

# Summary

## Domestic violence in the Netherlands

### *Comprehensive Synthesis Report on the Study of Victims and Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and the Capture-Recapture Method 2007-2010*

#### Introduction

In this comprehensive report, the most important results of the three partial studies of domestic violence have been summarised, integrated and valued. These studies were conducted in the period between 2007 and 2010 on the instruction of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The study contained the following three components:

- 1 *An estimation study of the annual number of victims and suspected perpetrators of domestic violence on the basis of police figures.* The study was conducted by researchers of Utrecht University (Van der Heijden & Van Gils, 2009).
- 2 *A partial study of the victims identifying the nature, scope, and help-seeking behaviour of victims of domestic violence on the basis of 'self-reports' in an online panel and in face-to-face interviews.* The study was conducted by Intomart GfK (Van Dijk, Van Veen & Cox, 2010).
- 3 *A partial study of the perpetrators, conducted by researchers of the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) and Tilburg University (Van der Knaap, El Idrissi & Bogaerts, 2010).* This study identified the characteristics of perpetrators of domestic violence and the help-seeking behaviour and recidivism of perpetrators on the basis of 'self-reports' in an online panel and on secondary analysis of data from the probation and after-care service.

Policy documents still often refer to study results from the first and most recent general study on victims of domestic violence in the year 1997 (Van Dijk, Flight, Oppenhuis & Duesmann, 1997). Since 1997, considerable policy and other efforts have been made to fight domestic violence.

The objectives of this comprehensive synthesis report are the following:

- 1 To state the scope of the results of the partial studies.
- 2 To draw up an integrated theoretic framework for the explanation of domestic violence.
- 3 To make a synthesis in which the results of the partial studies are discussed and, where possible, compared to each other and enriched by the results of the other partial reports and other study results.
- 4 To report on the results of new analyses. This concerns the degree in which partner violence occurs, the type of partner violence committed in situations of extreme controlling behaviour and exercise of power by a perpetrator of domestic violence (*intimate terrorism*), and the

relationship between the circumstance of being a victim and the circumstance of being a perpetrator of domestic violence.

- 5 To put outstanding research questions on the agenda for a possible follow-up study.

The general principal question of the study was: 'What is the quantity and nature of domestic violence in the Netherlands, and what is the behaviour of victims and perpetrators of domestic violence with regard to seeking help?'

## **Approach**

The starting points of the study design were efficiency, repeatability (waiting for an update of the key data for 13 years is long), generalisability (the results of the study of the victims must be representative of the Dutch population), and quality of the measurements (the results must be reliable and valid).

In this comprehensive synthesis report 'Domestic violence in the Netherlands', the multi-method approach of triangulation has been applied. In this method, the results of the 'self-reports' – consisting of experiences of victims and perpetrators of domestic violence – were compared to the results of secondary analyses of police and judicial data, and to the results of other studies.

In this study, the definition of domestic violence used at the national level is directional. Domestic violence is being defined as violence committed by someone from the victim's domestic or family circle. This circle may include partners and ex-partners, family members, relatives, and close friends of the family.

The study was not specifically aimed at child abuse. The study was mainly aimed at domestic violence that had been experienced recently (that occurred in the past five years), as a result of which many experiences of child abuse were not taken into consideration. In addition, two large-scale studies of the prevalence of child abuse were completed in 2007. New estimates are not yet considered desirable.

In the estimation study, the annual numbers of victims and perpetrators of domestic violence were determined on the basis of police registration of domestic violence in the management information system 'GIDS-Kubus'. Because many cases of domestic violence occur in secret and consequently cannot be retrieved from registration systems, it is not easy to determine the number of victims and perpetrators of domestic

violence. The GIDS-Kubus registration consequently does not contain all cases of domestic violence in the Netherlands, but only a tip of the iceberg. The number of cases of domestic violence that have not been registered is referred to as the 'dark number'. In the estimation study, the capture-recapture method was used to determine this dark number. The capture-recapture method is used to make an estimate of the number of victims or perpetrators of domestic violence that have not been registered on the basis of the number of cases of domestic violence that have been registered. Adding the registered number of cases and the estimated number of cases resulted in the total estimate.

The partial study of the victims of domestic violence was based on the 'self-reports' of the victims about their experiences with domestic violence. The study was designed to be conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a representative random sample of 9,508 respondents was drawn from the online panel of Intomart GfK. The respondents had been submitted to questions about the circumstance of being a victim and about the circumstance of being a perpetrator of domestic violence.<sup>53</sup> The research questions related, among other things, to the forms of domestic violence of which the respondents had been victims, who had been the perpetrators, and when the violence occurred.<sup>54</sup> In the questionnaires, the term 'domestic violence' was not mentioned. The response was 68%. The study distinguished among 21 forms of psychological, physical, and sexual violence.

**Table S1 The forms of domestic violence that are distinguished in the study**

Psychological violence	Physical violence	Sexual violence
1. To ridicule/belittle someone	9. To threaten to hurt someone	18. To rape someone*
2. To stalk someone*	10. To throw an object at someone	19. To force sex on someone*
3. To forbid someone to go out	11. To hit someone with an object*	20. To force someone to perform sexual acts*
4. To forbid someone to talk at parties	12. To push/grab someone or pull someone's hair	21. Other forms of sexual violence*
5. To forbid someone to make an appointment/have a date	13. To hit/kick/bite/punch someone	
6. To destroy someone's things	14. To choke/strangle/burn someone*	
7. To threaten to break off a relationship (partner)	15. To threaten someone with a knife or weapon*	
8. Other forms of psychological violence	16. To injure someone with a knife or weapon*	
	17. Other forms of physical violence	

\* Forms of domestic violence that are classified as obvious domestic violence even if they occurred only once.

53 This questionnaire, on the basis of which data were collected about the victim and about the perpetrator, enabled us to draw conclusions about the relationship between the circumstance of being a victim and the circumstance of being a perpetrator of domestic violence.

54 The questionnaires were included to the partial reports as Appendices.

In respect of the above-mentioned 21 forms of domestic violence, a distinction was made between incidents in the family circle and obvious domestic violence. The forms of domestic violence with asterisks in the table are considered obvious domestic violence, even if they occurred only once. These forms are the more serious forms of domestic violence. For the forms without asterisks, the relatively light forms of domestic violence, these must have occurred at least ten times (where applicable, in combination with other light forms of domestic violence) before they are considered as obvious domestic violence.

In the second phase of the study of the victims, 816 face-to-face interviews were conducted with respondents who had reported to be a victim of domestic violence in the first phase<sup>55</sup> of the study. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain more in-depth information about the consequences, the circumstances, and the behaviour with regard to seeking help. In the second phase, the aim was to obtain qualitative representation, and not statistical representation.

The partial study of the perpetrators was based on the self-reports by perpetrators of domestic violence in the Intomart GfK online panel and on a secondary analysis of data provided by the probation and after-care service. The first part of the 'self-report' data was collected in the same data collection as the first phase of the study of the victims. A group of 670 respondents, who in that part of the study had reported having committed one or more forms of domestic violence, was subsequently submitted to a follow-up questionnaire. Because the group of respondents was a selective group, it is not possible to generalise the results.

In addition to analysing the data that was collected by means of the self-reports in the study of the perpetrators, the researchers also analysed data that was collected by the probation and after-care service in respect of a total number of 9,504 perpetrators of domestic violence, in order to make an assessment of the risk of recidivism (RISC, Recidivism Assessment Scales). On the basis of this judicial population, the researchers established the characteristics, the behaviour with regard to seeking help, and the recidivism of the perpetrators of domestic violence who had been in contact with the judicial authorities.

55 When it became clear that the first phase would generate insufficient respondents for the second phase, a screening was conducted among the remaining 86,000 members of the Intomart GfK online panel that had not yet been approached for participation in the domestic violence survey. In this screening, the respondents were only asked about having been/being a victim of the 21 forms of domestic violence.

### Scope of the results of the partial studies

This study centred on the use of an online panel to collect 'self-reported' data on victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. A golden standard for collecting such data is the practice of conducting interviews by telephone or face-to-face interviews on the basis of a random sample. The use of online data collection is being disputed in Dutch scientific circles. The most important criticism has been that in online data collection, the population groups who have insufficient access to the Internet are underrepresented. In the initial period of the Internet, this criticism was still valid, but it is currently no longer true. Since 2000, the percentage of the Dutch population that had access to the Internet has increased strongly. In 2009, the percentage of the population that had access to the Internet had increased to 93% and was only still behind among senior citizens of 65 years and older (access to the Internet of 64%). As a result of this development, the conditions for reaching a sufficient degree of representativeness in online data collection have strongly increased. Much research was done into the difference in quality of the data collected in writing, including online data collection, and the data collected by means of interviews. The conclusion was that written survey methods would contribute to a better quality of the measurements, because they resulted in more candid, more honest, and more balanced answers than in the case of interviews. In addition, it was revealed that written survey methods, including the online panel, resulted in fewer socially desirable answers and more socially undesirable answers than in the case of interviews. This is particularly important in a sensitive survey, such as the study into the circumstance of being a victim and the circumstance of being a perpetrator of domestic violence.

In the past few years, it has become difficult to recruit respondents for interviews by telephone. The most important reasons for this are the rise of mobile telephony to the detriment of fixed telephone connections, and the new privacy regulations, such as the *'Bel-me-niet register'* (Don't-Call-Me Register) and the *MOA Onderzoekfilter* (Research Filter of the Market Research Association). In 2009, approximately 900,000 citizens did not want to be approached for participation in surveys. These developments have made it more difficult to reach respondents, and have interfered with the degree of representativeness that can be reached by means of an interview survey for which the respondents are recruited by telephone. The conclusion is that the representativeness and the effectiveness of interviews on the basis of random samples have strongly decreased in the past few years, whereas the representativeness and the effectiveness have increased in respect of online surveys. Both data collection methods have advantages and disadvantages. It is difficult to say which method will obtain the highest degree of representativeness. It is, however, clear that the use of an online panel has large cost advantages. In addition, a better

quality of measurements can be reached with an online panel than with interviews. For the purposes of this study, it was therefore decided to use an online panel as primary data source.

In this study, the results of the online panel survey were validated by applying triangulation: comparing the results of the online panel to the results of secondary analyses of existing registration and to the results of other studies. Used in this way, online data collection is to be preferred to interviews on the basis of random samples.

## **Results of the synthesis**

### *Quantity*

More than 9% of the Dutch population had been a victim of obvious domestic violence in the preceding five years. Approximately 40% reported one or several unpleasant incidents in the family circle of relatively low seriousness or incidents of domestic violence that had occurred more than five years ago. Approximately 50% of the Dutch population had never experienced any form of domestic violence or any unpleasant incidents in the family circle.

Nearly 75% of the cases of obvious domestic violence concerned physical violence (65%) and sexual violence (8%).

It is being estimated that, in the Netherlands, every year at least 200,000 persons fall victim to incidents of domestic violence or obvious domestic violence committed by 100,000 to 110,000 suspects of domestic violence. These numbers should not be confused with the estimates which sometimes turn up in the media with regard to numbers of incidents of domestic violence.

Approximately 60% of the victims of obvious domestic violence were women and 40% were men. This means that a considerable shift has occurred in the gender proportion in the circumstance of being a victim which is currently still used in policy memorandums (usually in the order of 84% women and 16% men) and which is possibly based on the gender proportion in the police registration of domestic violence for the year 2006.<sup>56</sup> This shift appears to be still going on, as in the past few years the estimated numbers of male victims have risen faster than the estimated numbers of female victims.

56 Ferwerda, H. (2007) *Met de deur in huis. Omvang, aard, achtergrondkenmerken en aanpak van huiselijk geweld in 2006 op basis van landelijke politieciijfers. (Coming straight to the point. Size, nature, background characteristics, and approach to domestic violence in 2006 on the basis of national police figures).* Arnhem/Dordrecht: Bureau Beke.

As suspects of perpetrators of domestic violence, men were by far in the majority compared to women: 83% of the suspects were men and 17% were women. In this context, it must be noted that in the past few years the numbers of female suspects have risen faster than the estimated numbers of male suspects. The judicial group of perpetrators of domestic violence consisted of men in 93% of the cases, and of women in 7% of the cases. In this group, the non-Western groups of immigrants were overrepresented. The capture-recapture estimation study confirmed this overrepresentation.

Triangulation was used in this study, with the results of a partial study being cross validated with the results of other partial studies. In this study, the multi-method approach proved to be of great added value in evaluating the reliability of the estimates of the number of victims and perpetrators.

#### *Partner violence*

Analyses of victim and perpetrator data converged, and showed that 60 to 65% of the obvious domestic violence related to partner or ex-partner violence. A percentage in this order was also found in the capture-recapture estimation study. Women reported more frequently than men that they had experienced partner violence, both as a victim and as a perpetrator.

#### *Intimate terrorism within partner violence*

Perpetrators of intimate terrorism belong to the most extreme category of perpetrators of domestic violence in which the perpetrator tries to dominate the victim by exercising control and power. Control, power, threats, isolation, and economic deprivations are the basic ingredients of intimate terrorism. On the basis of the online panel data, a profile of behaviour control characteristics was developed to distinguish perpetrators of intimate terrorism from the group of perpetrators of other types of domestic violence. By means of this profile, it was possible to correctly estimate in 82% of the cases whether a perpetrator belonged to the group of perpetrators of intimate terrorism or to the group of perpetrators of other types of domestic violence. The group of perpetrators of intimate terrorism was found to commit significantly more partner violence – with respect to nearly all forms of violence – than the group of other perpetrators of domestic violence. In the group of perpetrators of intimate terrorism, the percentage of women was lower than in the other group of perpetrators. The profile developed will enable care workers to recognise this extreme form of domestic violence more quickly, and to provide appropriate assistance.

*Relationship between the circumstance of being a victim and the circumstance of being a perpetrator of incidents of domestic violence and obvious domestic violence*

In nearly two thirds of the cases, perpetrators of domestic violence were also victims of incidents of domestic violence or obvious domestic violence. In more than two thirds of the cases, victims of domestic violence were also perpetrators of incidents of domestic violence. A significant statistical relationship was observed between the circumstance of being a victim and the circumstance of being a perpetrator of physical violence, sexual violence, and other forms of violence. Although there are still questions about the division of the relationship across gender, it may be concluded that there was relatively often an interrelatedness between the circumstance of being a victim of domestic violence and the circumstance of being a perpetrator of domestic violence. This finding may provide a basis for care workers in the provision of system-oriented assistance.

*Reporting domestic violence to the police*

Nowadays, victims report domestic violence relatively more frequently to the police and domestic violence remains relatively less often hidden than in the past. In the first large-scale study into domestic violence in 1997, the percentage of people reporting domestic violence to the police was 12%; this percentage has currently risen to 20%. The major policy efforts to stop domestic violence from being a taboo seem to have paid off in this context, although men are still somewhat behind women in reporting the circumstance of being a victim of domestic violence to the police.

*Consequences of domestic violence*

The consequences of domestic violence are serious in the relational, professional, and physical sphere. Domestic violence may have a great impact on a person's self-confidence, confidence in other people, social contacts, psychological problems, substance abuse, and financial situation. Nearly 25% of the victims of domestic violence interviewed stated to have attempted to commit suicide on account of the domestic violence. This mainly concerned women and young people.

*Assistance to victims and perpetrators*

It was revealed that victims mainly discuss the domestic violence with their mother, friends, and a new partner. If professional assistance had been sought, many victims had sought contact with the general practitioner, and the police came second. Female victims who had reported to the police felt that they had been helped far more frequently (in 63% of the cases) than male victims (36%). This raises the question as to whether the domestic violence that is reported to the police by men is being considered domestic violence to a sufficient degree, and is being registered as such. It was noticeable that victims of domestic violence had

difficulty finding the path to the ASHG (Advice and Support Centre for Domestic Violence). ASHGs are supposed to be the appropriate contact point to report domestic violence. The fact that only 1% of the victims that reported domestic violence stated to have sought assistance at an ASHG shows that this objective has not been realised.

#### *Recidivism of perpetrators*

Of the perpetrators who had been prosecuted by the judicial authorities for domestic violence 70% had criminal records. These perpetrators had, on average, already been prosecuted for a crime six times in the past. Of these perpetrators 30% were found to continue to commit crimes after having committed domestic violence, and were found to come into contact with the judicial authorities again within two years, usually for a violent offence or traffic offence.

#### **Concluding observations**

In future studies into domestic violence there will be good possibilities to apply triangulation, the multi-method approach that was used in this study. Characteristic of triangulation is that the results of the data collection methods cross validate each other. In this study, the results of the online panel survey were validated by secondary analyses of police and judicial data and, vice versa, the results of secondary analyses were validated by the results from the online panel survey. With this method, which is much less expensive than interview surveys, it will be possible to monitor developments in domestic violence more frequently. In this context, attention must, however, be paid to the representativeness of the online panel. The online panel that was used in this study proved to be insufficiently representative for the ethnic groups in the Netherlands. This report does not include any online panel results from these ethnic groups.