

## Management summary

### Aim and method of this research project

01 In 2002, the Dutch government initiated a national policy to tackle domestic violence. This report considers how that policy has taken shape since then and what results have been seen. The research question is "To what extent and in what way is it reasonable to assume that the policy for dealing with domestic violence in the period 2002 to 2011 was effective?"

02 The research project took the form of a theory-based evaluation. It consisted of two parts: 1) a reconstruction of the underlying policy theory, and 2) a synthesis of studies evaluating components of that policy. The policy reconstruction was drawn up after studying policy documents and conducting interviews with policymakers that considered how the policy was shaped and what the underlying rationale was. Then the plausibility of the policy theory was assessed using international research literature. A literature synthesis was carried out to determine the extent to which it is known whether the chosen objectives have since been achieved and whether expectations and assumptions turned out to be correct. This involved analysing all the available policy evaluations for the period 2002 to 2011.

### The Domestic Violence policy programme

03 The reconstruction of the policy theory is described in Chapter 3. The policy programme was officially started in 2002 and was developed in a number of stages. The ultimate goal was a reduction in the severity and extent of domestic violence. To achieve that goal, secondary objectives were established. The key objectives are summarised below (in italics). In the first instance the aim was to make the extent of the problem visible to victims, offenders, professionals and politicians, and to make it clear that domestic violence would not be tolerated (*awareness and setting standards*). The expectation was that this would initially lead to *increased demand for help from victims and more cases being identified by third parties*, and to an *increase in the number of notifications and reports*. The extent and severity of domestic violence would only be reduced later following the development of aid and an appropriate approach in criminal law and administrative law. Another aim was to set up an infrastructure to ensure collaboration between organisations in tackling domestic violence. The Ministry of Justice coordinated the policy and implemented it in partnership with a number of ministries and organisations, the main ones being the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport; the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; the Public Prosecution Service; the Police; the Association of Netherlands Municipalities; Transact/Movisie and *Federatie Opvang* [association of shelter organisations]. The municipalities were given the task of coordinating collaboration in the field of domestic violence. Over the years the ultimate goal of the policy programme has remained the same - a reduction in the severity and extent of domestic violence - but the emphasis in the policy programme has shifted from awareness, setting standards and collaboration in the justice chain to objectives at the level of victims and offenders. The point of departure was an integrated approach combining prevention, detection, tackling the problem and avoiding repeat offences. In the course of time there has been greater consideration for improving

the options for interventions and the quality of aid, care and shelter as well as for using criminal law to deal with offenders. The expectations and assumptions policymakers had when they filled in the details of the policy are described in Chapter 3. Numerous measures were taken to achieve the objectives; they too are described in Chapter 3. This study has considered how plausible it is that the objectives would be achieved with the planned measures. It has also looked at whether the measures were implemented and whether they had the expected effect.

### **The plausibility of the policy theory**

04 Chapter 4 considers the extent to which the policy theory is plausible: to what extent do results from academic research support the choices that were made in shaping the policy and associated measures? There is clearly at least partial scientific backing for many of the assumptions. However, there is certainly not sufficient scientific knowledge about many aspects. Summarising: the available data shows that in general terms the policy theory is plausible but insufficient measures were planned for some components to achieve the objectives.

05 The literature supports the assumption that collaboration within the justice chain is needed to tackle a complex problem like domestic violence. Many measures were taken to develop chain collaboration. There were far fewer measures dedicated to the results of this chain collaboration or monitoring those results. The need for awareness and setting standards is supported by the literature. The literature also indicates that policy should focus on children and young people in order to reduce domestic violence. However, the policy envisaged only limited measures for prevention and intergenerational transmission. The measures concerned with improving expertise in order to improve detection have support in the literature, which shows that professionals do not always recognise signals or know how to deal with them. It will not always be enough to train professionals; the expertise needs to become a fixed feature of their daily work. The many measures taken to increase the number of reports by professionals and victims can indeed be expected to achieve this objective. It is then important for the central reporting desks to be aware of the referral options and for there to be tangible, appropriate help available. The approach taken in criminal law and administrative law can be expected to help ensure the prosecution of offenders and help prevent people becoming offenders respectively. The quality of the treatment is an important factor in bringing about a real reduction in domestic violence, yet the policy programme planned only a few measures dealing with the quality and effectiveness of treatment methods.

### **The results**

06 Chapter 5 describes those results of the policy that have been established through evaluation studies. This analysis showed that some aspects of the policy (for example, the Temporary Domestic Exclusion Order Act [*Wet tijdelijk huisverbod*]) have been the subject of considerable research, whereas little or no research has been carried out on other aspects. This means it is not possible for all primary and secondary objectives to ascertain whether they have been achieved. The available studies show that there has been considerable success in particular in realising

collaboration within the justice chain, in options for intervention through criminal law and administrative law, and in raising awareness. At the start of the policy programme there was no 'chain' of organisations ensuring an integrated approach to domestic violence. The municipalities have encouraged parties to operate as a chain, a process that has been reinforced by the development of the domestic violence counselling centres. The greater awareness and the development of a specified approach by the organisations involved are thanks to the policy programme. However, the plan to improve the exchange of information between the chain partners through a shared recording system has not been implemented. The number of incidents recorded (by the police and domestic violence counselling centres) has been rising steadily over the years but it is not possible to say whether that trend is continuing as there are no consistent figures for the number of reports made after 2007.

07 There has been far less research concerning the aims of prevention, detection by professionals, and care and effective aid. More attention has been given to women's shelters, where work is being done on improving the quality and accessibility of the shelters. However, the victims who end up in the shelters form only a small proportion of the total. In the second half of the period covered by the policy programme in particular, considerable attention was paid to improving the detection of domestic violence by professionals and breaking through the barrier of professional confidentiality. Before that point, informational material was being produced but there was scarcely any training in place for professionals such as family doctors and social workers. Furthermore, relatively little attention has been paid to the development and implementation of prevention programmes. It is true that grants were awarded to a number of projects, but these were then suspended following a negative evaluation without any new programmes being set up to replace them. The temporary domestic exclusion order was intended primarily as a preventive measure to be taken before a criminal offence had been committed. In practice it turns out that domestic exclusion orders are actually often issued in situations in which criminal proceedings have also been instigated. On the other hand, the Temporary Domestic Exclusion Order Act has given a new boost to collaboration within the chain.

## **Conclusions**

08 At present, it is not possible to determine categorically whether the national policy to tackle domestic violence has been effective, because of a lack of research on the operation of some of the measures and a lack of monitoring of the policy's results. As regards the policy theory and its plausibility, it can be concluded that the policy is founded on a coherent theory. Evidence has been found in the scientific literature for most of the assumptions, or at any rate indications that the assumptions are plausible. This warrants the conclusion that in theory the policy should be able to achieve the envisaged objectives.

09 When the actual implementation is considered, it is clear that a number of the objectives have indeed been realised. Given the situation when the policy programme started in 2002 - many regional initiatives and developments but no coordinated national approach - much has been achieved over the past few years. This study also shows that now, in 2011, domestic violence is

seen as a reason for the authorities to take action (in criminal law). In addition, all municipalities now have a local infrastructure enabling an integrated approach to tackling the problem. Organisations that were previously not aware of each other's existence now actually work together. Women's shelters have become more professional, which has undoubtedly improved their effectiveness.

10 Furthermore, it can be concluded that measures have not been implemented in practice for all aspects of the policy theory, which reduces the policy's potential effectiveness. Few measures have been taken in the areas of prevention and avoiding intergenerational transmission of domestic violence. A contribution can be made here by increasing the awareness and resilience of children, from a very young age, and by helping adolescents to deal with conflicts and relationships. The development of comprehensive, effective care provision has also received little attention. This seems to have been left largely to the organisations in the field, but at the same time care quality and outcomes have not been monitored. Studies (in other countries) show that the interventions that have been investigated up to now have had a minimal effect in terms of reducing violence. This suggests not much should be expected in terms of behavioural changes that will ultimately be achieved through the intended behavioural interventions. It is also striking that there is no dedicated, nationally coordinated research and development programme, in view of the fact that to date few effective treatment methods have been identified and the fact that by no means all aspects of the policy have been researched. The research into risk factors, interventions and new developments (such as partner violence by women, violence by adolescents against their parents, violence against parents and the elderly) seems at present to be limited and targeted at certain aspects of the policy only.

11 The results achieved so far can be used to improve the policy and give it more depth. In doing this, major consideration should be given to further development of measures for the prevention of domestic violence. Prevention activities should focus on children and young people to ensure a lower prevalence of domestic violence among them than in the preceding generations. A greater focus is now needed on the policy's final element: the development, application and evaluation of interventions and treatment methods in order to reduce repeat offences and intergenerational transmission.