

Lo stalking in Portogallo: un'importante sfida da affrontare...

Stalking in Portugal: facing a remarkable challenge...

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Keywords: stalking; victims; Portugal background; social and scientific developments.

Abstract

There is no consensual definition of stalking. It varies across countries, and even in the same country, it varies across domains (e.g., legal; scientific). In fact, this is still a debatable and controversial topic that results in different scientific stalking definitions and measures (Sheridan, Blaauw & Davis, 2003). Even so, nowadays stalking is mainly conceptualized from a gender perspective (Kamir, 2001; Lowney & Best, 1995) and included in relational violence (Spitzberg, 2002).

Although studies on stalking have been carried out (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), stalking victimization has been investigated through several designs, methods and samples. That diversity allows a complementary and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon but, on the other hand, appropriate comparisons are difficult and complex (Dressing, Kuehner & Gass, 2006). After describing the overall picture regarding stalking victimization in the international context, we state that Portugal faces a transition stage. Being so, in this article we examined the Portuguese background regarding stalking, focusing on past and current developments, namely social and scientific. We consider that soon stalking will be established as a police and criminal phenomenon, since it is now in the judicial agenda.

Parole chiave: stalking; vittime; contesto portoghese; sviluppi sociali e scientifici.

Riassunto

Non esiste una definizione unica e universalmente accolta di stalking, ma varia oltre che da paese a paese anche a seconda dei diversi contesti di riferimento (ad es. giuridico, scientifico). In realtà, infatti, si tratta ancora di una tematica controversa e dibattuta, per cui molteplici sono i tentativi definitori così come le analisi scientifiche condotte (Sheridan, Blaauw & Davis, 2003). In ogni caso, attualmente, lo stalking viene prevalentemente individuato secondo una prospettiva di genere (Kamir, 2001; Lowney & Best, 1995) ed incluso nella categoria della violenza relazionale (Spitzberg, 2002).

A fronte dei molteplici studi condotti sullo stalking (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), la vittimizzazione è stata indagata sulla base di differenti modelli, metodi e campioni, offrendo così una maggiore e approfondita comprensione del fenomeno, ma rendendo allo stesso tempo difficile comparare i risultati ottenuti (Dressing, Kuehner & Gass, 2006).

Una volta inquadrare le condotte persecutorie a livello internazionale, è possibile affermare che anche il Portogallo si trova al momento ad affrontare una fase di transizione. Partendo da questa osservazione, nel presente articolo il fenomeno è stato esaminato nel contesto portoghese, concentrandosi sugli interventi passati e sugli sviluppi attuali, sia da un punto di vista sociale che scientifico. Gli Autori sono certi che presto lo stalking verrà riconosciuto quale fattispecie di reato, rappresentando attualmente una tematica presente nell'agenda del legislatore portoghese.

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1. Introduction

Since the late 1990s, many studies on stalking have been carried out (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Indeed, currently, on searching for “stalking victimization” (as keyword) on Google Scholar, we found a total of 588 entries, although only 44 were carried out before 2001. Subsequently, on analyzing references by years, we noticed an obvious trend of growth; for instance, 2001: 21 entries *vs.* 2005: 38 entries *vs.* 2011: 96 entries. Nevertheless, this field is still not well explored and many foremost questions remain unanswered.

Researchers, when facing a relatively unexplored phenomenon such as stalking, are usually concerned with its extent, nature, and characteristics. However, till date, surprisingly, only a few countries are able to execute it in a satisfactory manner, suggesting that in most cases stalking victimization is still invisible. Besides, as stated by Dressing, Kuehner, and Gass (2005), community-based studies on prevalence rates of stalking and its impact on victims in European countries are still scarce. Nevertheless, some trends about stalking and research issues are well known and they deserve attention.

Currently, there is still no consensual definition of stalking. It varies across countries, and even in the same country, it varies across domains; in some cases, the legal and scientific definitions do not overlap (Meloy, 2007). Even among researchers, this is still a debatable and controversial topic that results in different scientific stalking definitions and measures (Sheridan, Blaauw & Davies, 2003). When developing scientific studies about the phenomena in Portugal, stalking is conceptualized and defined as a behavioral pattern of persistent harassment, which includes different kinds of communication, contact, surveillance, and monitoring of a target by another person – the stalker (Grangeia & Matos, 2010). These unwanted communications and contacts may disturb the victim's life, sometimes severely.

Although stalking is an “old behavior” (Meloy, 1999), only in the past decades, it began to be seen as a type of interpersonal violence. Since its social recognition, several perspectives and theories emerged (according to Spitzberg and Cupach, 2003) and now stalking is mainly conceptualized from a gender perspective (Kamir, 2001; Lowney & Best, 1995) and included in relational violence (Spitzberg, 2002).

2. Trends on stalking victimization

Stalking victimization has been studied through several designs, methods, and samples. This diversity allows a complementary (or even deeper) understanding of the phenomenon but, on the other hand, appropriate comparisons are difficult and complex (Dressing, Kuehner & Gass,

2006). To overcome this issue, Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 175 studies of stalking, including a total of 122,207 participants from different samples (clinical, forensic/law enforcement, general population, college, adolescents, victims, domestic violence, homicide or attempted homicide, organizational, and others). According to this meta-analytic approach, the overall prevalence of stalking victimization was 25%. Stalking experiences were more prevalent in women participants, tended to last, in an average, 22 months, and mainly involved acquaintances – more specifically, the stalker was known to the victim in 80% of the cases and the most frequent relationship between the victim and the stalker was romantic involvement.

Regarding stalking behaviors, there is no single pattern of action and, in many cases, stalking merely consists of apparently innocuous behaviors that, however, collectively and repetitively are potentially disturbing (Sheridan, Blaauw & Davies, 2003). Despite the heterogeneity, stalking behaviors can be grouped into eight clusters, specifically: hyper-intimacy, mediated contacts, interactional contacts, surveillance, invasion, harassment and intimidation, coercion and threat, and aggression (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Spitzberg, 2002; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). According to Spitzberg (2002), proxy pursuit/intrusion (54%) and hyper-intimacy (37%) were the most frequent behaviors. Besides, in the meta-analytic work referred earlier, the authors concluded that threats were observed in 54% of the cases of stalking, physical violence in 32% of the cases, and sexual violence in 12% of the cases (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007).

Based on empiric evidence, stalking impact is no longer overlooked. Indeed, for stalking victims, the experience seems to be more than annoying and there are evidences of significant damages to physical health (Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Mullen, Pathé & Purcell, 2001), mental health (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 2001; Kuehner, Gass & Dressing, 2007), lifestyle (Dressing Kuehner & Gass, 2005; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), and economy (Brewster, 1998). Additionally, Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) argued that stalking also causes second and third-order effects, (in)directly affecting social and institutional surroundings of the victim.

Coping with stalking victimization has been another focus of research. Common responses were classified by Cupach and Spitzberg (2004; Spitzberg, 2002; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007) into five clusters, namely, moving towards/with (promoting negotiation with the stalker), moving against (based on confrontation), moving away (through avoidance and distance), moving inward (includes denial, minimization, or redefinition of the problem), and moving outward (comprises seeking for support from others). Although victims can adopt all of these responses, they have different degrees of efficacy. For instance, when the victim repeatedly asks the stalker to stop, unintentionally, the behavioral pattern of stalking can be reinforced. On the other hand, seeking for support improves social support, provides emotional

and instrumental support, and can be important in guaranteeing victim's safety.

Gradually studies of stalking victimization focused on community samples have been developed. The first community study was conducted in 1998 by Tjaden and Thoennes, and was focused on North American population over 18 years of age. The estimated lifetime prevalence was 2.2% for men and 8.1% for victims, and current prevalence was 0.4% and 1.0%, respectively. The authors observed that 78% of the victims were females, while 87% of the stalkers were males; further, 74% of the victims were aged between 18 and 39 years. Regarding victim/stalker relationship, women were mostly victims of intimate partners (59%) and men were mainly stalked by strangers (36%). In addition, 82.3% of the victims sought support from the police – nonetheless, only 50% were satisfied – and 18% asked for help from family and friends. One of the most recent studies focused on the same population was published by Baum, Catalano, Rand, and Rose (2009), which revealed a higher prevalence. The results showed that the current prevalence of stalking victimization was 13.9% in the overall sample, 20% in the female sample, and 7.4% in the male sample. Also, 62.1% of the victims admitted to be stalked by one person. Regarding gender, women tended to be stalked mainly by men and there was no association between male victims and stalker's gender. The stalker was some acquaintance (e.g., family member, friend, neighbor, or colleague) in 45.1% of the cases, while intimate partners represented 30.3% of the cases. These victims reported fear for their safety (1/5) and that of their children and family members (1/6). Additionally, 61.9% admitted that stalking did not cause economical costs. Support was only sought by 30.3% of the victims, and family and friends were the most common source of support. In the same year, Walker, Flatley, Kershaw, and Moon (2009) presented the updated data about the prevalence of stalking victimization in England and Wales. Through face-to-face interviews with participants aged 16 years or older, it was concluded that lifetime prevalence was 15.1% (women victims: 19.9% *vs.* men victims: 10.2%) and prevalence in the last 12 months were 3.6% (women victims: 4.4% *vs.* men victims: 2.8%)

As previously mentioned, community-based studies on prevalence of stalking victimization are only available in a few countries. Currently, as far as we know, those rates are known in the United States of America (Basile, Swahn, Chen & Saltzman, 2006; Baum, Catalano, Rand & Rose, 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; 2000), Australia (Purcell, Pathé & Mullen, 2002), United Kingdom (Budd & Mattinson, 2000; Walby & Allen, 2004; Walker, Flatley, Kershaw & Moon, 2009), Scotland (Morris, Anderson & Murray, 2002), Sweden (Dovelius, Öberg & Holmberg, 2006), Austria (Stieger, Burger & Schild, 2008), Germany (Dressing, Kuehner & Gass, 2005), and Italy (ISTAT, 2007). Other European countries, such as the Netherlands and Belgium, despite having anti-stalking laws and some data about them (e.g., rates of legal complains), do not have studies about the prevalence of the phenomenon in community samples. As argued by Grangeia and Matos (2011), those studies not only contributed to a deeper understanding of stalking, but also to define it as a relevant criminal issue and a public health problem in some countries.

This is the overall picture regarding stalking victimiza-

tion in the international context. The evident asymmetry across countries regarding stalking – specifically its scientific, legal, and societal recognition – can be, simultaneously, the cause and the consequence of the absence of more epidemiologic studies concerning stalking victimization.

We considered that Portugal faces a transition stage. In this article we examined the Portuguese background regarding stalking, focusing on past and current developments, namely social and scientific.

According to De Fazio (2009), European member states that do not yet have anti-stalking legislation can be included in three different developmental stages, namely: countries where the academic knowledge and the social and health interest for the phenomenon are present and, in some cases, have led to starting the process of criminalization of stalking with the presentation of bills. The second situation shows the presence of a small interest at academic and social level and the request for a specific law is limited to the legislators or representatives of women's associations. The third situation concerns countries where the phenomenon is mostly unknown and is still not considered a serious problem (p. 236). According to the report of the Modena Group on Stalking, in 2007, Portugal was one of the 11 countries of the European Union where stalking was part of scientific discourse, but was found in no other list of countries, namely in those that have a specific word for stalking, countries with anti-stalking legislation, or countries with prevalence studies. Despite the report referring to the presence of Portuguese support agencies for victims, the available responses were with respect to general victimization and not stalking victims in particular.

Currently, owing to significant scientific efforts and awareness in recent years, Portugal can be included in the first cluster defined by De Fazio (2009), but is still far from enforcing an anti-stalking law. The first scientific work about stalking in Portugal was published in 2007 – a theoretical article by C. Coelho and R. Gonçalves, entitled "Stalking: Another dimension of marital violence". Since then, the authors of the present article conducted several other researches about the prevalence and characterization of stalking in different samples, namely, juveniles, victims of domestic violence, homosexual community, and psychologists. Cyberstalking among adolescents and juveniles is also under scientific attention. Other research topics developed were perceptions about stalking among health professionals, helping professionals, victims *vs.* nonvictims of domestic violence and police, as documented above.

With regard to Portuguese legislation, despite the fact that there is no specific anti-stalking law, some particular stalking behaviors or some circumstances are punishable by Portuguese Penal Code (2007). For instance, behaviors, such as threats, taking pictures without consent, or disturbance of private life are punishable according to the law. Besides, when stalking occurs between intimate partners, victims can be protected through domestic violence law. However, stalking, as a distinguishable behavioral criminal pattern, is not a crime.

In sum, Portugal does not deal with all stalking scenarios and do not protect all the victims, being social recognition is in its infancy. Nevertheless, there is also good news, as we emphasize throughout this article: a growing body of knowledge and empirical evidence is emerging; media at-

tention on stalking is growing, promoting public awareness and, ultimately, professionals who deal with stalking victims claim specific resources and adequate responses. So, at last, we are significantly progressing from invisibility to social recognition.

3. Portugal: from invisibility to social and legal recognition

When in 2007 stalking academic research began to give the 'first steps' in Portugal, there was a constant need to make explicit the object of the research, that is, to explain the stalking conduct. Frequently we get the same reaction from people when we informally talked about stalking: how interesting should be studying such phenomenon and that stalking should be extremely rare, at least in Portugal. Nevertheless, almost everyone identified a stalking story happened with someone of their close circle of friends or family. Even when a negative impact was described as consequence of stalking, such as fear or changing routines, was hardly acknowledged as a victimization situation. At that time, there were only anecdotal evidences that stalking exists and even those stories were not reported as stalking (Grangeia & Matos, 2011). The challenge was therefore to 'show' that stalking exists in order to unveil this phenomenon and reveal difficulties lived by victims.

In fact, social research is usually oriented to social-political goals towards a positive social transformation. In the case of stalking research and particularly in countries where this research precedes social awareness, such as in Portugal, what is at stake is not only to raise awareness to this social issue, but the recognition of stalking targets as victims. To acknowledge stalking as a social and criminal issue allows directing efforts towards stalking prevention and to effectively support victims (Mullen, Pathé & Purcell, 2001). The identification and dissemination of the prevalence of stalking victimization highlights that stalking exists and that no longer should be ignored. It creates a new category of victim, the stalking victim (Dunn, 2002), at the same time that press political will criminalise stalking conduct.

Yet any research that focused on stalking in Portugal had to face a huge challenge concerning finding a word or an expression that fully translate the meaning of stalking into Portuguese. We adopted the expression 'persistent harassment' and additionally we provided an explanation of its definition in order to facilitate the match of personal experiences with the stalking concept and to provide a clear and consensual knowledge on scientific, legal and social spheres. This was a particularly important task since victims may not recognise their experience as victimization. In fact, the utility to gather several events into a single concept of stalking is to signify them as a recognised and socially condemned course of conduct. To name this victimization experience is to recognise its existence and at the same time it promotes a shared knowledge between victims and audiences (Finch, 2001).

To aggregate all stalking events into a single concept is particularly important "given that it may often consist of no more than the targeted repetition of an ostensibly

ordinary or routine behavior" (Sheridan, Blaauw & Davies, 2003, p.150) and thus being subject to romantic interpretations (Grangeia & Matos, in press). This same argument together with the variability and the protracted nature of the phenomenon are the main reasons to defend the legal recognition of stalking as a crime in Portugal. The legal types of crime presented in the Portuguese Penal Code (2007) offers some alternatives to penalise discrete or circumscribed events that may be part of stalking conduct (e.g. Article 190 Trespassing and Private Life Disturbance). Also some actions may be proven to consist of explicit threats (e.g., Article 153 Threats) or of abusive strategies perpetrated by an (ex)partner (Article 152 Domestic Violence). Indeed, the partitioning of the stalking into its several events masks its dynamics and nature at the same time that leave some actions legally unframed as crime, such as following or driving by or parking in front of house, or perpetuate its legitimisation through romanticize (e.g., unwanted gifts or flowers). Since stalking is not recognised as a crime in Portugal, the preventive and dissuasive effect of penal law is not applied, as well as confines formal responses from criminal agencies. Moreover, those responses may be postponed until stalking escalates to a criminal offense (e.g., physical attack). The criminalisation of stalking in Portugal may be a reality in a near future in line with recommendation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (2011), which specifies in the article 34 that: "Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the intentional conduct of repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct directed at another person, causing her or him to fear for her or his safety, is criminalised".

Ultimately, the lack of a criminal policy regarding stalking reflects a social position of generalized permissiveness at social level, at the same time that carries the message of consent. That is, since stalking is not (yet) considered a relevant social problem it also not constitutes a criminal issue, which reinforces stalking social legitimisation. In the end, the current status of stalking in Portugal affects directly its victims, undermining their agency to apply to formal responses, at the same time that promotes secondary victimization by the minimisation of opportunities of an appropriate and effective protection.

4. Major empirical developments

In Portugal, the very first attention and interest about stalking, as a specific type of victimization, arose from academic context (Grangeia & Matos, 2010, 2011). Therefore, it should be not surprising that major developments, both empirical and theoretical, were and are being achieved since 2007, embodied in several research projects, master theses, doctoral studies and articles, which will be briefly presented in this section.

A landmark was the project "Stalking in Portugal: Prevalence, impact, and intervention" (PIHM/VG/0090/2008) implemented between 2009 and 2011, and supported by the Portuguese Government through Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) and Comissão para a Cida-

dania e Igualdade de Género (CIG)¹. This project was organized in two distinct phases: Portuguese stalking victimization survey and training course on stalking intervention for helping professionals.

The Portuguese stalking victimization survey aimed to identify the prevalence of stalking victimization, to describe the profile of stalkers and victims, to characterize the dynamics and stalking behaviors, and to explore impact and sources of support. Therefore, we analyzed a representative national sample of Portuguese population aged 16 or older, constituted by 1210 participants (mean age: 44.25; 52.9% female). Data were collected through face-to-face interviews using "Stalking Victimization Inventory" (Matos, Grangeia, Ferreira & Azevedo, 2009). This study revealed that lifetime prevalence of stalking victimization was 19.5%. Victims were mainly women and stalkers were mostly men. Concerning relationship between stalker and victim, the most reported were "relatives, friends, colleagues or neighbors", followed by (actual or ex) intimate partner. Trying to establish contact and following were the stalking behaviors more common and physical and/or sexual aggression occurred in 7.2% of the cases. The main domains of impact were psychological health and lifestyle and the majority of victims, especially females, reported some fear. However, almost 60% of the victims did not seek any source of help to deal with stalking victimization. A detailed presentation of these results is provided in Matos, Grangeia, Ferreira, and Azevedo (2011a) and Matos, Grangeia, Ferreira, and Azevedo (2012).

The main conclusions obtained in the Portuguese stalking victimization survey were informative for the second phase, namely the training course on stalking intervention for helping professionals. This training course aimed to improve awareness and acknowledgment about stalking among professionals, to develop specific intervention skills to deal with stalking victims and to disseminate good practices regarding professional responses to stalking victimization. Three training sessions, lasting four-hours, were promoted and attended by sixty-five helping professionals (e.g., psychologists, social workers, lawyers, police officers). During the training course, contents such as stalking definition and historical background, facts and figures about stalking victimization in Portugal, stalkers and victims, coping strategies, risk factors (e.g. for violence) and intervention skills were addressed. Regarding the efficacy of these training sessions, a preliminary analysis suggested quite promising results, with improvements in perceptions, knowledge and skills.

Regarding master theses, ten works were concluded since 2009, covering different issues and samples and gathering predominantly quantitative data - indeed, only one study was based on a qualitative design. These studies can be grouped in three main lines of research, namely: prevalence, characterization and impact of stalking victimization;

perceptions about stalking; and cyberstalking. The prevalence and characterization of stalking victimization was studied in a homosexual sample (Mota, 2010) and in a sample of clinical and forensic psychologists (Costa, 2011). Stalking perceptions were investigated among several professional groups, namely: health professionals (Lima, 2010), victim support professionals (Gomes, 2010; Rodrigues, 2009 - using a qualitative design), police officers (Abreu, 2009) and female and male college students of Psychology (Braga, 2010; Pereira, 2010). In addition, stalking perceptions were also explored in a comparative study of victims and non-victims of intimate partner violence (Borges, 2010). Finally, cyberstalking - its prevalence and tactics - was studied in a diverse sample of college students (Carvalho, 2011). Despite of being less deep and comprehensive than the doctoral researches presented next, these empirical studies contributed not only to add a piece, but also to identify the missing ones in the puzzle of knowledge about stalking.

The empirical developments, which took place on our country concerning stalking study, have been pointing out significant implications, also materialised in the development of doctoral dissertations on the theme. Those works, that are being developed, have allowed reaching a diversified image of stalking specific scenarios.

In this particular domain, H. Grangeia's (2007) work must be mentioned, as it leads to two main concerns: on one hand, the need for mapping stalking, identifying its expression among young people and analysing the dynamics and perceptions that targets and pursuers sustain on the experience; on the other hand, the need for interpreting the targets and pursuers' experiences taking into account the social and cultural context where they occur. Being so, the first survey focus on an experience wider than stalking: the unwanted relational persecution on a scenario of non corresponding love; the data gathered indicate that such is an extremely common experience among young people. The second survey was based on an online questionnaire about persistent harassment, aiming to identify the prevalence of stalking characteristics among young university students. The third study aims to attain the perceptions and meanings of the juvenile population on what concerns the persistence of courtship in situations of love rejection, as well as to identify discursive constructions that contribute to the overlap or delimitation between strategies of seduction and harassment.

C. Ferreira (2008) has been trying to investigate the experience of stalking victimization after the relationship breakup. The results of this line of investigation sustain the conceptualisation of stalking as a specific and idiosyncratic facet of intimate violence, which can be associated to other types of violence inside the relationship. However, the author has also been trying to explore other dimensions of this theme, that are still missing in the specific literature: the experience of women victims of post-breakup stalking without history of abuse during the relationship with the stalker, the factors which predict the victims' search for formal support, as well as the meanings those women attribute to this type of victimization.

Although it is a preliminary register yet, F. Pereira (2011) has been studying cyberstalking among youngsters whose ages range from 12 to 16 years old, and also among their parental tutors. In this project, a quantitative and a qualitative study will be developed. The quantitative study specifically

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aims to: 1) access to the self reports of teenagers on what concerns their habits/behaviours as frequent users of digital media (internet, mobile phone, computer, IPAD); 2) catch the victimization and perpetration rates of cyberstalking; 3) analyse the parental tutors' knowledge of the habits and practices of their children on what concerns virtual world; 4) verify the (in)existence of strategies to protect them in the virtual context. All data will be gathered through a presence questionnaire – classroom context or parents reunions, respectively. After that, the qualitative study intends to study the teenagers' perceptions of the phenomenon, using focus group. Therefore, it will be possible to achieve a better knowledge of the theme which is being studied.

Until the present moment, the empirical developments previously mentioned have been also materialised in the publication of scientific articles, books' chapters and a manual of good practices for professionals.

Thus, it is important to mention an empirical article that analysed the factors responsible for the occurrence of fear towards the experience of stalking victimization (Matos, Grangeia, Ferreira & Azevedo, in press). The study was developed using a sample of 236 participants who mentioned having been targets of such type of violence at some moment of their lives, and three significant predictors of that emotional reaction were identified: the gender and age of the victim, as well as the strategy of surveillance. The conclusions of such work reinforced the need to enlarge the investment in research and practices to deal with this phenomenon.

On what concerns books' chapters, these have been mainly theoretical reflections. On this concrete domain, H. Grangeia e M. Matos (2010) produced a particularly relevant and detailed explanation on the consensus and controversies related to stalking, pointing out the aspects related to the definition of the phenomenon, the perspectives and theoretical models to understand this problem, its dimensions and characteristics, the different types of victims and offenders, the dynamics associated to stalking, the impact and coping of the victim and the perceptions related to this theme.

In another chapter (Grangeia & Matos, 2011), the same authors conducted a reflection on the fact that recognising stalking is still confined to a group of countries and on the implications of the phenomenon as a criminal and social problem. On the contrary, they debate the invisibility of such problem in the Portuguese context and list the consequences of such a circumstance.

Finally, the promotion of works targeting professionals' practices has also deserved a particular attention in the national context, mainly because we are aware that, in Portugal, the stalking embryonic statute leads to serious implications in recognising it and, as a consequence, in supporting the victims. On what concerns this matter, it has already been published a manual of good practices for professionals who directly contact with this population (Matos, Grangeia, Ferreira & Azevedo, 2011b). This tool work is organised into three sections that are mutually related – Know, Evaluate and Intervene – and assumes itself as a reference document to the support of such type of victims. It is an eclectic manual that aims to be an effective source of support to a heterogeneous group of professionals, such as psychologists, social workers, security forces professionals, jurists, lawyers, magistrates, among others.

5. Final remarks: the “good news” from Portugal

As a way of disseminating the accomplishment described, we developed an informative and preventive website (www.stalking-gisp.com) based on the Portuguese Stalking Survey data, including legal information and also practical guidelines to apply in case of stalking victimisation. As a result from the scientific and gradual social recognition, there was also a rising look for specialised training in this area. So, in addition to the manual, we had the opportunity to prepare some training courses that involved a total of sixty professionals from different areas such as judges, lawyers, police officers, social assistants and psychologists. The final evaluation of these actions is very encouraging towards its replication in the near future, reinforcing the need of a continuous training.

Besides, on the 25th of November 2011, we organized an International Congress, at University of Minho with the participation of national specialists but also with two international experts on Stalking: Laura De Fazio (Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia) and Lorraine Sheridan (Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh). Now, in 2012, in order to reply to a call by the National School of Judges, we organized a Seminar that engaged 300 judges in this particular theme.

Moreover, there is a higher media attention to the phenomena and, probably as a consequence of that, the look for specialized help from victims of stalking, victims by proxy and also stalkers are growing.

One of the most important achievements is the incorporation of the word stalking in the 2012 Portuguese dictionary in a very accurate manner: type of harassment where someone pursues and importunate someone else in a persistent and sometimes violent manner, for different reasons (revenge, love, jealousy, etc.).

So, at the present time, we can say that scientific attention was the first step establishing stalking as a prevalent social problem, namely between Portuguese juveniles and women, with significant consequences at the individual, community and social level, requesting thereby multidisciplinary attention. We believe that soon stalking will be established as a police and criminal phenomenon, since it is now in the judicial agenda.

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