

## Solitary threateners: Development of an instrument for risk assessment

### Summary

In this study a new personal index card was developed that can provide relevant data needed to assess the risk of solitary threateners turning to violence. These data can also help decide if preventive remedies are needed to end harassments and threats.

There were nine central research questions.

*Research question 1 investigated which factors contribute to violence being used by solitary threateners and which factors have a predictive quality.*

A majority of solitary threateners suffer from a psychotic disorder in combination with other disorders, like personality disorders, drug abuse, fixation on threats and social isolation. These factors increase the risk of violent behaviour. Legal data show moreover that solitary threateners have had prior contact with the police and judicial authorities, mostly for stalking private or public figures and for violent behaviour.

*Research question 2 investigated which factors can bring down the risk of probable violence.*

Risk factors can be placed in a continuum. On the one side, the factor will serve as a buffer or protection against violence, on the other hand it will facilitate violent behaviour. Protecting factors are a protective social network, a positive attitude towards treatment and care, adequate social skills, day programmes and a stable living environment. Risk factors for violent behaviour include personal disorders, drug abuse, non-compliance to medication, impulsive disorders and hostility.

*Research question 3,4, and 5 investigated what risk factors can measure, how these instruments are used in practice and what is known about their psychometric qualities.*

The instruments for risk assessment used in this research measure risks at future violent, sexual and general reoffending. Fifteen instruments for risk assessment like the HCR-20, HKT-30, DROS, SVR-20, SORAG and ODARA were examined. Empirical studies showed that the predictive validity of the 15 instruments was acceptable to good. These instruments are meant - usually in combination with the therapist' clinical view- to decrease the risk of delinquents' reoffending. In the case of solitary threateners the use of these instruments is more problematic because there is less information available.

These instruments were involved in the study in order to obtain an inventory of relevant risk- and protective factors.

*Research question 6 investigated which parts of the instruments for risk assessment could be used for the development of the new personal index card.*

The first phase of the empirical research investigated by means of a check list in 12 personal index cards which risk factors that were directly related to violent behaviour were most often found in solitary threateners with a personal approach. Beside the risk factors, protective factors were also taken into account. The research showed a number of factors that were directly related to violent behaviour of solitary threateners: psychiatric disorders like psychotic symptoms (illusions and hallucinations), personal characteristics, more specifically cluster-B personal disorders (anti-social, narcissistic, borderline and theatrical), behavioural characteristics and attitudes (like confused speech and unseemly approach of the threatened person) and factors relating to conditions and treatment, like evading treatment and not living up to judicial conditions.

*Research question 7 investigated which other factors not directly related to violent behaviour can be used for the development of the new personal index card.*

The second phase of the empirical research investigated by means of 30 personal index cards if there were any other relevant factors in the personal index cards of solitary threateners that were not directly related to violent behaviour but that could still play a role in the realization or decrease of violent behaviour. The research showed that social isolation, absence of a protective social network and absence of day programmes can form a higher risk at violent behaviour.

*In order to make risk- and other relevant factors understandable for specialists who have no or little psychological or psycho-diagnostic knowledge the risk factors on the personal index card were described in a non-clinical way (research question 8).*

The factor psychotic characteristics was described as follows: “is there question of an incoherent story that is hard to follow? Is there question of an excessive amount of communication? Does the person see, hear, think or feel things that are not realistic? Is there question of confusion and/or psychological problems? Is there question of extreme anger or frustration?”

The factor personal characteristics was described as follows: “Is there question of emotional stability? Is there question of depressed feelings and suicidal tendency? Is there question of extreme anger or frustration?”

The factors behaviour and attitude were operationalized as “Is there question of death threats? Is there question of threats with extreme or unrealistic violence? Is there question of prior stalking of (ex)partners? Is there question of impulsive reacting?” For the factors conditions and treatment, relations and work and living conditions narrative descriptions were used too.

*Research question 9 addressed the structure and content of the new personal index card.*

The new personal index card came about by studying literature, studying personal index cards of solitary threateners and the valuable input of KLPD-workers who will use the new card. The structure of the personal index card is such that it can be used easily and efficiently. The most recent mutation is very important and will always appear first; mutations prior to that and already recorded by the KLPD then follow.

In the part referral at PDM a distinction is made between communication forms and forms of approach. In taking preventive measures it will be important to know what kind of communication is used (among others: e-mail, internet, letters) and whether the threatened

person has been physically approached. In the personal index card there are also headings that provide data about the source of information. These refer to the different police systems that were left out of the report for security reasons. This is also where information can be found about the decisions of PDM. PDM has for some time now been using the Stalking Risk Profile (SRP) which will prove to be helpful in the assessment of the seriousness and probability of the stalker or solitary threatener striking again. This instrument was not incorporated in the empirical research.