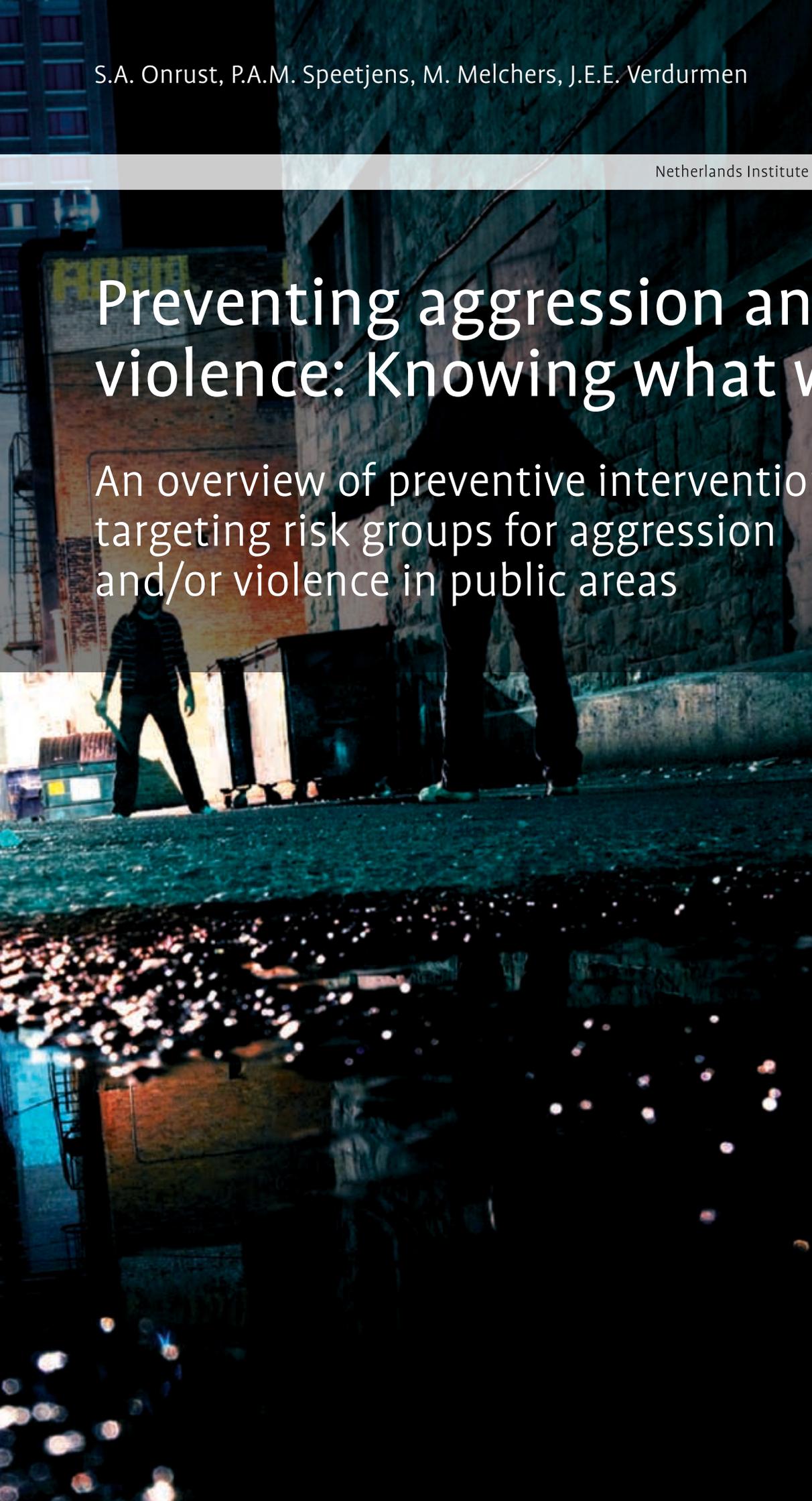


# Preventing aggression and violence: Knowing what works

An overview of preventive interventions targeting risk groups for aggression and/or violence in public areas



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## Summary

For violence by risk groups to be successfully prevented it is necessary to have a good understanding of interventions which are effective and those which are not. This report provides a state-of-the-art overview of the various interventions targeting risk groups for aggression and/or violence in public and semi-public areas, as well as research into their effectiveness.

"*Risk groups*" here is taken to refer to individuals and groups of individuals, such as school classes or residents in specific districts, who present an elevated risk of committing acts of aggression or violence. The "*public domain*" refers to public space which is accessible to all. The "*semi-public domain*" is taken to cover areas which are accessible to the public but for example only by appointment or with the use of an access pass, or where the owner or supervisor is authorised to deny access.

The present study has three objectives:

1. Firstly, to offer an insight into the available effective, promising, ineffective and counterproductive preventive interventions targeting groups at risk of committing acts of violence.
2. The second aim of the study is to identify those circumstances which contribute to the desired and undesired effects of such interventions.
3. The third and final objective of the study is to provide an insight into the usability in practice of effective and promising preventative interventions in the Dutch setting. For this reason the results of the literature survey have been presented to various experts.

A distinction is made in this study between 4 types of intervention: interventions which take place in a *school* context, interventions targeting the *individual*, interventions carried out in the context of a geographical *area or community*, and so-called *multi-component* interventions, combining several different interventions.

## Method

This study into interventions intended to prevent aggression and violence by risk groups is based on an earlier study by Van der Knaap et al from 2006. In their study the research methodology of the Campbell Collaboration (Petrosino et al, 2001) was followed, and the present study has also adopted this guidance. Studies were included with at least an experimental and a comparable control group as well as a pre- and a post-measurement. The publications referred to in this study were collated using search actions in a variety of national and international databases. A 3-stage selection process was then carried out to identify literature of relevance to this study.

1. The first selection involved assessments by two researchers who independently evaluated whether the intervention under consideration was aimed at the prevention of aggression or violence by a risk group in the public or semi-public domain, on the basis of the research title and summary. The selected studies were then called up for further assessment.
2. In the second phase of the literature selection process the above assessment was repeated, based on the information contained in the publication. The information in each study was set out in a classification table, with an indication whether the publication in question satisfied the criteria for inclusion.

3. The third and final phase involved the reading of each of the studies selected so far (n=61) and the completion of evidence tables. Where available, information was included here about selection criteria, contra-indications and circumstances in which the interventions were effective. Information was also included about the outcomes of the relevant studies, together with an assessment of the methodological quality of the research. All evidence tables were then checked by a different researcher.

The interventions were then divided into the following seven categories, based on the information from the 61 publications included in this study: (1) effective, (2) promising, (3) possibly ineffective, (4) ineffective, (5) possibly counterproductive (6) counterproductive (7) no judgement about effectiveness possible.

This classification was based on the research design used to study the effectiveness of the intervention, the quality of the study and the number of studies that showed this outcome. The results were then described in the report against the different intervention types (school, individual, community and multi-component). The results of meta-analyses, which did not form part of the original selection but which did contribute evidence of relevance to the topic of this study, were also taken into account in the final conclusion.

Lastly, a group of five Dutch specialists with expertise in the various settings covered by the present study were consulted. They were asked to give an assessment of the value for Dutch society of the interventions deemed to be effective or promising. It was also studied whether the relevant intervention (or a comparable intervention) had already been carried out in the Netherlands, whether it was applicable to the Dutch situation and whether it was compatible with Dutch practices.

## Results

### *Effective interventions*

The literature survey threw up two effective interventions. These interventions were found to have been effective by at least two high-quality studies.

The first was a school-based intervention. *Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways (RIPP)* is a classroom-based program for schoolchildren from disadvantaged areas. The program consciously focuses on the period of transition to secondary school, as this is a period characterised by numerous changes. This period also appears to be linked to an increase in aggression and violence. RIPP exploits this critical period by presenting attitudes to the children which are less sympathetic towards violence. Also on offer are a range of skills which are useful in supporting non-violent solutions to conflict.

The process of consultation with experts revealed that two school-based interventions broadly comparable with RIPP have been carried out in the Netherlands. The first of these, *Taakspel (Roleplay)* is aimed at a younger target group. The second program, *Baas in Eigen Soap or "Boss in your own Soap"*, targets pupils in the second phase of life, the transition to secondary school. The effects of the Taakspel intervention have now been demonstrated in high quality research. A pilot of the Baas in Eigen Soap intervention is currently underway.

The second intervention which has been effective in preventing aggressive or violent behaviour was community-based. The *Problem Oriented Policing* program specifically tar-

gets areas where criminality is prevalent. A package of interventions was implemented in these areas, on the one hand involving environmental improvements, for example the provision of street lighting, with stricter enforcement of measures to preserve good order on the other hand. Attention was also paid to prophylactic factors such as improved recreational facilities and the promotion of collaboration between such facilities and the government agencies. A tailored package of interventions was developed for each individual area.

The experts consulted were not aware of any comparable program in the Netherlands. Neither has any comparable intervention been described in the databank of effective youth interventions. There are some points of similarity with the *Hotspot* approach, which has been applied in the Netherlands.

### *Promising interventions*

As well as these two effective interventions the research synthesis has brought to light a large number of promising approaches. A single high/fair quality study identified a positive effect on aggression or violence from these interventions, but to date no other study has replicated this effect.

The first example was the *Social Development Curriculum (SDC)*, part of the *Aban Aya Youth Project*. Like the RIPP program, this was aimed at children aged 10 to 13 attending schools in disadvantaged areas and covered several years. Unlike the RIPP program, SDC was developed specifically for African-American youngsters. While this school program in itself appears to have been successful in combating violent behaviour, additional components have also been developed within the Aban Aya Youth Project which appear to amplify the effect of the school-based program (the *School Community Intervention*). These additional components consist of a parenting support program and a community-based program.

According to the experts there has been no intervention in the Netherlands comparable to the SDC school program. One program implemented in the Netherlands does however display similarities with the multi-component SDC intervention, namely the *POWER* integral empowerment program. The effectiveness of this program in Dutch practice is currently studied.

A promising intervention of a different type which aims to prevent aggression and violence is targeted specifically at children and young people with behavioural problems. This type of intervention involves intensive training in social and problem-solving skills, applying the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy. Three different interventions which appear to achieve positive results are described in this research synthesis: the school-based interventions *Aggression Replacement Training (ART)* and *Coping Power* and the individual intervention program *Social Cognitive Intervention*. All three of these interventions are offered to small groups.

A large number of interventions aimed at children with behavioural problems have been carried out in the Netherlands. ART (under its Dutch title *Agressie Regulatie Training*) has been studied in pilot projects in schools in three regions of the Netherlands. Coping Power is offered in the Netherlands under the title *Minder Boos en Opstandig*, and its effectiveness has already been studied. Social Cognitive Intervention has been carried out in the Netherlands under the title *Zelfcontrole*, and positive outcomes have been identified for this approach in Dutch practice. A modified version of *Zelfcontrole* is also currently studied in the school setting.

Another apparently promising type of intervention is the mentor program. Mentoring programs are described as an element of the promising school-based intervention *School-based violence prevention model*, as well as the promising individual interventions *Mentor-implemented violence prevention intervention*, *Big Brothers Big Sisters*, *Mentoring Program*, *Caught in the Crossfire* and *Early Community-Based intervention*, and contact with a mentor is also deployed as a possibly effective element of the promising community-based and multi-component interventions (*Communities That Care*). While the various mentoring programs differ in setting, level of standardisation and intensity, the approach in all cases is to provide the at-risk young people with a positive role model to follow.

Comparatively little use is made of mentoring programs in the Netherlands. Big Brothers Big Sisters is available in Rotterdam, but its effectiveness has never been studied. The experts consulted were not aware of any other standardised mentoring programs. One multi-component intervention making use of mentors, *Communities that Care*, has been implemented in the Netherlands and its effects are currently being studied.

Besides interventions aimed at young people in risk groups there are also several aimed primarily at their parents. In the *Nurse Home Visitation* program at-risk mothers and mothers-to-be are supported by means of a series of home visits from nurses. The *Primary-care based intervention on violent behaviour and injury* combines telephone parenting support with systematic screening for psychiatric problems on arrival at GP waiting rooms. The focus of the *Guiding Responsibility and Expectations in Adolescents Today and Tomorrow (GREAT) Families Program* is similarly on the provision of parenting support.

The Nurse Home Visitation project is offered in the Netherlands with the title *Voorzorg*, and its effectiveness is currently being studied. According to the experts consulted, the primary-care based intervention on violent behaviour and injury has obvious similarities with the *SPRINT* program offered by Amsterdam Local Authority. The effects of this program are currently being studied in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has a large number of programs aimed at parents and families. These exhibit certain similarities with the *GREAT Families* program, but are not completely comparable.

The combination of training in social skills for children with behavioural problems and parenting support for their parents also appears to achieve positive results. Examples of promising interventions based on this combination include the *School Community Intervention* in the *Aban Aya Youth Project* described above, the *Drug Abuse Resistance Education Plus* program and the *Bi-modal Preventive Intervention*. In some cases the parenting component appears to reinforce the effects of skills training for the children (*School Community Intervention* and *Drug Abuse Resistance Education Plus*), in other cases, for example *Coping Power*, this does not appear to be so.

The combination of training in social skills and support with parenting is also frequently implemented in the Netherlands. The *School Community Intervention* has much in common with the Dutch *POWER* program, while *Coping Power* is offered in the Netherlands under the title *Minder Boos en Opstandig*. There are also a great many other programs which to a greater or lesser degree match promising interventions undertaken abroad.

Other promising combinations of interventions are frequently based on a tailored approach. In this type of intervention a careful analysis is first made of the situation, followed by the deployment of a carefully considered package of interventions, aiming to achieve a sustained improvement in the balance between prophylactic and risk factors.

Examples of this type of intervention include *Communities That Care and Community Policing*.

An integrated community-based approach has also been tried in the Netherlands. Communities that Care has been introduced in the Netherlands and a study of its effectiveness in the Dutch setting is ongoing. The experts were not aware of the Community Policing initiative, however a number of other interventions with similar assumptions are known from the Netherlands: *Heel de Buurt (The Whole Neighbourhood)*, *Thuis op straat (At Home on the Street)*, *Buurtcoach (Neighbourhood Coach)* and *Marokkaanse Buurtvaders (Moroccan Community Fathers)*.

Finally, the present review has also thrown up promising interventions which aim specifically at places of entertainment: *Safer Bars* and *Targeting Alcohol-Related Street Crime (TASC)*. Safer Bars involves the provision of support to specific entertainment venues in improving environmental factors, with a training course for bar staff and management. TASC is broader in scope, but among other things provides a training course for door staff. Safer Bars has been implemented in the Netherlands with the title *Bar Veilig*. The effects of this intervention in the Dutch situation have not yet been studied.

#### *(Possibly) ineffective or counterproductive interventions*

Two of the school-based programs appear not to be effective in preventing aggression and violence: *Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE)* and *Building Resiliency And Vocational Excellence (BRAVE)*. DARE consists of 10 classroom-based lessons delivered by a police officer and covering assertiveness and good citizenship. BRAVE consists of classroom-based lessons in assertiveness, peer-assistance and the setting of objectives, and the offer of contact with a mentor. The experts consulted indicated that both of these school-based programs have pronounced similarities with the *school adoption program Doe effe Normaal (Just Act Normal)*. No research into the effects of this intervention in the Netherlands has been carried out.

As well as the above-mentioned school-based interventions, the area-based intervention *Cameratoezicht (Closed Circuit Television Surveillance)* also merits attention. While no studies have been included in this research which have a research design of sufficient quality to allow conclusions about the effectiveness of camera surveillance, a number of (overview) studies are available which indicate that camera surveillance on its own is ineffective in preventing or reducing aggression and violence in public and semi-public areas (Van der Knaap et al, 2006; Van Noije & Wittebrood, 2008; Welsh & Farrington, 2008).

A number of interventions were also identified as possibly having counterproductive effects. These included the school-based *Guiding Responsibility and Expectations in Adolescents Today and Tomorrow (GREAT)* program, the *Self-Sufficiency Project* and the *Adolescent Transition Program (ATP)*. The *Self-Sufficiency Project* involves the provision of financial subsidy for single parents who have recently found employment, in order to encourage such parents to seek paid employment. The *Adolescent Transition Program (ATP)* consists of a group course for anti-social and delinquent children (in the age group 11-14), combined with support with parenting for their parents. The experts indicated that none of these possibly counterproductive programs is on offer in the Netherlands.

#### *Circumstances contributing to desired or undesired effects*

The literature survey has revealed a variety of circumstances which might influence the outcomes achieved by the interventions considered. These circumstances include: 1) the quantity of information provided in the course of an intervention; 2) the inclusion of high risk groups; 3) the use of cognitive restructuring; 4) the age of the young people to whom the intervention is offered; 5) the gender of the young people; 6) the size of the group to which a group-based intervention is offered; 7) the combination of various different methods. Since only limited consideration has been given to the circumstances influencing the results achieved, the above examples must be regarded only as hypotheses. Further research will be necessary to allow any clear conclusions to be reached.

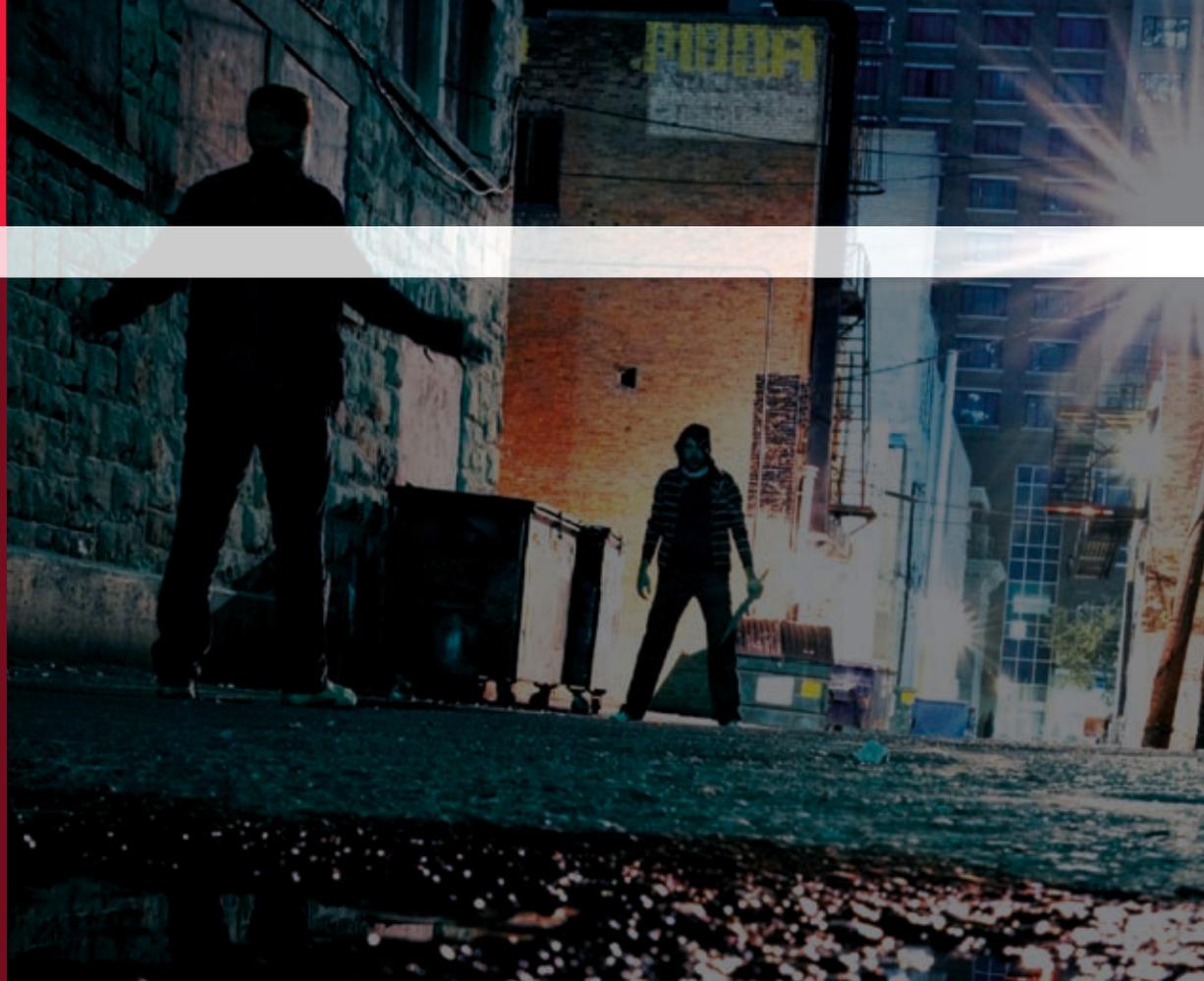
## Conclusions

The present study has identified two interventions of proven effectiveness in the prevention of violent and aggressive behaviour in public or semi-public areas, as well as a large number of promising interventions. A number of risk groups were defined in advance of the study: 1) children in whom (antisocial) behavioural problems were identified at an early age; 2) children or young people growing up in an insecure parental environment; 3) children or young people growing up in disadvantaged areas or areas where public violence is prevalent; 4) persons with a criminal or violent circle of acquaintances; 5) persons making excessive use of alcohol and/or other substances. For most of these risk groups it was possible to identify several interventions which were promising at the least. The only risk group for which no specific interventions were identified were persons with a criminal or violent circle of acquaintances. However, since there is overlapping between many of the risk groups identified here, we would anticipate that that group could also be reached by means of the range of interventions available.

Many of the interventions identified by the literature survey as demonstrably effective or promising are being implemented in the Netherlands, and in other cases a comparable program is in place. This suggests that the majority of these interventions (modified as necessary) would be applicable in the Netherlands; their effects in this country have however received little if any study. This makes it difficult to make recommendations about which programs would eventually need to be rolled out on a large scale. In the case of both the demonstrably effective interventions it is also the case that the Dutch equivalent is not an exact replication of the program as offered in other countries, rather these are stand-alone programs with similarities to the interventions identified. There is currently only limited use in the Netherlands of standardised mentoring programs. An expansion of this provision would appear promising, provided it is linked to research into the effectiveness.

High quality research will be essential to determine the effectiveness of the existing provision of promising interventions. A range of interventions aimed at children or young people growing up in disadvantaged areas or insecure parental environments lend themselves to research into their effectiveness in the Dutch setting. These include: the *Hotspot approach*, *Heel de Buurt*, *Buurtcoach*, *Thuis op straat*, *Big Brothers Big Sisters* and *Bar Veilig*. As well as the above-mentioned interventions which appear ready for further study, a number of interventions are currently being studied in the Netherlands. It is recommended that the outcomes of these studies should be critically explored.

Concluding, further research is required into the circumstances in which interventions are effective or ineffective, especially into circumstances contributing positively or negatively to the effects of group interventions.



For violence by risk groups to be successfully prevented it is necessary to have a good understanding of interventions which are effective and those which are not. This report provides a state-of-the-art overview of the various interventions targeting risk groups for aggression and/or violence in public and semi-public areas, as well as research into their effectiveness.

The present study offers an insight into which effective, promising, ineffective and counterproductive preventive interventions targeting groups at risk of committing acts of violence are available in both the Netherlands and abroad. In addition, circumstances are identified which contribute to the desired and undesired effects of such interventions. And finally, an insight is provided into the usability in practice of effective and promising preventative interventions in the Dutch setting.