

Summary

The aim of this survey was to obtain general information about victims of domestic violence in the Netherlands. The survey looked in detail at which types of domestic violence victims are faced with, the attributes that can be used to describe victims of domestic violence and how the help-seeking behaviour displayed by victims of domestic violence can be characterised. This summary presents the results of the survey point by point.

The survey was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved a preliminary survey of a group of members - as representative as possible - who form part of the Intomart GfK online respondents panel. The results of this first stage of the survey are described in chapter 4 ("Domestic Violence"). The second stage involved in-depth face-to-face interviews of victims of domestic violence from the first stage. The aim of the second stage of the survey was to describe in as much detail as possible the circumstances in which domestic violence takes place. That is why only *victims* of domestic violence from stage I were eligible for the sample of respondents for stage II. This means that the sample in stage II was consciously selected and that statistical representation was subordinated to qualitative depth. No generalisation can therefore be made of the results of stage II as regards the entire population. The data in chapters 5 ("Consequences for the Victims"), 6 ("Circumstances of Domestic Violence and Relationship between Victim and Perpetrator"), 7 ("Help-seeking Behaviour") and 8 ("Profiles of Groups of Victims") came from the face-to-face interviews in the second stage of the survey.

We will start with a summary of the first stage of the survey, which looked at domestic violence in the Netherlands. We will then examine the results from the second stage of the survey, starting with the consequences of domestic violence. This is followed by an investigation into the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of domestic violence, and then a summary of victims' help-seeking behaviour. The chapter ends with a description of a number of victim profiles.

Stage I

Incidents within the domestic sphere

Half of those interviewed had at one time experienced at least one incident within the domestic sphere. Of those interviewed, 23 percent had been confronted with at least one incident in the last five years.

The most common physical incidents involved the threat of physical pain and throwing objects. Both types of incidents had been experienced at one time by 18 percent of the respondents, and the figure for the last five years was five and four percent respectively.

Respondents who had experienced an incident in the sexual sphere had primarily to contend with forced sex. Ten percent of the respondents had been subjected to that at one time.

Being ridiculed or belittled, having things broken deliberately and threats of finishing the relationship were the most common “other” incidents. About one fifth of respondents had experienced this. Eight percent had experienced at least one of these incidents in the last five years.

Of those who had suffered an incident within the domestic sphere now and again, a small majority had also done something to another person in the domestic sphere once in a while.

Domestic violence

The survey makes a distinction between three – partially overlapping – groups of victims: victims of physical violence/stalking, victims of sexual violence and victims of other violence. There are hardly any differences in terms of age, level of education or ethnicity between these groups, although all groups of victims differ from the Dutch population as a whole in these attributes. The three groups only show substantial differences with regard to gender. When we look at victimisation percentages, women are clearly more often victims of sexual and other violence than men.

If we focus on victims of domestic violence and leave out the respondents who have only suffered sporadically, then nine percent of the population became victims of domestic violence in the last five years.

Ex-partners and partners are the principal perpetrators of domestic violence (46% and 34% respectively). Broadly speaking, victims of physical, sexual and other violence estimate perpetrators’ motives underlying domestic violence to be the same. In most cases, jealousy (38%) or the perpetrator’s character (45%) is cited. In almost one third of all cases, children have witnessed elements of domestic violence.

About one in five victims of domestic violence reports the incident that most recently occurred to the police. Physical violence is reported a little more often than average (by about a quarter of victims). If we look at gender, ethnicity and age, we see that women report physical violence more often than men, and young people aged between 18 and 24 report other violence less often than victims aged 25 and older.

Stage II: In-depth Interviews of Victims of Domestic Violence

Consequences for the Victims

Over two-thirds of victims of domestic violence have suffered – generally at different times – at the hands of more than one perpetrator. In most cases, the partner or ex-partner is identified as the main perpetrator of the domestic violence. This is true for 43 to 44 percent of all victims.

In general, we can say that women, young people and those with limited education suffer the consequences of domestic violence more often. Domestic violence leads primarily to emotional problems. This is mainly the case for victims of sexual violence and for women. There are also relatively more relational problems; around 85 percent of victims of violence by partners is divorced.

Respondents who had been victims of domestic violence as children were most likely to indicate that they had lost confidence in themselves and others. They also encountered problems with intimacy and sexuality more often and found it more difficult to start relationships. Of those interviewed who had been children (younger than 12) when the domestic violence started, almost 30 percent said that they had attempted suicide. With respect to the figure just mentioned, we would like to emphasize once again that generalisations of the results of stage II must not be made with regard to the Dutch population. If we limit our attention to the last five years, we see that being a victim of sexual violence in particular has negative consequences, especially in terms of intimacy and sexuality (64%).

Circumstances of Domestic Violence and Relationship between Victim and Perpetrator

In the majority of cases, victims of domestic violence live in the same house as the perpetrator (74-79% of the victims). The domestic violence perpetrated does not usually happen in isolation. This often results in others in the domestic sphere becoming victims.

Perpetrators often come into contact with the police or the law for other reasons than domestic violence (for example disorderly conduct). According to victims, psychological problems and alcohol abuse play a significant role in the domestic violence.

The great majority of victims have taken action against the main perpetrator of the domestic violence, and tried to stop the violence in that way. A small majority of the respondents that had taken action against the domestic violence thinks that the resistance had been effective. Over 20 percent of the victims who resisted indicated that the domestic violence stopped as a result of their taking action. In contrast, more than four out of ten victims think that resistance did not help.

The results of the survey show why domestic violence is often difficult for the outside world to recognise. The perpetrator (but also the victim!) 'benefits' from concealing the domestic violence from the outside world although the motives for this differ enormously. The perpetrator does not want to be exposed and therefore behaves completely differently towards 'the outside world' than towards the victim. This form of 'disguise' takes place in 80 percent of cases. In contrast, the victim of domestic violence is filled with feelings of shame. Shame makes it difficult for many people to talk about the domestic violence to others or to actually ask for help. Furthermore there is a fear that the violence will only get worse as soon as the victim decides to resist the perpetrator.

Help-seeking Behaviour

In spite of these feelings of shame, the majority of victims has a need for someone to listen to them, both in the period in which the violence is taking place and afterwards (this is true for around 60% of the victims). Victims often talk to friends and their mothers about the violence. The family doctor is the most likely to be taken into the victim's confidence of all the health and welfare services. Victims rarely go to the police. Although a minority of victims indicated that the violence stopped due to their contacting family, friends or welfare services, making contact does seem to be worthwhile: many felt understood and indicated that the contact had done them some good.

The victim's choice of who to contact first affects the degree to which health and welfare services are involved in the second contact. If the victim's mother is the first person to be talked to, a follow-up with one of the health and welfare services only takes place in a limited number of cases. If the first contact is with friends, this happens more often. In contrast, family doctors refer victims of domestic violence much more frequently to other health and welfare services.

The majority of the victims interviewed in stage II (72-76%) did not contact the police about the most recent incident they had experienced, mainly because the victims did not consider the incident to be important enough, it had never occurred to them to report the incident to the police, or because they were frightened of reprisals by the perpetrator. Victims who had reported the incident to the police were generally more often dissatisfied than satisfied about the performance of the police.

Profiles of Groups of Victims

An in-depth analysis was conducted on a number of groups of victims. These were victims of violence perpetrated by a partner, victims of several perpetrators, victims who had been exposed to domestic violence for a long time and those for whom the violence has not yet ceased and victims who sustained physical injuries as a result of the violence.

The consequences of violence by a partner are far-reaching for male victims, but less than for female victims. Men are slightly better at seeking help in the period that the violence is taking place, but the help provided by health and welfare services does not always turn out to be satisfactory.

The consequences of domestic violence are clearly more serious for victims who have encountered several perpetrators over time than for those who have had to contend with one perpetrator.

Victims who are exposed to domestic violence for a long time more often have to contend with a manipulative, disrespectful perpetrator.

In the case of victims for whom the violence has not yet ceased, the perpetrator is more likely to have psychological problems than in the case of the group where the violence has stopped. The victims themselves more often report losing jobs and having conflicts with others than those for whom the violence has stopped. Victims for whom the violence has not yet ceased talk to other people more often (including the police). In contrast, this group feels less helped by health and welfare services.

Victims who have had to contend with physical injuries have a greater feeling of powerlessness than any other group of victims.