

NETHERLANDS' PREVALENCE STUDY ON MALTREATMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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Introduction

The third Netherlands' Prevalence study on Maltreatment of children and youth (NPM-2017) aims to estimate the number of children who have been victims of child maltreatment in 2017 and to shed new light on risk factors for maltreatment. Trends over time will be shown by comparing results to those from the two earlier prevalence studies. Finally, child maltreatment will be discussed in the context of other forms of domestic violence and of divorce.

Method

Professionals from different groups (home- and center-based child care, kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, well-baby clinics, general practitioners, child protection professionals in hospitals, shelters for battered women, and the Child Protection Board) were randomly selected and invited to participate. In total, 785 professionals participated as so-called sentinels. These sentinels were asked to complete a digital registration form for each child with whom they had professional contact and for whom there was a suspicion of maltreatment during the research period (22 September - 22 December 2017). Sentinels were asked to describe the (suspected) maltreatment and to provide information about characteristics of the children and their families. The information about the maltreatment was coded by trained coders using detailed definitions of different types of maltreatment to determine whether or not the reported suspicion fit the definitions. In addition, reports of child maltreatment to *Veilig Thuis* (Safe at Home; the information and reporting center for domestic violence and child maltreatment) were counted (excl. cases already reported by the sentinels). Because *Veilig Thuis* works with different categories that do not all reflect child maltreatment with certainty, two approaches were used for these counts, leading to a more and less conservative estimate.

Results

Based on the number of children with suspicions judged by the coders as maltreatment and the counts of maltreated children reported to *Veilig Thuis* (with double cases counted only once), the total number of maltreated children in the Netherlands in 2017 was estimated at 90,000 to 127,000, or 26 to 37 per 1,000 children. The exact prevalence cannot be estimated

with certainty; there is a confidence interval around the estimate based on the collected data. The 2017 estimate is not significantly lower or higher than the estimates from 2005 and 2010. In most cases, the perpetrator(s) were parents.

Of all children who had experienced maltreatment, 29% experienced more than one form of maltreatment. Similar to 2005 and 2010, this study showed that emotional neglect was most common. The patterns of the occurrence of the different types of maltreatment were also comparable over time (2005 - 2010 - 2017).

As in the previous prevalence studies, we found that low education, unemployment, non-Dutch origin, single-parent families, step-families, large families (families with 4 or more children) and young age of the child were risk factors for child maltreatment. Low education indicated a fivefold increase in risk of child maltreatment, the risk in families with unemployed parents was increased with a factor 3.6, in families with parents of non-Dutch origin the risk was 3.4 times (first generation) and nearly two times (second generation) larger than in other families. The risk of child maltreatment in single-parent families was 2.3 times larger than in two-parent families, the risk in step-families was 1.6 times larger than in other families and in families with 4 or more children the risk was 1.7 times larger than in other families. Finally, the risk for children aged 0 to 3 years was 1.8 times larger than for older children. Importantly, these risk factors cannot be interpreted as causes for child maltreatment but can give direction to policy.

We also investigated how often child maltreatment occurs in the context of other types of domestic violence. In nearly half of the families with maltreated children other types of domestic violence occurred. In more than half of these cases this concerned violence between parents. Furthermore, we found that different types of domestic violence (not aimed at the child) occur in combination with all types of child maltreatment (the least with sexual abuse). Risk factors for the co-occurrence of maltreatment and other forms of domestic violence seem to be similar to those for child maltreatment in general.

In 60% of the families reported for child maltreatment parents were separated or a divorce/break-up was imminent. Emotional maltreatment and emotional neglect co-occurred most often and sexual abuse least often with parental separations (divorce or break-up).

Conclusion

The estimated prevalence of child maltreatment does not seem to have declined over the past decade. Screening, prevention, and intervention in the context of child maltreatment need continuing and perhaps increased attention. These efforts can be guided by knowledge generated by the current study about the distribution of the different types of maltreatment and the risk factors and characteristics of maltreated children and their families. Obviously, the effects of recently initiated policy changes are not yet visible. These effects should be monitored in the coming years. The ultimate goal is clear: reducing the number of victims of child maltreatment.



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