

## Summary

This report presents the findings of the study of domestic and public violence. The study comprised three parts, all of which were aimed at describing violence and the perpetrators of violence. The object of the first part was to portray the nature and scope of domestic and public violence registered with the police in the Netherlands in the year 2002. The second part concerned the replication of a 1998 study of violence committed against strangers in the street in order to obtain a picture over a longer period of the developments in street violence. The object of the third part of the study was to discover the extent of the overlap between the group that perpetrates public violence and the group that perpetrates domestic violence in order to answer the question as to whether a generic approach to tackling violence was advisable or a specific approach to domestic violence. The nature and scope of the violence were analysed on the basis of a random sample (relating to the year 2002) of 2,702 reports of violence in three police regions.

### **Nature and scale of violence**

#### *Domestic violence*

An average of 20 per cent of the violent offences reported to the police relate to violence in the home. As regards the types of offence and perpetrators found, a number of similarities were ascertained in the three regions studied. For example, the majority of the recorded incidents of violence took place inside marital or other relationships and relationships that had been broken off. An average of one third of recorded domestic violence turned out to occur outside the home or not on private property. The most serious incidents took place in or around the home. However, a number of significant differences between the regions were also found. For example, the scale of the domestic violence problem differed greatly per region. There were also differences between the number of Dutch-born suspects, the number of reports of 'domestic violence outside the home/private property', the number of 'grievous bodily harm' incidents, the number of incidents of violence involving the use of a weapon and the number of incidents in which the victim hit or hit back.

On the basis of the facts found it was possible to draw up the following broad profile of the suspects of domestic violence: the vast majority of this group are male, the age spread of perpetrators of domestic violence is wide and, compared with the total number of citizens not born in the Netherlands, foreign-born suspects of domestic violence are overrepresented. For the Rotterdam region a check was made on whether suspects were first offenders or not. Almost 40 per cent of the domestic violence suspects had had previous contact with the police as a suspect (at least once) in the three years preceding the offence committed; in about half of these cases the offence was one of violence. For the Central West Brabant region a check was made on whether the suspects had been reported to the police more than once for

a violent offence. About one in ten of the perpetrators of domestic violence had previously been reported for violence in the home and more than one in ten suspects had previously had contact with the police for an incident involving public violence.

#### *Public violence*

Of the violent offences in the public sphere, about two-thirds involved people who said they did not know each other. Violence between 'friends and acquaintances', between 'vague acquaintances' – where the victim knows the perpetrator by name only, and between 'neighbours' occurred far less often. Nonetheless, it remains important to monitor these types of public violence adequately in view of their negative impact on social cohesion at the local level.

In almost a quarter of the violent incidents a group of people committed violence against a single victim. About half of the offences of public violence occurred in residential neighbourhoods and a quarter in entertainment areas and venues. One in five of the incidents involving violence were described by the victim concerned as 'violence involving no initial buildup of tension'. Alcohol played a part particularly in violent incidents perpetrated in entertainment areas and venues, and in these instances it was often the victims themselves that had been drinking. Drug-related incidents mainly occurred in residential neighbourhoods and places of entertainment. Big differences can be seen between the regions as far as the scale and gravity of the problem of public violence are concerned. For example, the number of incidents of public violence per 10,000 inhabitants seemed to be linked to the degree of urbanisation of the regions. On the basis of the study in the three regions, it can be said that the greater the degree of urbanisation, the greater the number of incidents involving violence. This also applies to the number of serious offences in the total number of reports of public violence, the degree to which weapons were used by the suspects, the injuries caused, and aggressiveness on the part of victims.

The suspects of public violence are generally male (85 per cent). The average age is 26, with a heavy concentration in the younger age groups (those aged <15, 15–19 and 20–24 make up about half of the population). Those under the age of 19 especially seemed to be peer group focused when committing violence. There were hardly any suspects over the age of 45 (less than 10 per cent). Suspects involved in incidents in which there had been provocation or which occurred for no demonstrable reason were on average considerably younger than other suspects. Incidents that occurred for no apparent reason mainly involved suspects under the age of 15. Suspects that used serious violence did not differ as regards age, sex or country of origin from suspects who used no or only a slight degree of violence. Also, foreign-born suspects appeared to use a weapon more often in public violence incidents than did Dutch-born suspects. For the Rotterdam region a check was made on whether or not a suspect was a first offender. Almost 30 per cent of public

violence suspects had had previous contact with the police as a suspect at least once in the three years preceding the committed offence. In that period, about 10 per cent of the suspects had had repeated contact with the police, in particular in relation to violent offences. Based on the information available to the police in Central West Brabant, it emerged that in the three years preceding the incident less than 5% of the perpetrators of public violence had already had contact with police as a domestic violence suspect, while more than 20 per cent had had previous contact in connection with public violence.

#### *Domestic and public violence*

There were a number of striking differences between domestic and public violence. Public violence mainly occurred between men, domestic violence between men and women. In the case of public violence, several suspects using violence against a single victim or group violence was a regular occurrence. Violence in the home on the other hand generally took place between individuals. The population of suspects of public violence was younger than the domestic violence population. The group of perpetrators of domestic violence had a greater age spread, whereas public violence was concentrated among younger persons. Moreover, domestic violence often involved grievous bodily harm. However, no difference could be observed in the use of weapons or in the injury caused. Finally, a more detailed analysis of the reports made in the Rotterdam region revealed that the suspects involved in domestic violence had already had previous contact with the police (in connection with a violent or other offence) more often than suspects of violence in the public sphere.

#### *Developments in street violence between strangers*

The number of reports of street violence between strangers increased by about 20 per cent between 1998 and 2002. Other research also reveals a roughly 20–30 per cent increase in street violence in many police regions. This increase in the number of reports does not mean to say that violence among the population is on the increase. It could also point to the fact that people are more inclined to file an official report of less serious incidents of violence. This view is supported by the fact that the findings of this study reveal a decline in serious offences.

Compared with 1998, street violence between strangers in 2002 appeared to occur more specifically in residential neighbourhoods, with the number of 'one-to-one incidents of violence' increasing and the number of incidents involving more than one suspect and a single victim decreasing. Three-quarters of the 'street incidents between strangers' involved men. In this respect there was no difference between 1998 and 2002. The violence did not appear to have become more serious: both the proportion and the absolute number of serious offences is declining and the proportion (and number) of incidents in which the victim suffers serious to very serious injury remains

constant. Neither was there any significant change in the number of incidents in which a weapon was used or in the use of certain types of weapon. A 100 per cent increase was found in the number of reported job-related violent offences (on the street between strangers); from 91 in 1998 to 216 in 2002. The proportion of 12- to 17-year-old assailants turned out to be substantially smaller in the 2002 sample than in the 1998 one. The proportion of 25- to 40-year-olds on the other hand is increasing among suspects of violent offences. However, no significant changes by age were found among the victims of street violence between strangers.

### **Perpetrator profiles and tackling violence**

This report continues by looking in more detail at the group of perpetrators of violence both in and outside the home, also referred to as the general violence group. This group of perpetrators was compared with the group that commits domestic violence only and the group that commits public violence only. The quantitative data are based on research in the Central West Brabant region.

According to police records, the group that is violent in and outside the home is small: less than 8 per cent of the suspects that use violence against individuals have a record for both violence in the home and violence in public places. This figure can be seen as an absolute minimum. Generally, no checks are made on whether suspects of public violence are also violent in the home, and domestic violence is generally not reported. It is therefore difficult to establish on the basis of police data the size of the group that is violent both in and outside the home. What can be ascertained on the basis of individual criminal records is that a quarter of the suspects of domestic violence have a criminal record for a violent offence, i.e. the proportion of suspects of general violence is increasing to 14 per cent.

The study of similarities and differences in perpetrator profiles between the three groups produced a number of different views as regards the quantitative comparison between domestic violence and public violence. The age-structure pattern of the group that is violent both in and outside the home was the same as that of the domestic violence group. In spite of this, the number of young persons was still relatively large. We also find that this group comprises male suspects only and that the majority of the victims are women. In this sense, the group of suspects that is violent both in and outside the home was most similar to the domestic violence group. The general violence group differed in one respect from the other two groups in that its members had a criminal record and the length and variety of this record. The group that is generally violent was made up virtually only of suspects with a criminal record. Often, this group had committed several types of crime, e.g. property crime, violent crime and traffic offences.

Only 50 per cent of the group of suspects that are only violent in the home, like the group that is only violent in the public arena, comprised suspects with a criminal record. The criminal record of the two groups of violent offenders often related to one type of crime. It also emerged that the group that is generally violent was more frequently involved in the unlawful possession of a weapon than the other two groups.

Research into offender profiles revealed two relevant and distinguishing aspects: (i) either they were only involved in domestic violence or (ii) other criminal activities (involving violence) took place. The domestic violence perpetrators with no criminal record formed a clearly identifiable group. The literature reveals that this group distinguishes itself from the other two groups by a wider spread according to social class, no antisocial lifestyle or forms of addiction, inhibition as regards the use of violence and shame about using violence. From the interviews it emerged that suspects of domestic violence could be characterised as men who function normally, but in their relationships use violence to 'solve' feelings of impotence and frustration. The literature shows that this group is large or potentially large. Among the police, the probation service and in prisons the 'domestic violence only' group is smaller than the group that commits violence both in and outside the home.

*What does this mean for the criminal justice authorities in tackling violence?*

Since 2003 there has been a 'Domestic Violence' guide aimed at stopping the violence and preventing repetition through targeted intervention. This specific approach is indicated as domestic violence differs from public violence due to the relational context in which the violence takes place and the great likelihood of the violence being repeated, with big risks for the victim and negative consequences for any children there may be. It allows for stress to be placed on different aspects: more on treatment or more on repression.

The question is whether this approach is suitable for all perpetrators of violence. Research shows that the criminal prosecution of violence requires a distinction to be drawn between violence in the home and violence outside it. The approach set out in the Guide to Domestic Violence aims to put an immediate stop to the violence because the victim runs the risk of becoming a victim again. Taking immediate action and offering a treatment programme are the central theme. There are doubts about the feasibility of this approach for the perpetrators of public violence, because the groups in question differ as regards background and problems. If it is decided to apply the domestic violence approach to perpetrators of public violence as well, it is not advisable to put suspects of public and of domestic violence together in one treatment group. Tackling violence requires attention to be focused on the particular background and the dynamism of the relationship in which domestic violence occurs. In that sense, a specific approach is necessary, with attention focusing not only on controlling aggression, but also on

relational aspects. Added to this, the study reveals that other aspects such as an antisocial lifestyle, the presence of an addiction, a personality disorder or serious pathological abnormalities are also major factors that need to be taken into consideration in the criminal prosecution of violence.