

# Summary

Attention for domestic violence is growing. Both through their policies and by the professional care they offer, many authorities are trying to curb domestic violence. The municipalities, police and Public Prosecution Service (Openbaar Ministerie, OM) are also involved in this. These bodies were subject of a survey that was carried out in 2003, in which the following spearheads were focused on:

- policy;
- cooperation;
- professional development (education).

Following the initial survey, the ministries of Justice and of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) engaged Beke Consultancy and Research Group to do a second survey. In addition to the spearheads mentioned earlier, the second survey aims at safeguards, registration and information. On the one hand, safeguards include the presence of contact persons and/or coordinators; on the other, they include the presence of covenants and protocols. The information aspect is placed under the professional development aspect of this second survey.

The three bodies from the first survey are also central to the second. Besides them, the counselling- and support centres for domestic violence (Advies- en Steunpunten Huiselijk Geweld, ASHG's), established since 2003, have been included in this survey. The definition of the problem is directed at the current situation regarding the various ways that domestic violence is dealt with. The progress made since the first survey has also been included.

Various research activities are carried out against the background of this second survey: a study is done of the documents supplied by the police, the OM and the ASHG's and external source materials are taken stock of. In addition to this, coordinators and contacts at the police, the OM and the ASHG's are interviewed.

## **Findings from the survey**

In general, the approach to domestic violence has evolved greatly since 2003. Municipalities, ASHG's, the police and the OM have all taken additional measures, though their significance and quality varies. This is partly due to the phase these authorities are in: the establishment of all the ASHG's in the core municipalities has become fact, for example; as a result of this, many implementing tasks have been delegated to those ASHG's. For another part it is due to the manner in which the various bodies are managed: the police and the OM are managed mainly through national policy, which does not apply to the core municipalities and the ASHG's. For

the latter authorities this still translates into local differences (in quality) of the measures against domestic violence.

For a more accurate survey of findings, a division into four items is used. The first three refer to the approach of the municipalities, the police and the OM, respectively. Since the ASHG's are linked to municipalities, those two institutions are placed together. The fourth item consists of findings about the cooperation between the organisations involved in this survey.

#### Municipalities/ASHG's

The managing role of municipalities in the approach to domestic violence is smooth: although two-thirds of all the municipalities indicate that they do not possess a domestic violence policy, three quarters do have measures against domestic violence at their disposal. Of the core municipalities, 83 percent has a domestic violence policy. The latter percentage is a steep increase from 2003. The arrival of the new Social Support Act (Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning, Wmo) in 2007 will result in greater responsibility for municipalities with regard to how domestic violence is dealt with. In part, this has already been anticipated with a special programme of policy-based and instrumental support being offered by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten, VNG).

In the core municipalities, the implementation of the policy concerned has been largely delegated to the ASHG's. These were established between 2003 and 2006, so many ASHG's are still in their development phase. They are often faced with extensive duties: outdated protocols have to be rewritten, and contacts have to be made with the welfare services from the back office organisations, the municipalities, the police, the OM and other bodies. In addition to this, the telephone helpline has to be set up and staffed, often under the auspices of women's support groups, the municipal health service (Gemeentelijke Gezondheidsdienst, GGD) or social work organisations. The joint approach has the added advantage of having officials who are committed to dealing with domestic violence. However, there are also some problems in the cooperation between the various municipalities and between the municipalities and ASHG's, which mainly result from capacity shortages and a lack of financial room. Besides this, the ASHG's suffer from the poor cooperation between the various municipalities in their region.

A lot of effort has been made to catch the attention of target groups and professionals. The VNG support programme uses the Public Communication Toolkit (Toolkit Publiekscommunicatie), for example, both at the start of each ASHG and

for specific target group campaigns. In addition to this, many ASHG's have their own internet site and information materials. ASHG employees receive their information through Transact, and during regular meetings held for all the ASHG's together.

A real obstacle in the way domestic violence is being dealt with on the municipal level is the registration. In spite of agreements between municipalities and ASHG's concerning the supply of domestic violence statistics, it is mainly the police who supply them. Some ASHG's do not have their registration in order or still register manually. Besides this, they each have their own system of registration. Uniform registration is not achieved in 2006.

#### P o l i c e

The developments in the ways the police have been dealing with domestic violence may be called considerable. Since 2005, in almost all the police regions the National Domestic Violence Protocol and the Police Task (Landelijk Protocol Huiselijk Geweld en de Politietoek) is being used. In addition to this, the police carry out a quality assessment, which is an aspect the municipalities, ASHG's and OM do not use. The police use the quality monitor (Kwaliteitsmonitor), an instrument that turns on spearheads that are similar to the ones used in the current survey.

Many police officials have both trained for and are working in the field of domestic violence, as a result of which domestic violence tasks may be found at all police levels and in the most various functions. This facilitates the cooperation between the police departments, where preferably short decision-taking lines are used. Besides this, since 2005 the police have started organising interregional intervision meetings. They are increasingly making available sources of information so as to enhance the recognition of and approach to domestic violence, such as intranet and the 'Politiekennisnet', but they also take national and regional information initiatives.

Police registrations constitute a source of information in the area of domestic violence; since 2004, the Domestic Violence project code has been able to provide an insight in the nature and, in a more limited sense, the frequency of such violence. Besides this, the police are the only organisation that monitors its registration, through the regional coordinators. As it happens, this is a necessary activity, since the project code is not an obligatory field to be filled in during registration.

## OM

Of all the authorities concerned, the OM is the most nationally managed. The 2003 Domestic Violence Decree (Aanwijzing Huiselijk Geweld) offers clear guidelines for this management; however, there are still differences in the way the various district courts deal with cases of domestic violence. Unlike the ASHG's, the OM does not really use specific approaches for different target groups, such as children, elderly and ethnic minorities; it considers each case individually.

Every public prosecutor's office has a domestic violence liaison officer, often together with support staff. Domestic violence education of such officers is not an obligatory requirement in the OM, although they have to ensure that their colleagues become professionally developed in this respect. Since any monitoring is lacking, there is no insight in the domestic violence expertise of Public Prosecutors.

The public prosecutor's offices do not work together in their approach to domestic violence. However, on a more positive note, the OM and the probation and after-care service are more apt to work together in, for example, offering early care to perpetrators. Registration of domestic violence cases at the OM is also improving; however, like with the police, this is not obligatory. Unlike the police, the OM does not use any form of quality assessment; unfortunately, this makes the OM registrations less than fully reliable.

## Cooperation

The chain approach to domestic violence is increasingly focused on target groups. A lot has already been arranged for children and the elderly; ethnic minorities are receiving increasing attention. The handicapped are another target group for which initiatives are being developed. However, a number of contacts at the police, the OM and the ASHG's have indicated that there is insufficient time to put their collaboration into effect.

Cooperation as regards criminal law, between the police, the OM, the probation and after-care service and the offender care organisations, is functioning properly, also because of its bilateral and informal nature. However, there are differences in the quality of the cooperation between the criminal law partners and those who provide care. Where partners are motivated to work together, their cooperation works well. On the other hand, collaboration is hampered by the waiting lists at the Child Abuse Counselling and Reporting Centres (Advies- en Meldpunten Kindermishandeling, AMKs), flagging case consultations or unclear job descriptions. Capacity shortages and geographic differences between the various security regions, health regions and the core municipality also play a part.

Collaboration would benefit from a single mutual registration system with classified insight into domestic violence cases for each organisation. However, every organisation uses its own discretion in its registration, without any possibilities to link data. It is time for the bodies concerned to start realising that joint registration is the quintessential success factor to bring down domestic violence.

### **Recommendations based on the survey**

The survey results in the following recommendations, divided up to address the various spearheads (for an allocation of the various recommendations to the actors concerned, please see table 6.1):

#### **P o l i c y**

- give precedence to an intensified chain approach over 'sub' policies; too many of the latter will result in a splintered approach to domestic violence;
- coordinate current and new policy frameworks between regional municipalities and core municipalities, to avoid excessive discrepancies in local policy;
- study the effects of the various standards for dealing with domestic violence outlined in the Aanwijzing Huiselijk Geweld;
- for the sake of geographical clarity, focus on the choice of security regions over health regions that has already been made in the chain approach;
- ensure that municipalities coordinate their policies through the core municipalities. In spite of the new Wmo, this will keep the regional ways in which domestic violence is dealt with uniform.

#### **S a f e g u a r d s**

- keep protocols up-to-date, include result-oriented working agreements and appoint persons to be in charge of specific tasks;
- remain critical about your own manner of dealing with domestic violence; do not just leave the work to be done to the domestic violence pioneers in your department;
- ensure that key persons, contacts and knowledge are safeguarded by means of internal operational processing systems and monitoring systems for all local chain partners;
- monitor your own approach to domestic violence, analogous to the police.

#### **C o o p e r a t i o n**

- organise regular internal consultations to keep the objectives regarding domestic violence clear inside the organisation;
- organise case consultations led by a case manager. This will foster mutual understanding between organisations and enhance decisive power;
- give the opportunity to offer early care.

## Professional development

- combine the national publicity campaign with a national phone number;
- bundle the manners of dealing with domestic violence and monitor them for the benefit of the professionals;
- during case consultations, promote the exchange of mutual expertise;
- use ASHG staff to inform professional groups;
- give attention to the training of the liaison officers at the OM;
- investigate ways for a directive for professionals who detect domestic violence.

## Registration

- in the police, invest in the quality of domestic violence reporting. Promote the willingness to report domestic violence as initiated by the circle of friends and relatives of any victim;
- work on a duty to report for care organisations that considers the bond of confidentiality between the relief worker and the client;
- create obligatory domestic violence code fields to be filled in as part of the police and OM registration systems, then link the output of the two bodies together;
- use the possibilities offered by the law to exchange personal information from individual cases;
- at the same time as introducing the home restraining order, develop a national registration system for both the criminal law and social care partners.