

PRESS RELEASE

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FOUNDING LEADER OF THE WOMEN'S EQUALITY PARTY SEEKS REVIEW INTO MET POLICE'S MISHANDLING OF HER STALKING CASE.

In Spring 2020 Sophie Walker, feminist campaigner and founding leader of the Women's Equality Party was the victim of stalking. The experience was terrifying and caused her and her family to believe that they could be caused serious harm.

Sophie's car tyres were slashed multiple times, a brick was thrown through her window, her roof tiles smashed, three fires started at the back of her house and offensive graffiti scrawled on her property. The person believed to be her stalker was caught on a security camera outside her property during the early hours of the morning.

Although Sophie and her partner called on the police to help over 10 times, her case was not investigated as a stalking case until she resorted to making a plea for support on social media and senior police officers became involved. Sophie asserts that the perpetrator was never charged with stalking because of failures in the initial response which meant that evidence was not collected and events were not understood as a pattern of intimidating behaviour. The man arrested following Sophie's reports was charged with and pleaded guilty to two counts of the less serious offence of criminal damage which has a lesser sentence and does not reflect the fear caused by stalking. Sophie has moved house, fearing that otherwise the stalking would continue.

Sophie has written to both the IOPC and MPS asking for a comprehensive review into the failure of frontline police officers to understand and identify the offence of stalking in her case.

Sophie Walker said:

"The experience that we suffered as a result of an obsessive and controlling stalker was life changing and has ultimately forced us to move house. I feel that it is essential that I speak out about how my family and I were let down by fundamental failures in the initial police response to our calls for help. Despite an initial reluctance to attend, even when they did the series of events were not connected and did not form one single investigation. Essential evidence was left overlooked and ignored for weeks, and then lost. Behaviour that formed part of a terrifying pattern for me was dismissed by officers who did not understand its significance and I was forced to explain everything from scratch to a different responding team every time. I have asked the IOPC and the MPS to look at this in the hope that it prompts change on the ground and that future victims of stalking can be spared my experience".

Sophie Naftalin, solicitor said:

"The failure on the part of the police to address stalking is a systemic problem. Report after report by NGOs such as the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, Protection Against Stalking and Paladin have shown that front line police officers have an inadequate understanding of the offence of stalking and do not properly investigate cases, missing opportunities for evidence gathering, letting perpetrators remain unaccountable and leaving victims vulnerable. Sophie's case is a powerful illustration of how even when there is an apparent will to investigate, the police are failing to identify stalking at the essential early stages. This complaint investigation is an opportunity for the Metropolitan Police to interrogate what is going wrong. Urgent change is necessary".

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. For further information please contact Sophie Naftalin at Bhatt Murphy on 020 7729 1115 or s.naftalin@bhattmurphy.co.uk
2. Stalking is a gendered crime with 1 in 5 women likely to be a victim in their lifetime, in contrast to 1 in 10 men. There are also strong links between stalking and domestic homicide¹.
3. In 2017 a CPS–police joint inspectorate report² identified huge failures in the policing and prosecution of stalking. The report found that *“stalking in particular was misunderstood by the police and the CPS. As a result, it often went unrecognised. The police sometimes mis-recorded stalking offences, or worse, did not record them at all. Prosecutors on occasions missed opportunities to charge stalking offences”*.
4. Despite an estimated 1.5 million victims of stalking in 2019-20³, only 30,931 cases were reported⁴ and only 2,288 charges were brought⁵ [See Suzy Lamplugh Trust “Unmasking Stalking”].
5. For National Stalking Awareness Week 2021, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust has published research that suggests there has been a concerning increase in stalking behaviours during the pandemic and that victims continue to be let down by the police response⁶. The Trust is calling for a national task group to examine closely the low levels of prosecutions and devastating attrition rates in regard to stalking cases across the entire criminal justice system.

¹ <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=1a6cf4d9-0df5-42be-8b02-4bdbd75fa264>

² <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/living-in-fear-the-police-and-cps-response-to-harassment-and-stalking.pdf>

³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/stalkingfindingsfromthecrimesurveyforenglandandwales>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables>

⁵ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/stalking-analysis-reveals-domestic-abuse-link>

⁶ <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=fcb781a-f614-48c8-adcf-4cfa830c16a7>