

Summary

Violence defied?

A review of prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain

Introduction and research questions

This report provides a synthesis of 48 studies into the effects of the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain. This study was announced in the *'Actieplan tegen geweld'* [Action plan against violence] (TK 2005-2006, 28 684, no. 65) and is a result of the conclusion drawn in the policy study *'Van afzijdigheid naar betrokkenheid: Preventieve strategieën tegen geweld'* [From non-involvement to involvement; preventive strategies against violence] (Van Erpecum, 2005) that little is known about the effects of preventive projects. However, a preventive approach of violence is of great importance and knowledge about the effects of prevention measures regarding violence in the Netherlands and abroad is therefore essential. A research synthesis is a sound method of obtaining this knowledge, because this method – if carried out correctly – yields the most complete and reliable information about 'what does and does not work in a certain field'. Among policy makers there is also a need for knowledge about the nature of the mechanisms which form the basis of effective prevention measures and about the conditions under which those mechanisms work. Such knowledge can be used in order to adopt proven effective or promising measures to prevent violence in the public and semi-public domain in the Netherlands.

The following research questions have been formulated:

- 1 Which measures for the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain are known and studied for their effects in the Netherlands and abroad?
- 2 Which mechanisms form the basis for effective measures for the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain?
- 3 Under which conditions are the results of effective measures for the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain expected and achieved?

For this project, violence is defined as:

“The deliberate use of physical strength or power and/or the threat thereof, aimed against another person or group of persons and which results or is likely to result in injury, death or psychological damage.”

By focusing on the public and semi-public domains, violence between persons who are close to each other, i.e., between (ex) partners, family

members, relatives and housemates, is placed outside the definition. Relational violence is regarded as domestic violence, regardless of its location (Lünnemann & Bruinsma, 2005). Public domain is taken to mean the public space accessible to all. The semi-public domain consists of places which may be accessible to the public, but only by appointment or with a ticket for instance, and places where an owner or supervisor is entitled to refuse someone access.

This study distinguishes between *person-oriented prevention measures*, which try to influence the person of the potential perpetrator, and *context-oriented prevention measures*, which try to prevent crimes by intervening in the crime situation. In addition, there are measures which combine person and context-oriented measures and which focus on influencing the potential perpetrator and the crime situation, *the person and context-oriented prevention measures*. Within this distinction, a further division is made into primary prevention (prevention of new cases among the entire population) and secondary prevention (aimed at persons/groups/locations which are at increased risk).

Research method

In order to answer the research questions of this study, a research synthesis was carried out. In a research synthesis, relevant evaluation studies are collected and are critically evaluated in order to find out which programmes are effective. The current research synthesis attempts to combine the method advocated by the Campbell Collaboration with the model of context-mechanism-outcome of Pawson and Tilley (1997). Following the method of the Campbell Collaboration, the effect evaluations involved in this research synthesis are first assessed for their internal validity. This assessment is done using the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS). This is a five-score scale, enabling us to decide on the methodological quality regarding the internal validity of effect evaluations (Farrington et al. 2002). On the SMS, score 3 (quasi-experimental design) is the minimum research design required to draw reliable conclusions on the effectiveness of a measure. In addition to the attention for internal validity, attention is also paid to the external validity. The better the findings from an evaluation can be generalised into other situations (areas, individuals, times, etc.), the higher the external validity. In order to involve external validity in the research, the model of context-mechanism-outcome of Pawson and Tilley (1997) is used. This approach particularly focuses on the theory that forms the basis of a(n) (behavioural) intervention. By finding out for each intervention which mechanisms yield results in which target group under which circumstances, programme theories can be drawn up. On the

basis of such theories expectations with regard to the ability to generalise results can be formulated, and by verifying such theories an insight can be obtained into the way in which a measure works. In the current research synthesis, an attempt has been made – on the basis of the studied publications – to come to a description of the mechanisms that form the basis of the evaluated prevention measures, and the contexts in which these would be effective or not.

The publications to be used during this study have been collected by means of searches of on-line databases, consulting websites of relevant organisations and institutes, studying the bibliography of relevant publications and writing to members of the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) with the request to provide the researchers with information about evaluation studies carried out in their country. The first selection of studies was subsequently made on the basis of titles and abstracts by means of a number of inclusion and exclusion criteria drawn up in advance. The main question was ‘does this study concern an evaluation of an intervention to prevent violence in the public or semi-public domain?’. Each study was assessed by two researchers and if the researchers had different opinions as to whether the study had to be selected, a decision was made in mutual consultation. The complete publications of the selected studies were requested. These texts were read by one of the researchers and assessed for their relevance for the current research. The publications selected in this way have been summarised whereby the quality of the research design for each study was assessed on the basis of the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale.

In total, 48 studies into the effects of the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain were included. These 48 publications relate to 36 interventions. The majority of the studies were carried out in the United States. Extra efforts were made to find European studies, but they seemed hardly available, if at all. By far the most publications appeared in the period between 1995 and 2005. By far the most publications (n=25) describe the evaluation of a prevention measure applied at school. Ten publications relate to measures applied in the neighbourhood, in the street or at specific locations in a city, and four publications deal with interventions for banks or post offices. Only one or two publications describe interventions in licensed premises, at events, at the workplace, and in both schools and families.

The effectiveness of the prevention measures studied was assessed on the basis of the results of the 48 evaluation studies used for this synthesis. This relates to effectiveness with regard to the reduction or prevention of violence. The effectiveness of a number of measures was researched in two or more studies, but many of the prevention measures included in the current review were evaluated in only one study. In those cases therefore, we have drawn on the knowledge about the effectiveness of certain

measures, which knowledge was collated previously by other authors. Frequent use was made of the work by Sherman and his colleagues (2002), but also of numerous other meta-analyses and reviews. Based on the information from the 48 publications used in this study and from meta-analyses and reviews by other authors, the prevention measures studied have been divided into four categories: 1) effective, 2) possibly effective, 3) possibly ineffective, and 4) ineffective. Not all studies could be grouped in one of the four categories on the basis of the criteria used. When the quality of the design of a study was not good enough to decide on the effectiveness of a measure and if no further information was available from meta-analyses or reviews by third parties, the measure was not categorised. Furthermore, no decisions were made on the basis of some studies the results of which were contradictory. However, when no decision can be made on the effectiveness of a measure, it does not mean to say that the measure studied could not be effective. Further (qualitatively sound) research should reveal this.

Results

In chapters 3 and 4 the mechanisms, contexts and results of the studies involved in this research are described. The following conclusions are drawn on the basis of these descriptions.

Person-oriented prevention measures

Two person-oriented measures, presented at schools in order to prevent violence can, on the basis of the available literature, be regarded as an effective form of person-oriented prevention. Two other person-oriented school prevention programmes and a community-based intervention are regarded as possibly effective and three school programmes are regarded as possibly ineffective. No decisions with regard to the effectiveness of the measures can be made on the other person-oriented prevention measures.

The effective person-oriented prevention programmes distinguish themselves from the possibly ineffective programmes through their intensity. One programme is a programme used throughout the school with continuous activities while the other consists of 25 weekly classes, followed by twelve classes at the start of the next school year. The fact that such an intensive approach works, was also demonstrated by the meta-analysis by Wilson, Lipsey and Derzon (2003) into the effects of school programmes to prevent aggressive behaviour. They concluded that programmes that are implemented correctly, apply an intensive approach and are presented by teachers, are often more effective than programmes for which this is not the case. In addition, Wilson, Lipsey and Derzon concluded that person-oriented prevention programmes yield

better results when the target group already displays a certain amount of aggressive behaviour prior to the start of the programme. Most effects can be gained from this group. This is also demonstrated by the evaluations of the effective school programmes: children and youngsters who displayed more aggressive behaviour prior to the interventions, benefited most from the programmes.

Context-oriented prevention measures

Three context-oriented prevention measures proved to be effective: improved street lighting, 'hot spots' policing and targeted surveillance. A possibly effective measure to prevent violence in bars is training pub staff how to prevent incidents. In addition, it may be effective to implement tailor-made situational prevention measures to prevent robberies on shops and businesses. As regards the underlying mechanisms and the way in which the measures are implemented, this latter measure seems to show similarities with the policing efforts aimed at hot spots and with targeted surveillance: a detailed analysis of the situation leads to the targeted implementation of opportunity-restricting and deterring measures.

A context-oriented intervention which may be ineffective is the use of a self-help book to prevent victimisation of sexual violence, while camera surveillance certainly is ineffective when it comes to preventing violence. Camera surveillance seems to have a preventive effect on property offences in particular, but in preventing violent crime the strength of the camera lies in the possibility to coordinate a fast response to incidents and with that to prevent incidents from getting out of control.

Context-oriented prevention measures, with regard to which no decisions can be made about the effectiveness of the reduction or prevention of violence, are the application of bullet-proof glass in banks and post offices, training bank staff and the prevention of crime at large-scale events. Other measures about which no decisions could be made are neighbourhood watch programmes, prevention in extremely violent neighbourhoods and the agreements signed by Dutch municipalities to restrict nightlife violence.

Person and context-oriented measures

Training young children (whether or not in school) in combination with parent training is effective in preventing violence during adolescence. The current study only includes two programmes which combine the training of children with that of parent training. However, they are not the only ones which appear to have a favourable effect in preventing crime in the long term (Farrington & Welsh, 2003). Such interventions are usually aimed at reducing the number of risk factors or negative effects which these factors have on the development of the child. Since multiple negative developmental outcomes often share the same risk factors, such

programmes are generally not explicitly aimed at preventing crime (it is a side result). This is the reason why hardly any evaluation studies of such interventions have been included in this synthesis. It is therefore advisable to verify in the literature, with regard to early interventions for problem behaviour among very young children, to what extent interventions, which have proven to be effective, also have an effect on the prevention of violence in the long term.

Another effective form of person and context-oriented prevention is training young people before they start dating, to prevent victimisation as well as perpetration of dating violence (Safe Dates and Youth Relationship Program). Such programmes appear not to be effective among older adolescents and young adults.

A possible effective person and context-oriented approach to prevent violence uses targeted measures to reduce specific risk factors. Such form of secondary prevention of violence requires proper cooperation between the various parties to actually influence varying risk factors.

Based on the available literature, no conclusions can be drawn in respect of the effectiveness of preventing violence in relation to two Dutch person and context-oriented measures – a nationwide campaign against violence at school and the Marietje Kessels Project. The same applies to a psychodynamic school programme to prevent violence.

Conclusions

The objective of this study was twofold. In first instance, the study needed to provide an overview of effective or promising measures for the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain in the Netherlands and abroad. Secondly, the study had to provide insights into the mechanisms which form the basis of effective or promising prevention measures and into the conditions under which those mechanisms work. However, this study shows that the effects of a lot of prevention measures are not evaluated. In addition, it appears that when a measure is evaluated, the quality of the study design is often not sufficient to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the studied prevention measure. As a result, the overview of effective and promising measures to prevent violence is by definition incomplete.

The second objective too of this study, gaining insights into the mechanisms and contexts of effective and promising prevention measures, has been realised to only a limited extent. It is striking to see that only a small number of effect studies pay explicit attention to the underlying mechanism which should ensure that a prevention measure generates the intended result. Also, the context in which a measure is used is usually not described into great detail and the lack of evaluation

studies cause measures that have been evaluated to have been verified in only a very limited number of contexts.

Despite the fact that the objectives of this study could not be fully realised, a number of recommendations with regard to preventing violence in the public and semi-public domain can still be made.

1 More attention for evaluating prevention projects

More attention must be paid to the evaluation of prevention projects. A lot of projects are not or not properly evaluated as a result of which it is unknown how effective many measures are. Not only does this apply to projects abroad, the same goes for Dutch projects. In order to secure the evaluation of measures in the future, an evaluation study must be provided for from the very start of a prevention project. Existing projects too must be studied for their effects.

2 Early interventions for young children

Early interventions for young children with behavioural problems and their parents appear to be effective in preventing violence during adolescence. Such programmes are indeed not explicitly aimed at preventing violence in the public or semi-public domain, but since most of the violence committed by young people takes place outdoors, it is plausible that such programmes shall actually have a favourable effect here. Deploying such programmes is therefore recommendable. In addition, it is advisable to verify what preschool interventions, such as High/Scope Perry Preschool, have a favourable effect on preventing violence and which could be offered in the Netherlands.

3 Prevention programmes in schools

Deploying prevention programmes in schools can make a positive contribution to reducing violence. Programmes implemented throughout the school or which are highly intensive and which comprise more than a limited number of lessons alone are likely to be given preference. The best effects in this respect can be expected among students already displaying a certain extent of violent conduct. However, if such programmes were to be adopted in the Netherlands, attention must be paid to the possibility that effects of school programmes in urban contexts are limited to the conduct of students at school and not include the behaviour of children and young people in the street and at home.

4 Improving street lighting

Improving street lighting in stable neighbourhoods with a homogenous population composition can make a contribution to the prevention of street violence. It is therefore advisable to use improved street lighting in those neighbourhoods which appear to be suitable in order to prevent street violence.

5 Targeted implementation of secondary prevention measures

When implementing secondary prevention measures in public and semi-public zones, it is advisable to do so focusing on certain targets. To this end it needs to be carefully verified what problems or risk factors are specifically present, after which tailor-made interventions can be implemented. Policing efforts aimed at hot spots and targeted deployment of surveillance, e.g. aimed at truancy enforcement, are good examples of such a targeted approach and it should be checked how this can be used more often.

6 Specific prevention measures

Specific prevention measures which appear to be promising include the programme Safer Bars to prevent violence in pubs, the programmes PeaceBuilders and Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways to prevent violence in schools and Safe Dates and Youth Relationship Program to prevent 'dating' violence. It needs to be considered whether these measures could be implemented in the Netherlands.

7 Implementation and evaluation of prevention measures

When specific measures are adopted for deployment in the Netherlands, it is obvious that a lot of attention needs to be paid to their careful implementation and securing a high degree of programme integrity (is the measure carried out as intended). These are necessary conditions to repeat the effects achieved elsewhere in a new context. In addition, the implementation of a new measure must be accompanied by a high-quality evaluation study to verify to what extent the results achieved elsewhere can be repeated.