

# Receiving threatening or obscene messages from a partner and mental health

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Threatening or obscene messaging includes repeated, unwanted texts, emails, letters or cards experienced by the recipient as threatening or obscene, and causing fear, alarm or distress. It is a rarely examined

aspect of intimate partner violence.

Led by City University of London, a new study has examined just how common exposure in the UK to threatening or obscene [messaging](#) from a current or ex-partner is; it looked at the characteristics of those who are most at risk, and for associations with other forms of violence and abuse, mental disorder, self-harm, and suicidality.

The study was an analysis of results from the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey conducted with over 7,000 interviewees, mainly face-to-face, in 2014.

The analysis found that one adult in fifteen (6.6%) who had been in a relationship had received threatening or obscene messages from an intimate partner, with one in four victims of abuse reporting repeated messages in the previous year.

Recipients of these messages were twice as likely to be female than male, and more likely to be younger adults. They were also more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged, and to have experienced other forms of sexual and partner [violence](#) as well. Even after accounting for these other adversities, receiving repeated threatening or obscene messages was associated with higher rates of anxiety and depression, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts.

Sally McManus, Senior Lecturer in Health in the Violence and Society Centre at City University of London and lead author of the study said, "It's so very important that when in clinical, police, or other service settings—service providers ask about all the kinds of contact people may have from current as well as former partners. Threats and obscene messages may be a way of extending control after a relationship ends, and is linked to continued [poor health](#) in victims."

Whilst the study did not differentiate between technology-enabled and other means of threatening or obscene messaging, the authors suggest that the near ubiquity of the likes of texts, [instant messaging](#), and [social media](#), may mean exposure to threatening and obscene messaging could become even more immediate and pervasive.

The study is published in the journal *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*.

**More information:** Sally McManus et al, Receiving threatening or obscene messages from a partner and mental health, self-harm and suicidality: results from the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s00127-021-02113-w](#)

Provided by City University London

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