



## Victimization of Domestic Violence

### *Prevalence Study on the Magnitude, Nature, Relationships, and Consequences of Victimization and Perpetration*

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#### SUMMARY

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#### **Background**

In 2010 the WODC (Research and Documentation Centre) of the Ministry of Justice and Security conducted the last prevalence study on domestic violence. An overarching synthesis report (Van der Veen & Bogaerts, 2010) has been composed, based on various substudies on the magnitude of domestic violence using a mark-and-recapture method (Van der Heijden, Cruyff, & Van Gils, 2009), via self-report by victims using an online panel and through in-depth face-to-face interviews with victims (Van Dijk, Van Veen, & Cox, 2010), and also via

self-report by perpetrators using an online panel and a secondary analysis of rehabilitation data (Van der Knaap, El Idrissi, & Bogaerts, 2010).

The research from 2010 is being replicated, partially making use of the same methods and techniques, but also through conducting adjusted and new substudies. The present research is a substudy of this more comprehensive research.

The aim of this substudy is to estimate the nature and magnitude of victimization and perpetration of domestic violence in the Netherlands, based on a self-report study among the Dutch speaking population of 18 years and older, and reporting about changes since the last study in 2010. This study reports on the analyses concerning the nature and magnitude of domestic violence. The WODC has formulated the following question:

*Based on self-report, what is the current nature and magnitude of domestic violence in the Netherlands, and how has it developed since the last prevalence study?*

### **Research design**

The prevalence of domestic violence is estimated through a cross-sectional survey. The study is conducted simultaneously using two samples, both of which vary in survey design. On the one hand CentERdata collected data through a probability-based online panel (from now on: the LISS panel). On the other hand the CBS collected data through a random population sample. Although both datasets have their strong points, for the sake of the report's legibility it was decided to report chiefly about the CBS-data.

This choice for the CBS-data is based on differences between the datasets, namely the differences in sample design, the provided weighting model, as a result of which the CBS sample offers the best opportunities for generalising to the population. An extensive methodological comparison is described in a separate supplemental report comparing the CBS-sample and the LISS panel (Lauret, Veenstra, Van Duijn, 2018).

## Results

### *Prevalence of victimization*

Of the CBS-respondents, 5,5 percent stated that they had become a victim of domestic violence in the past five years. More than half of the reported domestic violence consists of violence among partners and ex-partners. This violence occurs more often once or a few times than that it is structural in nature and the violence is often motivated by a conflict between the victim and the perpetrator.

Domestic violence is gender specific; more women (6,2 percent of the female respondents) than men (4,7 percent of the male respondents) are victims of domestic violence. Moreover, women experience more diverse incidents. In addition, women are more often the victim of structural violence, women get (temporarily) injured more often, they are more reluctant and afraid to speak about the violence and are more fearful that it will reoccur. Besides that, female respondents are more often the victim of (ex-)partner abuse than male respondents.

### *Consequences of victimization*

According to the victims, children witnessed domestic violence in 23,5 percent of the reported cases. Of the victims, 10,7 percent is temporarily injured due to the violence and 6,7 percent is injured permanently. Of the incidents which have led to injury, over 40 percent needed treatment by a general practitioner or at a hospital. For the most recent incident of physical or sexual violence, it holds that in 17,1 percent of the cases a police report has been filed. A police report is filed more often in cases where injuries occur. Victims indicate that they speak about the violence mainly with their informal network. In the formal network victims principally speak to their general practitioner, but hardly ever with official organizations. One fifth of the victims do not talk to anybody about the violence. Both male and female victims state that this was because they do not feel the need or desire to talk, or that, in their opinion, the incident was not severe enough. Male victims state more often that they do not talk about the violence because they felt complicit or did not know who to talk to. Female victims state more frequently that they feel ashamed or do not speak about the violence because they did not dare to speak of it.

### *Partner abuse*

Of all the violent incidents committed by partners and ex-partners, 72,1 percent is solely physical violence, 13,0 percent is solely sexual violence and 14,9 percent is both. The person responsible for the reported physical violence is significantly more likely to be an ex-partner than a partner. In cases of sexual violence, the male ex-partner is mentioned significantly more often. Of all the victims of partner abuse, 37,6 percent depends economically on the breadwinner/perpetrator, whereas this is 47,2 percent amongst non-victims. (Ex-)Partner abuse is gender specific: women are being emotionally abused more often, only women reveal that they are being intimidated by their partner and generally women are more frequently victims of structural (ex-)partner abuse than men.

Among couples in the LISS-panel who reported about victimization and perpetration of domestic violence, 3 percent of the women and 2 percent of the men reported having been victim of partner abuse in the past five years. The extent to which women mention being a perpetrator against men, coincides with the degree to which men report being a victim of women. However, women report a higher level of victimization by men, whereas men report their own perpetration against women less frequently. The extent to which men report perpetration against women therefore seems to be an underestimation.

### *Prevalence of perpetration*

Of the respondents 3,5 percent indicated having been a perpetrator of domestic violence in the past five years. There are no significant differences between men and women, respectively amounting to 3,4 and 3,6 percent. Perpetrators mainly admit to committing physical violence and hardly ever sexual violence. Half of the perpetrators report violence against (ex-)partners, over one fifth of the perpetrators report about violence against brothers and sisters and less than one fifth reports violence against children. Women report a significantly higher rate of perpetration against (ex-)partners than men do. Violence against brothers is reported significantly more often by men. A conflict or dispute is the most common motive for committing violence (35 percent). This corresponds with the motives mentioned by victims. Personal drug use is by far the most reported motive for sexual violence. Furthermore, more men than women have contact with the police as suspects of both domestic violence and violence outside the domestic sphere.

### *Combined victimization and perpetration*

Of the respondents, 1,6 percent expressed having been both a victim and a perpetrator in the past five years, 3,9 percent reported only being a victim of domestic violence and 1,8 percent only being a perpetrator. Most of this violence is mutual, which means that respondents are perpetrators against the same people they became a victim of. Mutual (ex-)partner violence is the largest group, followed by violence between siblings. The vast majority of respondents stated they were both victim and perpetrator in the same period. Regarding mutual (ex-)partner violence, more people indicated that in the course of their lifetime, they first became a victim and later a perpetrator, rather than the other way around. Contrary to (ex-)partner violence, siblings reported first being a perpetrator and later becoming a victim of sibling violence. The most commonly mentioned motives for combined victimization and perpetration are not different from one-sided victimization or perpetration.

### *Comparison between 2010 and 2017*

Compared to 2010, the self-reported cases of victimization from 2017 are lower. Back then victimization was reported by 10,1 percent, against 5,5 percent among CBS-respondents and 6,8 percent among LISS-respondents in 2017. However, differences in the research design can influence the observed differences between data from 2010 and 2017. In light of that, caution should be exercised when speaking of a decrease of the prevalence while comparing the results. As in 2010, respondents most commonly report being a victim of their (ex-)partner. Relative to the study from 2010, physical violence is more often reported to the police in 2017. The percentage of filed police reports concerning sexual violence has remained relatively stable. When it came to confiding in somebody, friends and partners were mentioned the most by victims. In 2017, partners are, however, mentioned somewhat less frequently whereas friends are more often mentioned. Compared to 2010, relatively more CBS-respondents mentioned that they spoke to no one about the sexual violence they experienced.

## **Discussion**

### *Limitations of the research*

The study has several limitations, which could have had an influence on the data collection and therefore on the findings. A small but important group is precluded from participation. This concerns persons who reside in institutions and shelters and persons who are not registered in the population register. In addition, it is important to gain insight into the context of the violence and thus be able to indicate the impact of the violence. This is less feasible because the data collection method, being survey research, is by definition a method which offers fewer options to inquire into the context, details and impact.

An important limitation regarding the comparability with the research from 2010 are the methodological differences between the studies from 2010 and 2017. This means that the change in prevalence might be (partially) attributed to methodological differences between the studies.

#### *Recommendations for future research*

It is valuable to continue measuring the prevalence of domestic violence over time. In future research, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research can provide more insight into the nature of the problems and their impact. For a future prevalence study, it could be helpful to carry out an additional informants study on the victimization of domestic violence. Practitioners that work with victims or perpetrators of domestic violence can complement the population survey in order to provide a better understanding of the magnitude of the issue. It is also advisable to include a separate chapter about (ex-)partner abuse in the survey. Using scales (instead of single items) provides a more nuanced view on the impact and severity of the violence. Attitudes about relationships and domestic violence are also interesting indicators for the perception of the violence. Lastly, it would be advisable to pay particular attention to investigating violence between siblings, seeing the degree to which it occurs in.