cognitive fusion following treatment completion, $t(14) = 5.2$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.33$. The MPFI subscales also revealed a significant increase in psychological flexibility, $t(14) = -2.3$, $p = .034$, $d = -.61$ and decrease in psychological inflexibility, $t(14) = 2.4$, $p = .031$, $d = .62$ at Time 2 following completion of the six fACT sessions. Overall, these measures all reveal positive shifts in the psycho-social functioning of EASI candidates upon completion of fACT. The effect sizes for these analyses were all medium to large based on Cohen's (1988) criteria where $d = 0.2$ is considered a 'small' effect, $d = 0.5$ is considered a 'medium' effect, and $d = 0.8$ is considered a 'large' effect.

Re-offending

Re-offending data were coded to examine the occurrence (i.e., at least one recorded call to service or re-offending report = yes; absence of any calls to service or re-offending reports = no) and frequency of further police contacts in terms of the number of calls to service and re-offending reports logged against each candidate over a 10-month period (1st September 2021 – 15th June 2022).

An examination of the proportion of EASI completers (i.e., those candidates who had fully completed all six fACT sessions) with calls to service or re-offending reports on their individual police records revealed 22 candidates (45.8% of group) who had re-offended by 15th June 2022 compared to 26 candidates (54.2% of group) who had not re-offended. Over the same time-period, these figures compare to 35 candidates in the comparator group (63.6% of group) who had re-offended since the date of their Conditional Caution/Out of Court Disposal for stalking compared to 20 candidates (36.4% of group) who had not re-offended. A Pearson Chi-Square test revealed that significantly fewer EASI completers had re-offended during the specified period compared to candidates in the comparator group, $\chi^2(1, N=113) = 4.02, p=.045$.

Independent t-tests also demonstrated that EASI completers had significantly fewer calls to service recorded against them on average ($M = .73, SD = 1.16$) relative to the comparator group ($M = 1.82, SD = 3.01$) during this 10-month period, $t(101) = -2.36, p = .020$. The EASI completers also had significantly fewer re-offending reports on average ($M = .60, SD = .94$) than the comparator group ($M = 2.44, SD = 3.80$) during the same period, $t(101) = -3.25, p = .002$.

The research team also examined the proportion of individuals within the EASI completer and comparator groups whose re-offending behaviour could be classified within and across each of the categories of stalking, domestic abuse and other offences (i.e., at least one call to service or re-offending report in each category = yes; absence of any calls to service or re-offending reports in each category = no). Contrary to the offence history data, individuals within both the EASI completer and comparator groups were much less varied in their re-offending behaviour with the majority engaging in either stalking, domestic abuse or other types of offending in isolation (see table 6).

Table 6. Pattern of re-offending for EASI completer and comparator groups

Offending Behaviour	EASI Completer Group N (%)	Comparator Group N (%)
Stalking, Domestic Abuse and Other Offences	1(2)	7(13)
Stalking and Domestic Abuse	2(4)	1(2)
Stalking and Other Offences	4(8)	4(7)
Stalking Only	14(29)	18(33)
Domestic Abuse and Other Offences	2(4)	4(7)
Domestic Abuse Only	7(15)	18(33)
Other Offences Only	8(17)	22(40)

Note: EASI Completer Group N = 48; Comparator Group N = 55

7. Qualitative Findings

The second part of the evaluation focuses on the qualitative aspects of evidencing the impact of EASI. Interviews were conducted with stalking perpetrators and victims to capture their perceptions and experience of engaging with the intervention.

Methods:

The ideal situation would have been for the evaluation team to be able to speak with matched pairs of victims and EASI candidates who were involved in a number of randomly chosen cases. However, there were ethical concerns and data protection issues which needed to be considered before interviewing. Given the sensitive nature of the research and the vulnerability of the participants, it was decided that key stakeholders working closely with victims (Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworker) and perpetrators (West Midlands Police) would be the appropriate authority to initially introduce participants to the evaluation team once they had completed their time with EASI and obtain an agreement in principle to be contacted for the purposes of research. Those who agreed to be contacted were then given an information sheet with all the research details, informing them about the purpose of the evaluation, the interview process, and their right to withdraw. Once participants had completed their EASI sessions (perpetrators) or engaged with Black Country Women's Aid victim support (victims), they were invited to take part in the research interview. Before the interview began, they were asked to read and provide written and/or verbal consent to participate and be audio-recorded. To maintain safeguarding and anonymity, the invitation was sent via the WMP coordinators as they had developed a personal relationship with the participants and were the main point of contact through which they were referred into EASI. Once the participants had consented to the interview, they were sent a Zoom link. The researchers used an anonymous Zoom account and avoided using personal identifiers (such as names) during the interviews to reduce any potential personal risks. Only individuals whose therapy was already finished or almost finished, and who were willing to engage in the research, qualified for our limited sample pool.

After obtaining informed consent, a total of 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with EASI completers and 3 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with victims between May and June 2022. Key demographic characteristics of EASI candidates and victims are listed in Table 7. When possible, two researchers conducted the interviews online, via Zoom. Interviews lasted between 20 to 60 minutes and were recorded with the permission of the participant. These interviews were anonymised, professionally transcribed and were coded and analysed using qualitative software NVIVO. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed several interesting insights.

Table 7. Key Demographic Data for Evaluation Interviewees

Anonymised EASI Candidate Number	Ethnicity	Gender	Age
C15	White British	Male	45
C39	White British	Male	57
C13	White British	Male	50
C33	White British	Male	46
C42	White British	Male	46
C31	White British	Male	38
C45	Pakistani	Male	38
C47	White British	Male	41
C21	White British	Male	43
C49	White British	Female	29
V49	White British	Male	NA
V45	Pakistani	Female	34
V51	Unknown	Female	NA

Limitations

This part of the evaluation has several limitations:

- A handful of those who participated in EASI consented to taking part in the research, and therefore the responses detailed below, may not be fully representative of all ex-intimate stalking cases.
- We realise that the sample could be made up of a self-selected group of people who were willing to participate in the research given how the sample had to be chosen and recruited.
- The participants' recollection of the intervention varied depending on how much time had lapsed since they completed their therapy sessions. Those who had more recently finished their sessions (within a month of the interview) had more detailed recollection of their sessions and what techniques they found helpful compared to those who had finished their sessions 6 months prior to the interview.
- Finally, we acknowledge that these interviews were sensitive and that we, as the researchers, had a short window of opportunity to build rapport with the participants. As a result, we cannot rule out the possibility that the interviewees were not entirely honest or as self-reflective as might have been preferable, causing us to only get information that they believed to be socially acceptable.

However, the interviews provided many insights into how participants viewed the impact of EASI and are a crucial source of data for this evaluation. We first provide the results of the perpetrator interviews before moving on to the victim interviews. Impact of intervention and future prevention are the two key themes that are presented. We concentrate on these themes since they serve as a foundation for some of our suggestions for future practices and the aims of the intervention.

7.1. Interviews with EASI Stalking Candidates and Victims

Impact of EASI on Completers

All interviewees had participated in the EASI after being recommended to it by the West Midlands Police following their conditional caution. The therapy provided comprised of six weekly FACT sessions conducted by HCPC registered/BPS chartered Forensic Psychologists working on behalf of HMPPS. It was interesting to observe that EASI candidates who interviewed felt that they had received personalised interventions that were catered to their unique needs and circumstances. This appeared to be especially important considering that the motives for each individual differed substantially, with most resonating with the Rejected stalker identities (see SRP in Mullen et.al., 2006).

Motivations

During the interviews, EASI candidates were asked about the actions that led to their involvement with the EASI project and key motivations driving their behaviours. Three candidates argued that their behaviour was justifiable because they wanted to see the children they shared with their victims. Each of these individuals indicated that their ex-partners kept their children away from them and contact with their children motivated their behaviour rather than a desire to communicate with or visit their ex-partner.

Only one candidate contested that his stalking allegation was a mistake, and that the behaviour in question was not stalking or based on a desire to be near the ex-partner. Instead, the candidate described that their presence in the area was unintentional:

“I moved on with my life and I found another partner who unfortunately happened to live very close to her [the victim’s] new partner... my partner took it upon herself then to manipulate that situation to make it appear like I was stalking her and harassing her because I had been seen in this area” - (C15).

This candidate strongly denied that he was engaged in stalking behaviours and described the victim’s claims to the police as part of a pattern of abusive behaviour, which suggests that ex-intimate interactions of these sort make the nature of the charge quite complex.

One candidate stated that his behaviour was not driven by a disagreement about wedding finances. After their relationship had ended, the victim allegedly took all the money from their joint bank account, prompting the candidate to confront them and demand the money back. These interactions culminated in revenge-seeking behaviours leading to the stalking allegation and charges.

Only one EASI interviewee revealed that his behaviour was motivated by a desire to resume a recently concluded romantic connection. This was aggravated by the fact that his victim and himself shared the same workplace and therefore saw each other frequently. The applicant hesitated to understand why their relationship had ended and would send repeated emails to his ex-partner, believing that there was the opportunity to rekindle the relationship, unaware that this was upsetting the victim.

Behaviours

Though the motivations for stalking do not seem obvious as typically the notion is that there is a fixation or obsession with the victim, fACT therapy gave the EASI completers the opportunity to consider their own motives, examine their actions and address underlying issues linked to their behaviour, as suggested by one interviewee:

“Eventually we did get down to it and I recognised what I needed to do to move on and I was struggling to let go, not thoughts of sort of still wanting to be with her [victim], but to let go of my pure resentment... but I have got to a place where I can live with that and it doesn’t consume me and I don’t have thoughts about it. So, it was very helpful from that point of view.” - (C13)

The sessions were tailored to the needs of candidates according to the drivers behind their stalking behaviours:

“I did mention that I tend to suffer with a little bit of a short temper and I did ask was there anything I could use to help that and she recommended the breathing technique.” - (C39)

For a handful of EASI completers, the sessions were a space to address their denial and gain clarification on the behaviours which constituted inappropriate stalking behaviour, regardless of their motivations. Two of the EASI completers described turning up at the victim’s home either to check up on them as they had a new partner, or to take photos. These actions were motivated by a desire to keep tabs on their ex-partner, and a suspicion that their new partner was untrustworthy. One placed a tracker on the victim’s car, claiming that if it were not for being caught through CCTV, the behaviour would not have been alarming for his ex-partner as she would not have known and ultimately, it was to monitor the whereabouts of his daughter.

“My personal view is that what I’ve done, I would have preferred not to have a done and, okay, perhaps it’s not pleasant putting a tracking device on someone’s car, but I had no desire whatsoever to interact with my ex-wife.” - (C42)

The engagement with fACT sessions served several purposes recognised by EASI candidates:

- A space to address their own behaviours and recognise the fundamental drivers
- A place to reflect on past situations and strengthen decision-making skills
- Being equipped with cognitive tools to manage their emotions
- Familiarizing themselves with self-regulation techniques to tackle re-offending temptations

Whilst the therapy sessions were delivered online via Zoom, they were held by the same psychologists each time in order to provide consistency and to build up a rapport with each candidate and to cater to their individual needs. Whilst the candidates found the specific techniques that were introduced to be helpful, they also found that having a person to talk to, provided a lot of personal benefit to them. For instance, one candidate stated that the psychologist ***“explained the way I reacted, and we explored another route that I could have gone down, instead of doing what I did.” - (C13).***

Self-Regulation Skills

Additionally, the fACT sessions gave the respondents the skills and abilities they needed to control their own risk of reoffending. This was demonstrated using analogy exercises, which interviewees claimed encouraged them to come up with the best response to a tempting or provocative circumstance that might occur in the future. Each session introduced a new technique for the candidates to learn which would address the motivating factors behind the stalking behaviour. The therapy gave EASI candidates a range of options to explore and helped them determine whether engaging in repeat offences posed any hazards in the future. As a result, most of the EASI candidates were confident in their ability to refrain from committing new offences.

“It’s like being in a train station, waiting for a train. You either decide to get on that train or you decide not to. You know full well if you get on the train you’re going to end up, basically, back at the police station, so you learn not to get on it and stay away from it. It’s helpful, and somebody to talk to as well” (C13)

“That would never allow me to get into that situation ever again. Because the first sign of anything like that, all those six sessions and six patterns that she’s taught me would ring alarm bells in my head straight away for me to say, “Sorry, this is not for me. Goodbye.” Without a doubt. I will never get into the situation again that I landed myself in with my ex. Not knowing all of this. They’re great life tools.” - (C33)

Preventative Factors

The reasons behind the involvement in EASI and their active ownership of their own risk management were major topics of discussion for participants. Interestingly, many EASI candidates who interviewed were in denial of their behaviours constituting stalking in their mind. The impact on the victim was not something that they acknowledged due to their belief that the main purpose for contact was to see their children. What became apparent was the importance for them to feel indifferent to their ex-partner, manage their (often negative) feelings towards the victims and be mindful of how their behaviours, regardless of the motivations behind them may be seen in the eyes of the law as stalking. The label of stalker or offender was an uncomfortable one for most of the EASI completers and there was a willingness to remove this label linked to their identity.

For others, there was a genuine realization of how their fixations were affecting other aspects of their life and the desire to improve their emotional well-being was at the heart of managing emotions and refraining from troubling past behaviours.

“I did obsess and fixate sometimes on thoughts of how much I resented her, to the point where they had the potential of affecting my life, but in a benign way and not in a way that would then transpose onto her, it would be more something like I would sit and wallow in it for two hours on a Sunday afternoon rather than going out and enjoying going for a walk in the hills like I like to.” - (C13)

Some EASI candidates were particularly interested in the possibility to interact with a service that would offer them suitable counsel on how and where to direct their energy and get back to being functioning members of society. Others reported that the sessions helped them get back to a healthier lifestyle.

"I've joined the classes, like Fitbox classes, circuit classes, and made new friends, and all my old friends when I got in contact with them again were fine with me... With getting outside my own head and being out with my friends, it's nice to be there for people again and not just wallow in self-pity. I just spiralled. And I think I beat myself up...I now have got control over my emotions and my thoughts and I'm not going to relapse."- (C31)

Conclusion

Interviews with those who had stalked clearly demonstrated the benefits of partaking in FACT. Despite almost all of the interviewed candidates having been referred into the EASI for the first time as a result of a conditional caution, they realised the wide range of benefits of working with the therapeutic team:

- It helped them to reflect on their behaviours and acknowledge the stalking nature of their behaviour and recognise key motivations/intentions driving them
- It raised self-awareness about what they needed to concentrate on to address their problem behaviours in order to avoid future reoffending.
- It made them realise the importance of accepting the past and using mindful strategies to diffuse negative thoughts associated with their past and committing to pragmatic approaches to their present situations
- Finally, it equipped them with the cognitive tools and techniques they could use to self-regulate their emotions, avoid resorting to fixation and obsession by directing the focus on themselves and to deal with circumstances that could lead to reoffending in a careful manner.

Impact of EASI Services on Victims

This element of the evaluation examined victims' interactions with police, Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworkers (ISACs), and the resulting case outcomes in the context of EASI involvement. Victims were questioned about their stalking experiences as well as their interactions with every criminal justice agency and the support offered by Black Country Women's Aid on behalf of EASI. In this research, we primarily focused on the victims' experiences with the victim advocacy. This was not to minimise the very damaging impact of stalking on victims. As a direct result of their stalking experiences, all victim interviewees reported experiencing depression, anxiety and distress.

Police Reporting and Awareness

Victims' interactions with the criminal justice system were mostly focused on the treatment they received from the police and how they believed their case was handled. Two victims described their relationships as being emotionally and mentally abusive before the stalking behaviours began. They had only come to the realisation that they had been in an abusive relationship with the offender once they had spoken to the police about the behaviours that they were reporting. They were reluctant to inform the police as they did not believe that the behaviours were significant enough to warrant a crime and there was an initial belief that they could self-manage the situation:

"Originally, I was just dealing with it myself just because I didn't want to cause an issue, I'm not a person that likes to cause a massive issue." (V49)

Additionally, for this victim in particular, part of the reluctance to involve the police was due to being a male victim with a female offender which goes against common stalking dynamics and societal stereotypes.

Victims said that they first ignored or minimised the stalker behaviour in the expectation that it would subside. When the stalking became intolerable and started to affect other aspects of their life, they notified the police. For one victim, she only decided to call the police once the perpetrator started calling at her place of work (a school) to make false accusations that put the victim's job in jeopardy:

“If it was just myself, I could deal with it, I could be patient, whatever else, but as soon as it went public, as soon as my work was involved and stuff, I knew I needed to get the police involved because there was no coming back from it... If you are putting a date profile out there saying this person is a child abuser, blahdy-blah, and this is where he works, that's the sort of scary world. It wasn't just myself, it was dragging other aspects of my life into it, which could have been very serious.” - (V49)

For another, her mental health had been affected negatively to the point of feeling helpless and she sought out the police as a cry for help and protection (V45).

Most interviewed victims reported that their interactions with the police were pleasant. Regarding the level of support, victims appeared to be comforted that when they felt frightened and afraid, the police arrived right away and offered them help. A couple of them did indicate that they were disheartened with the timeline of responses but acknowledged that the complexity of their case made this difficult for the police to intervene in a timely time.

“So when I was speaking to them about the profile, “Oh well we might not be able to do anything about it, it's got to be down to her, because it's an American company and this, that and the other”, very hard for the UK police to actually remove it, so she has to remove it herself. So she had to obviously admit it and then remove the profile. So I knew even hearing that that it was going to be a few more months of things being leaked about me and a few more months of... which was hard for me.” - (V49)

It was evident that in these cases, the local police were either capable of giving the victim guidance that would facilitate the gathering of evidence and the issue of a non-molestation order. They were able to attain this through the courts within a few months, which provided some sort of temporary relief and legal parameters around the offender while the police continued the investigations and therapeutic work with EASI candidates.

Support from EASI via Black Country Women's Aid

An ISAC (Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworker), employed by Black Country Women's Aid, was allocated to any victim whose case had been identified as stalking by the West Midlands Police Service. ISACs' responsibilities included aiding in the handling of cases, developing safeguarding strategies, and offering general support to the victim. The participants in this study had an ISAC assigned to them who they had been working with from the beginning of their case. As the EASI project was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, communication was restricted to e-mails, phone and video calls between ISACs and victims. The structure and complexity of the cases often affected the quality of engagement²⁵.

²⁵ It is important to note that three victims agreed to be interviewed due to a lack of engagement from many victims with the service. Black Country Women's Aid indicated that this was due to a reluctance to discuss their case again and due to disengagements from frustrated victims who felt that the service was offered too late for them, considering the stage at which their case was at.

All interviewed victims emphasised the benefits of this advocacy programme, claiming that it helped them with issues related to case management, safeguarding, legal advice and mental health.

“I think after a few months, I was already registered with the GP to get counselling, that was just taking a long time. So then Black Country Women’s Aid said that they’d got a counsellor available for about 10 weeks. I did that for about 10 weeks, and that really did help.” - (V45)

Two interviewees expressed appreciation for the ISAC’s assistance with giving them the confidence to take charge of the situation by becoming familiar with the legal processes which could help them and managing their own safety.

“Yeah, this (Women’s Aid) lady sent me something about how... if we have a problem with contact because I told her that I don’t want to have him here...and talked about contact with my son because probably he has a right to contact with my son. And she sent me some links for how to do this for family court.” - (V1)

“They are really supportive actually. By telling me to report the further incidents that were happening, and telling me how the police actually work, because obviously in the beginning when I didn’t report it properly, there were further incidents, but the police are not going to do anything if they haven’t got any evidence or any statements, so, yes, I think my understanding of how the police work wasn’t there, so I needed that bit of extra help.” - (V45)

“I think when we first started, we had a phone call, and there was so much information about what I can do to keep myself safe, and all of that, like a Dash Cam, or a Ring Doorbell, or things like that, to keep myself safe. They gave me lots of information and phone numbers for things, so I can contact them any time really.” - (V47)

All victims reported finding it difficult to get the psychological therapy they needed to deal with their fears; instead, they said the ISAC served as a stand-in. The ISAC offered the victim’s circumstances an awareness that was lacking in other areas of their lives, and they felt heard, which brought them a sense of comfort. The victims’ sense of support increased as they realised how valuable being checked-in by someone who understood their situation was.

“I think having the weekly phone conversations is beneficial because you are not having to repeat yourself and you can just have a general conversation. Obviously, it’s just someone checking you are okay. But having that five, ten minutes out of a week might not seem a lot to a lot of people but when you are going through what obviously I went through... it allowed you to try and get back to normality.” - (V49)

Above all, interviewees valued the ISAC’s role as a primary hub for communicating critical information back to them and having a support hub to guide them through the criminal justice process. The victims who were interviewed during this time expressed reassurance and satisfaction with this form of contact. Whilst the victim advocacy aspect of EASI was appreciated, there was an ongoing anxiety and scepticism around the lack of information and control they had on the effectiveness of EASI on the stalking perpetrators, with one victim claiming that she was already contacted by her ex-partner shortly after his EASI sessions finished. Others worried of being revictimised due to the belief in their ex-partner’s ability to manipulate the system and use the EASI sessions to buy time before they may decide to reoffend.

"I don't know if he's actually talking, you know, committing to it. Because I know that the evidence was there when he was interviewed, he couldn't really say, "Oh, I haven't done it." So, he admitted it. And he'll say anything when he's confronted, to spin things around, and I just, I don't know. People who don't know him don't know what he's like." - (V45)

"I can't see me not getting a message come the end of this year, just because I believe that's the person that she is...she's very good at acting and throughout the whole process it's been a very soap opera - oh I'll cry, I'll make people feel sympathy for me... I think it might be a case of you won't see the impact till the end of this year, till that non-molestation order ends." - (V49)

Conclusion

Although victims have suffered significant psychological and emotional harm, they had often felt supported by the police, especially in recognising stalking behaviours and abusive relationship patterns. Since they were unaware of how EASI would hold their ex-partners accountable during or after their engagement with FACT, interviewees were particularly worried of revictimization. However, for a variety of reasons, victims felt that their involvement with victim advocacy programmes was of substantial value:

- The Black Country Women's Aid ISACs helped clients develop personalised safety and assistance plans. In order to create the best possible strategy, it was necessary to consider individual needs for both practical and emotional support, improve clients' feelings of alienation and raise their awareness in regard to their own safety.
- Victims believed that the ISACs provided a much-needed therapeutic space for them to voice their anxieties and issues and feel heard by an understanding party.
- The interviewees who experienced physical stalking had appeared to be extremely satisfied with the advocate service overall because they perceived it to improve their understanding of the criminal justice system.

7.2. Interviews with Key Stakeholders

This report expands on the set up and knowledge of EASI by speaking with stakeholders nearer to the evaluation's conclusion to record their learning and development over the course of the project. This section specifically focuses on three key themes:

- Stakeholders' experience of a multi-agency approach to stalking
- How the initiative evolved and matured over the 12-month period
- Successes and challenges that stakeholders faced along the way

The goal of these interviews was to gather empirical information of the stakeholders' learning and experiences so that recommendations for best practices for professionals could be made.

Method

After obtaining informed consent, a total of seven semi-structured interviews were conducted via video-call with police and ISACs involved in EASI between May and June 2022. With the participants' consent, interviews were recorded and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. These interviews were coded and analysed using qualitative software NVIVO after being professionally transcribed and anonymised.

Interviews were conducted with the police who detect and refer the stalking perpetrator to the intervention and ISACs who deliver support services to victims. The interview schedule was developed in line with the aims of the study and to tap into the nature of the stakeholders' roles and work within EASI, their experiences with the service users (perpetrators and victims) and their reflections on future models of a similar kind.

Stakeholder Experiences:

Multi-Agency Working

Interestingly, the EASI format of working together is quite different to other models of multi-agency initiatives where there is typically co-location and regular triage follow-ups between all stakeholders involved. EASI, however, follows a less cohesive model in that stalking cases which qualify stalking perpetrators for the initiative are predominantly filtered out by the police, who then pass on relevant but restrictive case information to HMPPS psychologists who deliver the psychological therapy sessions to EASI candidates. The ISACs usually have their clients referred in through the police or self-referral and any liaison between the stakeholders usually takes place if a particular case needs to be discussed. Problems are discussed on a case-by-case basis and knowledge is exchanged accordingly.

Most stakeholders believed that their involvement with EASI was valuable in terms of information sharing and increasing the support to resolve matters.

“Yes, I think knowledge sharing, sharing best practice, working through any issues, together as a group. You never feel alone or like you’re struggling to find the answer, because there’s always somebody that will be able to help with that.” - [SH1]

“...the relationship with the partners and the communication with the partners has been really good. We’re able to share information and any problems that are arising and work through them together and I think, yes, it’s good to have that connection.” - [SH2]

There was a collective and common effort to work towards a shared goal and stakeholders expressed this to be a facilitator in working together.

“...I think there’s a willingness on all parts. I think we’ve all got the same ideal. That we all just want stalking to reduce. So I think there is a willingness on all parts that mean that we work together collectively as a group in terms of when we meet up and we discuss things.” - [SH3]

Despite each involved agency having their own respective approaches to case management, stakeholders believed that solid working relationships with each other and shared informed opinions were helpful in problem-solving.

“In this particular partnership, EASI...I think we’ve got good interpersonal relationships and professional relationships where we can just pick up the phone and have a chat about something. So I do think they work really well and they’re all sort of built on, just that mutual respect of what each other does.” - [SH3]

Evolution of EASI

Some stakeholders recognised that over the course of the project, awareness around stalking had certainly improved within the CJS agencies and the community at large.

“I think we’ve definitely raised awareness. Particularly, like, interviewing individuals and certain questions that need to be asked...There’s been a lot of training that’s come off the back of EASI, so we have done a few inputs to various teams and there’s also our intranet page, which is dedicated to stalking and there’s quite a lot of information on there. Also, people can come to us for any help and guidance and we’re also pushing for SPOs as well, so we can direct people to the relevant team to get help with those.”
- [SH1]

As a result of the introduction of EASI, there was an increase of conditional cautions for stalking perpetrators, from cases referred to the police. This was opposed to the more typical response of no further action or a direct referral to the Crown Prosecution Service, which victims are typically reluctant about.

“...we’ve introduced an alternative outcome that the victims like because it means they don’t have to go to court potentially, and the offenders quite often are asking for help during their time with us and there hasn’t previously been anything concrete like this that we could offer other than referrals through the normal health channels, which are a bit hit and miss, to be honest.”- [SH3]

EASI also provided an increased amount of awareness and resources available for the community at large to understand the nature of stalking and legal remedies available to them.

“There’s a stalking triage clinic every Thursday where people can go to discuss their cases that might be suitable for a SPO. So, I do think, as an organisation, there has been more awareness, more training, and more focus on stalking.” - [SH1]

Our observation was that the police and victim services worked well to have important discussions around the pressing issues involved in more complex cases.

“Really positive working relationships between the Psychologists and ourselves. Everybody is very positive about solving difficulties, regardless of where they sit, so if it’s a police issue that is preventing referrals then the psychologists have been very helpful trying to help us problem solve.”
- [SH4]

We believe a range of factors were crucial to enhancing the relationships between stakeholders, to develop the project; sufficient time for the establishment of the intervention programme to ensure that information-sharing methods were properly formed in terms of trust; openness to share knowledge and learn from one another and personnel who were committed and focused on the success and overall outcome of EASI.

Perceived Success

A major successful outcome for the police seemed to be recognising stalking cases from an early stage of case referral and making the process more efficient. Due to the complex behaviours involved in such cases, having a specialist unit with knowledge, was viewed as valuable to make the process of detection more efficient.

“We are picking up stalking cases earlier, so there is an opportunity going forward to design into PPU that process so we can pick up and identify risk faster...so we can see very early on before it gets to the investigation teams whether it is stalking or not and we can start to prepare and plan for how that case gets handled.” - [SH2]

For some, the perceived success of EASI was related to the early intervention which was an effective alternative for both perpetrators and victims, without the involvement of more serious and formal criminal justice procedures, in the first instance of stalking.

“...there needs to be that really early intervention, where you’re recognising it as a crime at the earliest stage possible and then offering an option that isn’t just about the criminal justice system, but is about thinking about those behaviours, the impact it has on the victim and the impact it will have upon you as a stalker, if you continue down that road of behaviours.” - [SH2]

“I think it’s a great way of putting the onus on the offender but it’s also for those ones that have those abilities and desires to change, it’s going to work.” - [SH1]

There was a strong drive to make victims feel supported and heard by specialist advisors during their involvement with the criminal justice system.

“I’d like to see more confidence in the police from the victims’ side. And just from them feeling that their voice is being heard. And that they’re report is being investigated as far as it can be.” - [SH3]

“...initially when we’re closing the cases, that the victims are feeling happier, they’re reported no further behaviours. But also, that we’re not seeing that victim again with the same person.” - [SH6]

All stakeholders believed that the success of the project was largely tied to reducing reoffending rates however, there was an interest around whether the six-week intervention would have a long-term effect for desistance.

“We’d like to see that reoffending rates have dropped. I’m wondering whether it’s going to have an effect straight after they’ve finished the six sessions, but then, gradually dwindle as time goes by, just because they’re not necessarily practising what they learn during those sessions. So it will be interesting to see that.” - [SH1]

“That we show that stalking is reduced, not only for the victim who is the candidate who we support, but for future relationships. So if that person can take from that project ‘not only do I not want to stalk this person any more, but it’s going to change my mind set when entering into new relationships’.” - [SH2]

While a reduction of reoffending was viewed as an overall success for stakeholders, there was acknowledgement of challenges arising due to each agency’s definition and understanding of the term, which was slightly different.

Challenges

Some logistical challenges pertaining to service-design were recognised by police personnel. One was finding EASI participants to qualify for the scheme as they must be ex-intimate stalker types who have received their first offence disposal for stalking, deemed as low-medium risk and be willing to admit their role and participate in the scheme voluntarily.

“The biggest difficulty for us is finding the people. It’s a very narrow criteria, compared to the people that walk through the door.” - [SH2]

From a multi-agency perspective, the set up posed some issues around information sharing.

“The multi-agency information sharing agreements were hugely problematic and shifted quite a lot, as people became clearer about what information was needed. We definitely need one agency to be the link, as we’ve got it, because the police do control all the elements and we’re the only ones that see all of it.” - [SH1]

At times, the police found it difficult to connect EASI candidates with psychologists outside of working hours. Due to data-sharing agreements, EASI candidates’ identity remained anonymous, and they could only be connected to their FACT sessions via the police.

“That’s a safeguarding requirement, but it means that if they can’t connect, there’s no-one there to troubleshoot it and solve the problem, which we do during the day...so yes, a challenge, using the IT platforms that everybody can access.” - [SH2]

In a few instances, the police and victim services clash on what may be regarded as a stalking incident due to the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. For example, cases where there are children involved can complicate matters if there is to be no/limited contact between the parents. While the victim may deem the contact as stalking by proxy, the police and social services may be reluctant to interfere with basic parental rights.

“...Child contact is the biggest issue with stalking harassment; it always uses the excuse. And not a lot of police or social services support that...he may be a good father but they’re still using their children as a weapon to further impact the mum’s life.” - [SH8]

“So, one of the interesting things is that there have been a couple of offenders where there’s been child disputes who have changed their approach to trying to resolve the dispute, but the victim hasn’t recognised that shift and is still perceiving it as aggressive behaviour... and it’s like the victim is still in the mentality of being stalked - understandably - and the offender has shifted their behaviour but it’s still getting reported as an offence.” - [SH2]

One of the challenges voiced by the ISACs was that if there was reoffending, there was no way of directly reporting this to EASI. Victims would have to report the behaviour as a new crime through the regular police channels and until it was detected or flagged up by the police as a reoffence, there would be no consequence for the offender.

“I think having someone directly to speak to would be so much better because she’s still having to report to 101 all the time who don’t know what’s going on in the case, don’t know what’s happening with him... having someone just to say, “He’s still doing this, what can you do to help me?” I think that would be a lot more appropriate.” - [SH7]

ISACs at times did express that they had to support the victims to challenge the process, and this was their way of helping them along the criminal justice process.

“...if we need to challenge decisions, especially if they’re looking at a lower-level charge than what can actually be achieved, then we challenge those, look at getting reviews done. I think recently we’ve had a lot where the police have NFA’d a lot of cases, so we’ve had to direct clients to file complaints etc.” - [SH5]

Impact on Victims and Perpetrators

Stakeholders stated that stalking perpetrators need immediate and specialized help to deal with the effects of stalking to have some control over their own risk management due to the substantial impact stalking has on victims’ physical and mental welfare.

“The intervention needs to be around the stalker. The person who is committing the behaviour. Because if you don’t do those early interventions, it’s only going to get worse and the onus then becomes on the victims to make all the changes.” - [SH3]

ISACs had voiced concern over cases where there was reoffending after EASI candidates had completed EASI sessions, because this meant that it takes longer to achieve an outcome for victims, resulting in victim dissatisfaction.

“It’s frustrating because there isn’t being an outcome... I know obviously when he started, she (victim) was explained by the police what it was, what was going to happen - she thought that if he breached, there would be conditions in place for when he does the EASI project but there weren’t, so there’s been no consequence for anything he’s doing so she’s actually feeling at the moment like it’s a bit of a waste of time and is less inclined to report anything at the moment.” - [SH8]

“There needs to be some kind of an outcome to the programme of why the whole system or the programme and the talking to us and feeling like they’re getting support, to have no outcome is harder, which is why a lot of clients then disengage; if they don’t feel they’re getting the support or an outcome, they’re like ‘Well, what’s the point?’” - [SH7]

Some ISACs expressed the danger of misclassifying the risk of reoffending if certain behaviours and intensity of the fixation was dismissed.

“I think if you don’t look at what the behaviours are, it’s where it’s going to be effective...If you’ve got someone who’s just phoning and texting and asking about kids or it’s about the house, fair enough, it probably would work with them about their approach to going round that stuff. But if someone is literally fixated and obsessed with making this person’s life hell, making their presence known, it doesn’t really feel like it’s going to be successful.” - [SH5]

The police have recognised through anecdotal feedback, some positive behaviour from EASI candidates who engaged in FACT sessions.

“We are noticing a difference from the way they communicate with us at the start when they’re a bit hostile or aggressive, and if they go for it and they engage, then their communication at the end can be quite different, much more pleasant and normal, I suppose, and a bit more positive.” - [SH2]

Future Considerations

Stakeholders were questioned about what they would change if they could go back in time. Recognising the lack of resources, some interviewees identified that a more thorough set-up phase would've ironed out some logistical challenges, which were time-consuming for the amount of personnel who were working as part of EASI.

“In the set-up phase, the learning we’ve had was that you’ve got to have a clear service design in place. You’ve got to have the enablers to allow it to happen and think about the knock-on effects of parachuting in a different process.” - [SH2]

Some stakeholders had felt that having one point of contact from each agency to attend regular meetings would allow for a more efficient process to share relevant information, as opposed to chasing up every time a problem arose in a case.

“I think so, it just saves a lot of time, and as case workers, if you’re the person that’s working with them daily, and I think that all of us can actually just put that risk forward and those concerns forward... it would be just great for them to have that, it just saves time. It’s all agencies, it’s one space.” - [SH8]

The existing victim advocacy services found it difficult to keep up with demand, given the vast number of cases being processed. Stakeholders agreed that additional funding and staffing was required in this area going forward.

“I think that you do need more staff for the influx that you get, because obviously you’ve got a certain amount of EASI candidates to monitor and stuff, and it’s something that I’ve been banging the drum for a while but obviously I know that funds are tight and everyone’s feeling the crunch a bit, but obviously I think you definitely need a bigger team to manage the influx that we’re getting as well as the EASI on the side so. It’s a good project to have, it’s just you need additional staff to manage that caseload.” - [SH7]

Conclusion

Interviews with stakeholders revealed several advantages to using a multi-agency approach to stalking management and victimisation. Individually, the opportunity to work in a collaborative manner provided a solid platform for stakeholders to learn from one another and build on expert knowledge in order to better detect and handle stalking instances. Due to limited resources, Black Country Women's Aid had one main point of contact to discuss any problematic cases with the police; however, there was a desire expressed to have more continuous and frequent communication between the police and the ISACs. Due to EASI being piloted during the COVID-19 period, there was limited contact and restraints on possibilities such as co-location, which may have enhanced multi-agency working. The EASI was designed to protect both offenders and victims. Both treatments appear to contribute to the notion that reoffending may be reduced if the specific interests of both parties were addressed. Overall, our interviews with stakeholders revealed that their procedures and abilities for detecting and dealing with stalking situations improved over the course of the project.

8. Discussion

This evaluation report provides evidence to answer the question: Does EASI work? Certainly, 'working' can refer to a variety of outputs that might be viewed as signs of the success of a multi-agency initiative of this type. Here, we seek to report preliminary findings in relation to the project's many targeted outcomes. To summarise, the EASI pilot project had five primary objectives that it intended to realise over the period of a year, from August 2021 to August 2022. These objectives, as stated in the initial bid, are:

- To increase awareness and understanding of ex-intimate stalking
- Reduce (ex)-intimate stalking reoffending by providing early intervention
- Improve psychosocial wellbeing of stalking perpetrators by reduce risk/distress symptoms and providing mental health support as a form of intervention
- Improve victim safeguarding and support by way of advocacy services that provide continuous high-quality care and increase victims' confidence in the police and the criminal justice system as a whole.
- Improve knowledge and confidence in managing stalking amongst criminal justice agencies through collaborative working and case management

In this section, we summarize our findings reported in the preceding quantitative and qualitative analysis segments while keeping these primary objectives in mind. We explore the research assumptions and outputs in relation to whether the program's objectives were met, as well as a handful of additional interesting revelations.

1. To increase awareness of stalking by improving identification of stalking cases and management

It is difficult to measure whether there was an overall increase in awareness of stalking across the CJS, as only a certain number of referrals into EASI were made over the short course of the 10-month evaluation period and were fairly similar every month. A longer period is needed to recognise if stalking awareness training will have a subsequent effect of the number of referrals overtime.

However, there was some strong indication from the qualitative findings that the specialist knowledge of EASI did trickle down to WMPS, BCWA, EASI candidates and victims. In the preliminary stages of implementation, there were some crucial training events provided to all stakeholders, which emphasised the complexities in identifying and responding to stalking cases which involve ex-intimate partners. This was in addition to the training that the police attained in relation to using the SAI tool correctly. Police and BWCA stakeholders had recognised this in advancing their understanding of stalking. This sharpened understanding of stalking had evidently been communicated to victim interviewees who felt that the knowledge was a great help in their own awareness of what they were experiencing and consequently they were more confident to record, identify, report and safeguard themselves. More evidence to support EASI candidates' understanding and acknowledgement of their own behaviour as stalking is needed. Overall, the specialist expertise provided by the psychological team and relevant agencies seemed to have a positive impact in regard to the confidence of stakeholders to identify and manage stalking cases.

2. To reduce re-offending rates amongst EASI participants

Although we acknowledge key limitations of the re-offending data, our analyses are promising in terms of the potential for EASI to reduce levels of re-offending amongst people who engage in ex-intimate stalking. Through measuring two indices of re-offending over a 10-month period (1st September 2021 – 15th June 2022), we observed that EASI completers had significantly fewer calls to service and fewer re-offending reports recorded against them on average relative to the comparator group. Moreover, when compared to individuals in the comparator group, we observed a significantly smaller proportion of people in the EASI completer group who had calls to service and re-offending reports recorded against them over this time-period.

However, it is too early to determine conclusively whether participation in EASI does reduce re-offending amongst perpetrators given the complexities in how re-offending is being measured for evaluation purposes and the need for a longer follow-up period. Future evaluation work will need to establish precisely when re-offending occurs during the therapeutic process; for example, differentiating between the numbers of calls to service and re-offending reports that are recorded against individuals whilst they are undergoing fACT sessions compared with those that are recorded only after all sessions have been completed. It will also be necessary to further examine patterns in the outcomes of these police contacts involving EASI completers in terms of whether calls to service and re-offending reports are currently under investigation, filed no further action, or whether they led to a charge or conviction. Another important issue to consider in further research is the duration of any observable treatment effects amongst the EASI completers. In other words, it would be useful to ascertain patterns in the length of time that individuals typically desist from engaging in further stalking behaviour before it recommences after treatment has ended.

3. To improve psycho-social wellbeing amongst EASI participants

Despite a small sample size, the fACT related psychometric data collected pre and post intervention are positive and demonstrate that EASI has great potential to improve psycho-social wellbeing amongst people who engage in ex-intimate stalking. Compared to measures at baseline (pre-treatment), EASI candidates self-reported significant improvements in their psychological flexibility following completion of the six fACT sessions at Time 2 (post-treatment). Moreover, there were simultaneous reductions in psychological inflexibility and cognitive fusion. The large effect sizes reported for these analyses, particularly in relation to decreased cognitive fusion, provide preliminary evidence of meaningful change in these outcomes. These findings support a core aim of the content of fACT-based interventions such as EASI; specifically, to improve clients' levels of psychological flexibility and reduce the process of experiential avoidance associated with problematic behaviours²⁶ such as stalking. However, these preliminary findings should be interpreted with caution given that individuals who completed the pre and post psychometrics constitute a self-selected sample of people who were willing to participate in the research. These individuals are likely to be highly motivated to address their stalking behaviour and benefit from the fACT sessions so the findings may not be generalisable to all ex-intimate stalking cases. In further evaluation research, it would also be useful to cross-check these findings against the re-offending data; specifically, to examine whether self-reported improvements to psycho-social wellbeing are positively associated with a reduction in re-offending.

²⁶ Hayes, S.C., Strosahl, K., & Wilson, K.G. (1999). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change*. Guilford Press.

4. Improve victim safeguarding and support by way of advocacy services that provide continuous high-quality care and increase victims' confidence in the CJS.

Interviews with victims revealed that they were somewhat satisfied with the outcomes of the criminal justice system because of their positive interactions with the police and BCWA. The qualitative data indicated that the victims felt supported by the ISACs and the support that they provided on a mental health level, but also a practical level in helping them understand police and court procedures and taking ownership of their self-care and management. As EASI was implemented as a diversionary measure for their ex-intimate partners who had stalked them, their satisfaction with the CJS was mixed because they were concerned about the possibility of being victimised again. Nevertheless, there were not enough interviews completed to draw any firm conclusions concerning overall victim satisfaction. A few victims who disengaged with the service were reported by BCWA, partly due to the timing of support being available and the stage at which their case was in. Very few victims who engaged in the advocacy, consented to being interviewed by the evaluation team, which makes it even more difficult to assess their satisfaction or experience with the advocacy aspect of EASI.

5. To Improve knowledge and confidence in managing stalking cases by way of multi-agency collaboration

An interesting aspect of EASI was that while it was a multi-agency initiative, there was a sense of each organization having their own identity and goals channelled through a format which would aim to reduce stalking overall. Shared common goals seemed to unite every agency involved and though they were not co-located (possibly due to the COVID-19 climate and remote-working arrangements), communication between each agency seemed to be open. The dialogue and discussions between agencies happened to take place when there was a challenge posed by a stalking case in terms of classification, identifying and dealing with behaviours and then deciding on a final CJS outcome. Interviews with stakeholders revealed that while it was demanding to manage caseloads and technical issues due to data sharing agreements and limited resourcing, having a point of contact who they could access was beneficial. In addition to the training received, stakeholders reported learning from each other and trying to reach a solution to determine what the best outcome for a case should be. It can be challenging for all services to balance out the interests of those engaged in stalking with victims in the context of risk however, the sense of teamwork and camaraderie made these discussions easy to have and subsequently improved their awareness and understanding of ex-intimate stalking cases.

Conclusion

Overall, the time frame used to evaluate the intervention was too brief to determine whether any long-term effects on reoffending can be made, however, some short-term outcomes were achieved. The amount of data obtained was inadequate to test some of the assumptions underlying the project. Consequently, even if the evaluation might note that many of the targeted activities were accomplished, what effect they have on the target audiences could not be tested fully in certain circumstances, and only partially in others. What we can assert is that:

- The organisations involved in the implementation of EASI were engaged in training and information-sharing initiatives aimed at enhancing practitioner knowledge and skills as well as communication amongst each other. It's unclear if there was an increase in referrals and identification of stalking cases in the area throughout the period of evaluation or that long-term outcomes that were intended for victims actually emerged. It is also unclear as to whether EASI candidates' awareness and understanding of their own behaviour and the impact on victims was truly recognised during FACT.
- The EASI candidates received tailored FACT interventions from specialist psychologists, which helped them comprehend the root causes of their fixation and obsession and offered them useful strategies for coping with emotions and behaviour in the future. The intended reduction in reoffending behaviour may have occurred, but there is insufficient data to demonstrate it at this point in time.
- Victims were given helpful information by the police and BCWA to aid in case investigation, manage their well-being as well as future risk management. Evidence suggests that victims are satisfied with advocate services, but not with the criminal justice response as a whole, as of yet.
- According to stakeholders, a multi-agency strategy did enhance the response to stalking. Information exchange was very helpful for risk assessment and risk management in stalking situations, and this led to more thorough investigation, proper handling of cases and enhanced specialist knowledge in the field.
- Stakeholders stated that victims needed earlier support and additional mental health services to help them deal with the impacts of being victimised.
- The projected long-term goals of increasing victim safety and lowering rates of ex-intimate stalking, degrees of fixation, and obsession are not fully supported by the data. This is not to argue that the programme is ineffective, but rather that the time frame was too short to draw any concrete conclusions.
- Data management and collecting requirements for interventions like EASI need adequate funding to see out long-term effects and devoted resources and employees with the necessary abilities to track success and manage caseloads.

9. Recommendations

- It is crucial to guarantee that a multi-agency partnership such as EASI has enough funding and support from essential stakeholders, and that positions are filled by professionals who are qualified and motivated to engage with both victims and perpetrators for the purpose of attaining a shared goal of crime prevention (or in this instance, reduction of ex-intimate partner stalking)²⁷.
- Whilst the focus of this sort of initiative is on improving offender mental health and behavioural risk-management, victim support in terms of mental-health intervention would also be welcomed to increase victim satisfaction.
- EASI is an early intervention diversionary outcome for stalking perpetrators, and thus offers a limited number of therapeutic sessions. Though the purpose is to equip EASI candidates with emotional tools to self-manage their own risk afterwards, some participants acknowledged that they would have benefitted from continued support, even if it was in the form of a fACT-based activity book to check-in with themselves. As resources to continue therapy may be more costly, a recommendation based on the interview data is to provide a brief handbook or guidance reference tool for candidates who complete EASI to assist those who need to refer back to key techniques covered in the sessions and continue to practice self-regulation and risk-management.
- It is crucial to gather relevant data and build up frameworks for collecting specific data from the beginning of every project to measure against intended outcomes. Throughout the project, practitioners were more concerned with the procedural and service delivery components of EASI. This highlighted that for data to be gathered and updated consistently and methodically during the project, specialist resources and skill sets are needed. We recommend that a data analyst position for such initiatives is considered for monitoring and evidence-based research purposes.
- Project management is essential in this sort of multi-agency partnership because it helps establish processes and procedures in an adequate system, ensures appropriate data collection and management practices, and ensures that information sharing agreements between partner agencies are in a timely manner. Although organizations could be inclined to name a lead agency stakeholder as the manager and single point of contact, this practise frequently leads to a project manager's position being secondary to the initiative's operational needs and becoming less successful²⁸. We recommend an independent project manager to oversee that multi-agency models such as EASI, are being implemented effectively.
- It takes time to establish multi-agency relationships, foster confidence among partners, and establish protocols for the exchange of data and information. Additionally, given the nature of stalking as an offence, its identification, investigation, and delivery of intervention take additional time. Therefore, before the impacts can be effectively evaluated, initiatives like this need to have stability and funding for a significant amount of time. The benefits of spending in resource-intensive initiatives such as EASI, over brief periods of time are difficult to demonstrate. Tompson and colleagues (2020) suggest that a minimum establishment period of 3-5 years is needed to truly see the effect of interventions²⁹.

27 Cleaver, K., Maras, P., Oram, C. and McCallum, K., 2019. A review of UK based multi-agency approaches to early intervention in domestic abuse: Lessons to be learnt from existing evaluation studies. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 46, pp.140-155

28 Ibid.

29 Tompson, L., Belur, J. and Jerath, K., 2020. MASIP evaluation final report.