



Violence Defied Research Synthesis

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Study object and policy relevance

The 'Violence Defied?' report contains a synthesis of 48 studies into the effects of the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain. Announced in the 'Actieplan tegen geweld' ('Action plan against violence', Lower House 2005-2006, 28 684, no 65), the study is a response to the scarce availability of data on the effects of prevention projects. A preventative approach to violence also requires knowledge about the effects of interventions. Policy makers on this subject need data on the nature of the mechanisms that form the basis for effective prevention measures and on the circumstances under which these mechanisms do or do not operate. Three research questions were formulated:

- 1 Which measures to prevent violence in the public and the semi-public domain are known and have been studied for their effects in the Netherlands and abroad?
- 2 Which mechanisms form the basis for the effective measures to prevent violence in the public and the semi-public domain?
- 3 Under which circumstances are the results of effective measures to prevent violence in the public and the semi-public domain expected and achieved?

The study

In a research synthesis relevant evaluation studies are collected and critically evaluated in order to find out which programmes are effective. The 'Violence defied?' research synthesis combined the Campbell Collaboration method with the context-mechanism-outcome model proposed by Pawson and Tilley (1997). Selected effect evaluations were initially assessed for their internal validity based on the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS) (Farrington et al. 2002). In addition to attention to the internal validity, attention was also paid to the external validity. As findings from an evaluation are easier to generalise to other situations (areas, individuals, times, etc.), the external validity increases. To involve the external validity in the study the model of context-outcome-outcome as proposed by Pawson and Tilley (1997) was used. This approach focuses particularly on the theory on which a (behavioural) intervention is based.

Based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 48 studies into the effects of prevention of violence in the public and the semi-public domain have been included. These studies relate to 36 prevention measures. Based on the results of the evaluation studies, the effectiveness of the prevention measures was assessed. In each case, the assessment focused on the effectiveness in terms of the reduction or prevention of violence. Subsequently, the prevention measures studied were divided into four categories: 1) effective, 2) possibly effective, 3) possibly not effective, and 4) not effective. Not all studies could be classed in

one of the four categories based on the criteria used.

The key findings

The 48 studies were carried out in countries facing similar problems and context characteristics as the Netherlands. The 36 prevention measures have been described in terms of the mechanisms on which they are based, the contexts in which they are being executed and the effects that are being reported in the 48 evaluation studies. Nine measures are effective forms of prevention of violence. Six measures are possibly effective forms of prevention. Four measures are possibly non-effective and one measure is not effective in the prevention of violence. For sixteen of the thirty-six measures it was not possible to decide their effectiveness based on the studies under review.

Based on the study, the following recommendations were made:

- More attention needs to be paid to the evaluation of prevention projects. Many projects are barely evaluated, and for many measures it is therefore not known if they are effective or not. Evaluation research must be incorporated from the start of a prevention project.
- Early interventions for young children with behavioural problems and their parents prove to be effective in preventing violence during adolescence. While such programmes may perhaps not be aimed explicitly at preventing

violence in the public or semi-public domain, it is likely that such programmes will have a favourable effect as most violence committed by youngsters is committed outside their homes. In addition, it is recommended that a study is carried out into which pre-school interventions have a favourable effect on preventing violence and which could be offered in the Netherlands.

- The use of prevention programmes in schools may contribute favourably to reducing violence in schools. The best effect is expected with pupils already showing a certain level of aggressive behaviour.
- Improving street lighting in stable residential areas with a homogenous population may help prevent violence in the street.
- The use of secondary prevention means in public and semi-public areas must take place in a focused manner. For this purpose, the problems and risk factors present must be carefully mapped out, followed by tailor-made interventions.
- Specific prevention measures that look promising in the prevention of violence must be considered for use of these measures in the Netherlands. These include, for example, the Safer Bars programme for the prevention of violence in bars, the PeaceBuilders and Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways programmes to prevent violence in school and the Safe Dates programme to prevent 'dating' violence (see chapter 4 of the report).
- When specific measures are adopted for use in the Netherlands, a great deal of attention will need to be paid to the implementation and guaranteeing of a high degree of programme

integrity (is the measure being carried out as intended). These are vital conditions to be able to replicate effects found elsewhere in a new context.

In response to this study the Minister informed the Lower House that, in future, systematic attention will be paid to the evaluation of prevention projects. A number of existing projects, too, will be investigated for their effects. In addition, an investigation will be carried out into which early interventions for young children and their parents will have a favourable effect on the prevention of violence that can be offered in the Netherlands. Finally, a number of programmes that have been proven to be effective will be selected to be made suitable by the *Centrum voor Criminaliteitspreventie en Veiligheid* (Centre for Crime Prevention and Safety, CCV) for use in the Netherlands.

This study shows that many prevention measures are not studied for their effects. In addition, it appears that, when a measure is evaluated, the quality of the study design is often inadequate to be able to draw any conclusions on the effectiveness of the prevention measure investigated. Only in a small number of effect studies explicit attention is paid to the underlying mechanisms that should ensure that a prevention measure realises the results intended. The context in which a measure is being used, is usually not described in detail either, while the lack of evaluation studies ensures that even evaluated measures are being tested in a very limited number of contexts only.

Literature

Van der Knaap, L.M., L.T.J. Nijssen, S. Bogaerts

Geweld verslagen? Een studie naar de preventie van geweld in het publieke en semi-publieke geweld

The Hague, Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2006

Onderzoek en beleid, nr. 239

Van der Knaap, L.M., L.T.J. Nijssen, S. Bogaerts

Violence Defied? A Review of Prevention of Violence in the Public and Semi-public Domain

The Hague, Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2006

Onderzoek en beleid, nr. 239a

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