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My research interests focus on violence against women, and particularly, post-separation stalking as a form of violence in the Western context. I defended my thesis in December 2016 at the University of Lapland, Finland. The title of my dissertation is “Being Stalked: Recognising Post-Separation Stalking and Helping its Victims”. In the doctoral thesis, I explored women’s experiences of stalking after the break-up of a partnership, focusing on cases where women are stalked by male former partners. The study shows that victims of post-separation stalking are still largely unrecognised by the helping system, which prevents them from receiving adequate help and support.

Different forms of violence in close relationships have intrigued me since my bachelor studies. In my bachelor’s thesis, I examined child sexual abuse based on the literature. I continued with the same theme in my master’s thesis by doing a discourse analysis of the news stories in a local newspaper on the topic of child sexual abuse. I find it important to study sensitive and tabooed phenomena, and to bring forth the experiences of people who live at different kinds of margins

My research interest in marginality arises from two perspectives. First, post-separation stalking is a form of violence which is marginal in relation to umbrella terms such as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and post-separation violence. Second, the majority of interpersonal violence happens between men: men are often both victims and perpetrators (e.g. alcohol-related use of violence). But when looking at violence in a different context – in intimate relationships – post-separation stalking and violence against women are not marginal anymore. In intimate relationships women are more often the victims of stalking after the break-up of a partnership and men the perpetrators. Moreover, many studies show that post-separation stalking against women can be lethal: it includes an increased risk of a potential or actual lethal act. Despite Finland’s

status as a Nordic welfare state known for gender equality, the violence of men against women is a significant social problem. The victims are still unheard or their need for help is not recognised in the helping system, local communities, and society.

Currently, I am continuing the topic of my doctoral thesis, but this time from the perspective of children. I am working as a postdoctoral researcher on the project entitled, “Children’s Knowing Agency in Private, Multi-Professional and Societal Settings – the Case of Parental Stalking (CAPS)”. For this four year research project, funded by the Academy of Finland, my colleagues and I are interested in children’s knowledge and agency in professional and societal contexts, with the focus being on Finnish children’s knowing agency in dealing with parental stalking after the parents’ separation. The study rests on the conviction that children have a right to knowledge and agency as well as to protection in private, multiprofessional, and societal settings. Approaching children’s knowing agency from the perspectives of social work, law, and education, the research aims to produce knowledge to improve practices in social and health services, and law enforcement, and thus help and safeguard victims of stalking. The insights gained will also contribute to the education of social workers, lawyers, early childhood educators, and teachers.

In addition to this, I’m doing research to develop child and family services, particularly the family centre model, in Lapland – the core of which is one of the government’s key initiatives to reform child and family services in Finland. The objective of the family centre is to coordinate the public health, social, and educational services intended for children and families into a network that also includes the services offered by NGOs and religious parishes as well as by voluntary stakeholders. I think these two projects support each other in developing better services for children and families, making their need for help visible. In this way, the projects can help to move the families from the margins to the centre by offering better services.

Changing the perspective from women to children continues my research interest of studying people at the margins. Children can be said to be doubly marginalised when taking into account parental stalking and service responses. Firstly, children’s needs, voices and rights easily disappear when interventions take place into violence in families. Secondly, violence is often seen as a problem between adults and a problem with their parenting, which moves the focus from the children to the adults. I think we, as researchers, have the potential to make children at the margins more visible and help their voices to be heard.