

Government gives police new powers to protect victims of stalking

New Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) will allow courts in England and Wales to move quicker to ban stalkers from contacting victims or visiting their home, place of work or study. This will grant victims more time to recover from their ordeal.

In addition to banning perpetrators from approaching or contacting their victims, SPOs can also force stalkers to seek professional help.

According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales, almost one in five women over the age of 16 have experienced stalking, as well as almost one in ten men.

The Orders will usually last for a minimum of 2 years, with a breach counting as a criminal offence that can result in up to 5 years in prison.

Minister for Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins said:

Every year, thousands of people live with the terrifying experience of being stalked, which can lead to victims feeling isolated, abused or even losing their lives.

I am determined that we do everything we can to better protect victims and new Stalking Protection Orders will help the police to intervene and take action against perpetrators at the earliest opportunity.

In addition to the SPOs, courts will also be able to impose an interim SPO to provide immediate protection for victims while a decision is being made.

SPOs will come into effect on Monday 20 January and have the support of anti-stalking campaigners and law enforcement.

Suky Bhaker Acting Chief Executive of The Suzy Lamplugh Trust said:

Today is an important step forward in the way stalking is handled in England and Wales and an acknowledgement of the suffering victims of stalking can face.

We welcome the introduction of Stalking Protection Orders and hope to see the new order complement the existing legislation to ensure that victims receive a proactive response when they come forward and report stalking.

Professor Clive Ruggles of the Alice Ruggles Trust said:

The Alice Ruggles Trust is working hard to make stalking victims more aware of the dangers they face and to come to the police earlier than many do at present.

Stalking Protection Orders represent a powerful new tool to help the police respond in the right way when they do. It is critical, though, that there is no delay in arresting perpetrators who breach them: any other response may well escalate the risk to the victim.

We believe that the existence of SPOs could have made a critical difference in Alice's case, and will help improve the outcome for many others in the future.

Head of the Association of the Police and Crime Commissioners, Katy Bourne, said:

Stalking is an insidious crime that takes over and destroys lives. It is vital that those affected can feel confident in reporting, knowing that early action will be taken and that the law is on their side.

These Stalking Protection Orders will allow police to apply for restrictions on the behaviour of perpetrators, excluding them from entering a particular area or from making contact with their victim in any way.

It will be a criminal offence to break the terms of an order which, I hope, will become a substantial deterrent and a way to enforce the law without adding unnecessary strain upon the victim.

Alongside the introduction of Stalking Protection Orders, the Home Office also helps fund the National Stalking Helpline, run by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. The Home Office has provided £4.1 million over the last 3 years to the Metropolitan, Hampshire and Cheshire police forces as part of the Multi Agency Stalking Intervention Programme, which provides interventions with stalking perpetrators.