

## Do 'vulnerability' variables predict help-accepting behaviour after victimisation?

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If we assume that certain demographic and socioeconomic variables indicate vulnerability in victims and therefore represent a higher need for support after victimization, do these characteristics then predict help-accepting behaviour? For Victim Support Netherlands (SHN) this is a relevant question given her mission to provide support services that are optimally attuned to the individual victim's needs and capacities. The result of an analysis of SHN data, using nominal regressions, is that variables such as age, sex, educational level, income and minority background have little or no predictive value in relation to help-accepting behaviour<sup>1</sup>. But looking at the cross tabs with standardized residuals a very consistent pattern emerges, as is shown in the table 1.

To conduct this analysis<sup>2</sup> we supplemented the SHN client data of 2011 (N = 182.622) with demographic and socioeconomic variables derived from various microdata sets provided by CBS Statistics Netherlands. The SHN sample contains for each individual subject the variables age, sex, type of victimisation, date and type of entry, and number and type of services used. The micro datasets provided measures for educational level, minority background, personal income and household income (both in percentiles) per subject.

Before presenting the results of the analysis it is necessary to explain how victims come into contact with SHN. Victims are predominantly referred to SHN by the police.<sup>3</sup> This is basically an automated process. When a victim reports a crime or traffic accident to the police his personal details are electronically transferred to SHN. A SHN employee then contacts the victim, offering information and practical, psychosocial and/or legal support (outreaching approach). If it is not possible to establish contact due to non-response, an incorrect or absent phone number, the victim receives a letter explaining what SHN can offer. If the victim subsequently does not contact SHN of his own accord, this is registered as 'no contact'. If contact is established, but the offer of support immediately declined, this is registered as 'not accepted'. Furthermore we distinguish between the situation where there is a single contact and only a single service is delivered (represented by the variable 'single service') and the situation where a more extensive form of assistance is provided, including multiple contacts and services (represented by the variable 'multiple services').

Our initial premise is that more vulnerable victims will accept the offer of support more often and use relatively more services than victims we deem to be more resilient and self-reliant. Based on literature we define as vulnerable victims and/or victims with a relative higher need for support female victims<sup>4</sup>, children and adolescent victims (<26 years)<sup>5</sup>, first and second generation ethnic minority victims<sup>6</sup>, victims with a low educational level and low income victims.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> No variable has a higher value than  $R^2 < 0.02$

<sup>2</sup> This research project was facilitated by the WODC and executed in 2013-2015

<sup>3</sup> Only a small minority, about 10% of the victims that come into contact with SHN, do so on their own initiative.

<sup>4</sup> Rickwood et al. (1994), Möller-Leimkühler (2002), Addis & Mahalik (2003), Oliver, Pearson Coe & Gunnel (2005)

<sup>5</sup> Lewis & Lewis (1984), Muncie (2009), Finkelhor (2008), Vynckier (2012), Leferink (2015)

<sup>6</sup> Korf en Bovenkerk (2007), Drogendijk, Kleber en Van der Velden (2012)

<sup>7</sup> Wittebrood (2006), Daigle (2013)

In table 1 the relation between the different demographic and socio-economic variables and help accepting behaviour is presented. The X represent the highest Z-score ( $|Z| > 4$ ) for that variable and category. Interestingly the pattern that emerges is not quite as we expected.

Precisely those victims we assume to be (most) vulnerable (in terms of age, background, educational level and income) and most in need of support, are the ones most difficult to come into contact with. More strikingly, they tend to decline the offer for support more often than any other category of victims. But if they do accept, they use the SHN support services more intensively (multiple services) than any other group of victims. This pattern is marked by the yellow highlighted X. The opposite pattern is also present (grey-shaded X): victims that are considered less vulnerable are more frequently disposed to accept the offer for support, albeit mostly a single service.

Table 1 Help accepting behaviour

Variable	Description	No contact	Not accepted	Single service	Multiple services
Sex	Male	X		X	
	Female		X		X
Age	<26	X			X
	26-45		X		
	46-65				
	>65			X	
Background	1° gen. migrant		X		X
	2° gen. migrant	X	X		
	Non-migrant			X	
Educational level	Sub-primary		X		X
	Primary				
	Secondary				
	Tertiary			X	
Personal income	Low	X	X		X
	Average				
	High			X	
Household income	Low	X	X		X
	Average				
	High			X	

X = de hoogste Z-waarde,  $|Z| > 4$

To what conclusions lead these results? First of all that there is no simple, unambiguous relation between help accepting behaviours of victims characterized as vulnerable, and their actual need for support. That is reflected in the pattern that vulnerable victims tend to decline the offer for support more frequently than other victims. The need for support is probably defined by many other factors as well – factors that we were not able to include in the analysis.

But there is a very consistent pattern in our data: when vulnerable victims do accept the offer for support, they use the SHN support services more extensively than victims we consider to be less vulnerable or more resilient/self-reliant. A possible explanation is that for some reason vulnerable are less able or inclined to recognize the offer for support as beneficial. And this might imply that SHN needs to review the way victims are approached, for example the content, style and channels of her communication, and the image she has as a service provider for victims.

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