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Cahier 2022-9

De effectiviteit van de BORG-training

*Een vergelijkend recidiveonderzoek onder daders
van partnergeweld*

Summary

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Een vergelijkend recidiveonderzoek onder daders van partnergeweld

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Cahier

De reeks Cahier omvat de rapporten van onderzoek dat door en in opdracht van het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en documentatie Centrum is verricht. Opname in de reeks betekent niet dat de inhoud van de rapporten het standpunt van de Minister van Justitie en Veiligheid weergeeft.

Summary

The effectiveness of the BORG training programme

A comparative recidivism study conducted among perpetrators of intimate partner violence

Introduction

Intimate partner violence is the most common form of domestic violence and has been high on the political agenda in the Netherlands since the start of this century. One of the intervention programmes for batterers that has been developed over the past decade to reduce intimate partner violence is the 'Ending Relational Violence' (BORG) training programme provided by the Dutch Probation and Parole Service. The BORG training programme has been executed nationwide in the Netherlands since the summer of 2014. The programme involves a group training course that consists of twelve group and three individual sessions. Although the BORG training programme was set up as a group training programme, the programme can also be followed on an individual basis – for example, if the perpetrator is unfit to take part in group settings. The objective of the BORG training programme is to break the spiral of violence within the (former) relationship, thereby ensuring that intimate partner violence decreases or stops. In addition, there are three secondary objectives: gaining insight into the relationship dynamics, identifying the risks that may trigger violent behaviour, and applying skills and strategies to prevent disagreements and conflicts from escalating. The BORG training programme is intended for adult perpetrators of intimate partner violence in cases of common couple violence or mild antisocial violence. Various selection criteria are used to determine whether a batterer is eligible to participate in the BORG training programme. For example, the batterer must have a low or average risk of reoffending, must have a residence permit, must not have engaged in serious antisocial violence or have a serious alcohol or drug problem, must acknowledge the intimate partner violence and must have an IQ of 80 or above.

This study examined to what extent the BORG training programme has been effective in reducing (domestic violence) reoffending among perpetrators of intimate partner violence and what any potential successful and less successful aspects of the training programme may be. The study consisted of a quantitative and qualitative part and focused on four key research questions. The first three research questions were quantitative in nature. The research group consisted of 463 convicted perpetrators of intimate partner violence who took part in the BORG training programme between January 2015 and December 2017. The control group consisted of a comparable group of perpetrators who were convicted for intimate partner violence but had not participated in the BORG training programme. The fourth and final research question was qualitative in nature and was answered on the basis of interviews with thirteen batterers who had taken part in the BORG training programme and who were (still) under supervision of the Probation and Parole Service during the interviews. This study was part of a five-year research programme into the recidivism of and effectiveness of interventions for perpetrators of domestic violence.

The following research questions were key to this study:

- 1 What are the background characteristics of the BORG participants (research group)?
 - a What are the characteristics of the research group, in terms of the characteristics of the perpetrators, criminal cases and criminal histories (such as age, sex, type of domestic violence and number of previous criminal cases), and to what extent are these comparable to those of the control group?
 - b To what extent does the research group meet the BORG selection criteria?
 - c What are the execution characteristics of the BORG training programme (such as attendance percentage, individual or group training programme, and completed or prematurely terminated training programme) within the research group?
- 2 How effective is the BORG training programme in reducing reoffending? More specifically: how does the recidivism of the research group relate to the recidivism of the control group?
- 3 Which execution characteristics of the BORG training programme are related to the risk of recidivism, when correcting for perpetrator, criminal case and criminal history characteristics?
- 4 How do former BORG participants reflect on the BORG training programme and what do they feel are the success and failure factors of the programme?

Method

Three types of data were used for the quantitative part of the study. First of all, the study relied on data from the Probation and Parole Service on the BORG training programme from the Integral Probation and Parole Service Information System (IRIS), consisting of data, such as the start and end date of the training programme, attendance and absence at sessions and whether or not the programme was completed or terminated prematurely. The study requested data from all batterers who took part in the BORG training programme up to December 2017, which allowed the research group to be defined and allowed perpetrators to be excluded from the control group. Secondly, the study use data from two risk assessment instruments used by the Probation and Parole Service: the Recidivism Assessment Scales (RISc) and the QuickScan. Both instruments are used to identify factors of an offender that contribute to criminal behaviour and to asses the risk of reoffending. This study requested all RIScs (version 4) and QuickScans (version 2.8 and 2.9) that were administered up to December 2017 from the Probation and Parole Service. This data was used to determine to what extent the research group met the BORG selection criteria, such as a low or average risk of recidivism, (partial) admission to the offence and the absence of a serious alcohol or drug problem. Finally, the study relied on data from the Research and Policy Database for Judicial Information (OBJD). The OBJD is a pseudonymised version of the Criminal Records System (JDS) – the official registration system for criminal cases. For example, each case will list when it was referred to the Public Prosecution Service, what the relevant offences were and how the case was settled. This study used data from the OBJD up to June 2020. The data was used to put together a control group based on various perpetrator, criminal case and criminal history characteristics and to calculate the rate of recidivism of the research and control group.

The quantitative research group consisted of 463 convicted perpetrators of intimate partner violence who participated in the BORG training programme between 2015 and 2017. First, the various backgrounds of the research group were identified using descriptive statistics. Secondly, the effectiveness of the BORG training programme was examined by comparing the recidivism rate of the research group with that of the control group. The control group consisted of perpetrators who were convicted for intimate partner violence between 2014 and 2017 and who were selected from the OBDJ. Subsequently, all underage perpetrators, perpetrators without a Citizen Service Number and perpetrators who had previously participated in the BORG training programme were excluded from the control group. Given that settlements are not imposed arbitrarily, there are already *ex ante* differences between the perpetrators in the research and control group. In order to make the groups more comparable, the groups were matched on various characteristics using *Propensity Score Matching*. After matching, the groups were comparable for various perpetrator characteristics (such as sex and age), criminal case characteristics (such as type of domestic violence) and criminal history characteristics (such as age during the first criminal case and number of previous domestic violence cases), which allowed for a better comparison of recidivism. The term recidivism was operationalised as 'an offence leading to a new criminal case'. Criminal cases refer to cases that have ended in a conviction by the court or have been settled by the Public Prosecution Service (including discretionary dismissals, however, not including acquittal, dismissal of the charges and other technical decisions by the court) as well as to cases that have not yet been (irrevocably) settled. Survival analysis was used to calculate one to three-year recidivism prevalence. Three forms of recidivism were examined: recidivism for domestic violence (new criminal case due to domestic violence), recidivism for violence (new criminal case due to violent crime) and general recidivism (new criminal case due to any offence). Finally, the relation between execution characteristics of the BORG training programme (such as individual or group training sessions and whether the programme was completed or terminated prematurely) and recidivism was examined using bivariate analyses and a multiple Cox regression analysis.

The qualitative part of the research consisted of conducting interviews with former BORG participants. To this end, the Probation and Parole Service selected all males who were under supervision at the time of the interviews (August and September 2021) and who had at one time taken part in a BORG training programme and participated in at least five sessions. From this group of 124 Probation and Parole Service clients, a random sample of 60 clients was drawn (five times as many respondents as the intended number of interviews due to the expected non-response), taking into account the Probation and Parole Service region. The Probation and Parole officers of the clients were approached and asked if their client would be willing to take part in the interview. The interviews largely took place *face-to-face* at the Probation and Parole Service, with two interviews taking place in the evening via video call. The interviews on average lasted an hour. The interviewees were asked to sign a consent form, which also included permission to make audio recordings. A list of topics for discussion was drawn up prior to the interviews.

The qualitative research group consisted of thirteen former BORG participants. The majority of the former BORG participants that were interviewed took part in the training programme in 2020; two interviews participated in 2015 and 2016. In order to gain a better understanding of any potential successful and less successful aspects of the training programme, the transcribed interviews with former BORG participants were coded and analysed, using pre-determined codes (*a priori* codes) as well as

codes derived from the data (in vivo codes). The two researchers initially coded a number of transcribed interviews independently of one another and then compared and reviewed them in order to reach a consensus in the method of coding. The analysis examined which codes were most common in the data, but also looked at differences between the former BORG participants in terms of their experiences with the training programme.

Results

Backgrounds of BORG training participants

The perpetrator, criminal case and criminal history data of the BORG participants in the quantitative research group showed that almost all BORG participants were male. They were on average 37 years old. More than 80% had been convicted of a simple battery (minimal injuries), 8% for simple assault (threat of violence) and 5% for aggravated battery (serious physical injuries). Most BORG participants were given a conditional discretionary dismissal, community service order or training order as the most severe settlement for intimate partner violence. Almost three quarters of the BORG participants had been convicted before and almost 30% had even been convicted on five occasions or more. Nearly half of the BORG participants had previously been convicted of a violent offence and a quarter had previously been convicted for domestic violence. One-fifth of the BORG participants had previously been given an unconditional custodial sentence.

The BORG data showed that the BORG participants in the quantitative research group on average began taking part in the BORG training programme 8.5 months after the intimate partner violence was committed. In the case of 28%, the training programme started within three months, whereas in the case of 47% this took longer than six months. Most BORG training programmes were provided in the Probation and Parole Service region North-West, East and South (22% to 29%), with the least number of trainings taking place in the South-West and Central-North regions (10% each). The criminal law framework for participants at the start of the training programme was usually a conditional sentence (40%) or a conditional discretionary dismissal (37%). Over 10% of the participants participated in the training programme voluntarily pending the settlement of the criminal case (the Probation and Parole Services only allows for this when they expect a conviction). Despite the fact that the BORG training programme is a group programme, 13% of the research group took part in the training (partly) on an individual basis. More than 60% of BORG participants attended all of the sessions and 12% attended less than half of the training sessions. The average duration of the training programme was more than three months. Looking at the manner of termination, it was found that 86% of the research group completed the training programme, while 14% dropped out.

BORG selection criteria

Both the quantitative part and the qualitative part of this study showed that a significant percentage of the BORG participants did not meet the BORG selection criteria. Contraindications were present in a significant number of BORG participants, such as committing acts of serious antisocial violence, having a serious substance abuse problem, a mild intellectual disability or denying the intimate partner violence.

Effectiveness of BORG training programme in terms of recidivism

This present study finds no evidence in favour of the effectiveness of the BORG training programme in terms of reoffending. The recidivism comparison showed that recidivism rates in terms of domestic violence, violence and general recidivism of the BORG participants and the control group did not differ significantly.

Relationship between execution characteristics of BORG training programme and recidivism

Due to the low recidivism rate for domestic violence, the relation between the execution characteristics of the BORG training programme and recidivism for domestic violence could only be examined by means of bivariate analyses. Three execution characteristics were found to be bivariately related to three-year domestic violence recidivism. Firstly, BORG participants who were able to start the training programme within three months were less likely to commit a domestic violence offence again compared to BORG participants who were forced to wait longer than a year for the programme to start. Secondly, BORG participants who participated in the training voluntarily or as part of a conditional discretionary dismissal were less likely to reoffend than BORG participants who participated as a result of a conditional sentence or suspension of pre-trial custody. Thirdly, BORG participants who left the training programme prematurely were more likely to commit a domestic violence offence again than BORG participants who had completed the training. The question, however, is whether these relations can be upheld once the relation between these characteristics and domestic violence recidivism is examined simultaneously in a multivariate analysis. The first relation, for example, is most likely a spurious relationship, given that the speed at which the training programme started appeared to be related to the imposed sentence (and therefore the type of offence and perpetrator). A multivariate analysis could, however, be performed for the relation with general recidivism. Of all the BORG execution characteristics, only the manner in which the BORG training programme ended showed a significant relationship with general recidivism in this analysis. BORG participants who had completed the training were 35% less likely to reoffend with any offence whatsoever than BORG participants who dropped out. This could likewise be a spurious relationship, given that, for example, the motivation of the participants to change could play a key role: participants with a lower level of motivation could be more likely to drop out and reoffend more often.

Potential success and failure factors according to BORG training participants

The qualitative part of this study, in which thirteen former BORG participants were interviewed, yielded different findings. First of all, it became apparent that the respondents' experiences with the BORG training programmes varied. More than half of respondents gave a positive assessment of the training programme and stated that they had learned from it. What they had learned principally came down to skills to prevent escalation in disagreements and conflicts. Other secondary objectives of the training programme, such as gaining insight into relationship dynamics, taking responsibility for the violence committed and being able to reflect on one's own behaviour appeared to have had a limited impact among many respondents. A number of respondents were less explicitly positive or negative about the training programme and were less able to identify what they had learned. The final group of respondents gave the training programme a more negative assessment. They indicated that they learned little or nothing from the programme and that it had little effect on them. It is

striking to note that it is primarily within this group that participants reoffended after the BORG training programme.

Secondly, it appeared that the training programme did not always have a lasting impact, with various participants appearing to mix up various training programmes. In addition, a significant number of respondents found it difficult to identify what exactly they had learned from the BORG training programme. A number of respondents also explicitly stated that the information and material faded away after the training if they did not keep working on it.

Thirdly, it appeared that both the group and individual variants of the BORG training programme entails both advantages and disadvantages and that respondents differed in their preference for the type of training provided. Advantages of the group training that were mentioned were sharing experiences (including mutual recognition), mutual support and learning from each other. Advantages of the individual training that were raised included that an individual training programme was more flexible in terms of time and location, making it easier to combine with work and involving less travel time and travel expenses; that it was easier to involve a partner; that it was more suitable for individuals who thrive more easily by way of one-on-one interactions; that it was less time-consuming for participants; that individual training programmes solve the problems that arise in small groups (such as little recognition among the few other group members and groups that are cancelled due to dropouts).

Fourthly, in the majority of cases, intimate partner violence appeared to be of a reciprocal nature, whereas the BORG training programme focuses on the convicted men. Their partners, in most cases, are not involved in the programme or only to a minor extent.

Fifthly, it appeared that respondents considered a good trainer and a good connection with the trainer to be a crucial part of the training programme, this being vital to participants' motivation and to completing the programme as well as to extent to which one learns from the programme.

A sixth finding was that there appeared to be regional differences and differences between trainers. For example, some training programmes were provided by a single trainer and some by two trainers; half of respondents had been part of a group with only three or four participants whereas a few respondents had taken part in a group consisting of twelve participants; certain respondents were able to start the training programme immediately, whereas others were forced to wait until the end of the criminal trial; the extent to which trainers made an effort to involve participants' partners likewise differed.

A seventh finding was that the BORG training programme is not an intervention that stands alone. In the interviews it became clear that many of the respondents, but also their partners, (simultaneously) participated in other interventions or received additional support.

A final finding is that in four cases, the trainer for the programme also appeared to be the participant's Probation and Parole officer, despite the fact that these are different roles within the BORG training programme.

Conclusion and discussion

This study found no indications that imposing the BORG training programme on perpetrators of intimate partner violence is more or less effective in preventing intimate partner violence than not imposing the BORG training programme. However, a number of issues have emerged in this study that could play a key role in terms of the lack of an effect.

A first potential explanation for this is that the group that took part in the BORG training programme does not fully correspond to the intended target group for the programme, for which two indications were identified in this study. First of all, it was shown that although the BORG training programme is intended for perpetrators with a low to average risk profile and more minor (intimate partner) violence problems, most BORG participants had previous convictions and were therefore no longer first-time offenders, with a substantial percentage of participants having been convicted on five previous occasions or more, and they also had committed violent crimes outside the home and other types of offences in addition to intimate partner violence. These findings are in line with previous studies. A second indication is that both the quantitative and qualitative part of the study showed that a significant percentage of BORG participants did not meet the selection criteria of the BORG training programme. By not selecting the right perpetrators, the effectiveness of the BORG training programme may be (partially) undermined.

A second reason that may account for why no evidence was found to support the effectiveness of the BORG training programme in terms of recidivism is that the objectives set by the programme may be overly ambitious. The programme consists of a relatively short behavioural intervention consisting of twelve sessions, with the training provided by an employee of the Probation and Parole Service, rather than an intensive and long-term treatment programme provided by a psychotherapist. Can such a training programme be expected to put an end to intimate partner violence? The results of the qualitative part of the study also indicate that the content of the training programme did not always stick in participants' minds and memories and that the secondary objectives did not always appear to have been achieved.

A third explanation to account for the lack of effectiveness may be that participants' partners are not involved enough in the BORG training programme. The question is how effective a training programme aimed at reducing common couple violence would be if the intervention were only aimed at one of the two partners. Common couple violence centres precisely on the interaction between the partners. Several cases emerged in the interviews in which intimate partner violence would most likely not have been reduced or stopped if the partner had not been involved in the training programme and/or had been referred to therapy or other support services.

A final potential explanation to account for that fact that the current study has not found any significant effect of the BORG training programme on reoffending is that previous (international) studies showed limited evidence of the effectiveness of the six intervention methods used by the BORG training programme (cognitive behavioural therapy, motivational interviewing, the conflict scenario, problem-solving mindset, the time-out procedure and challenging participants to engage in self-reflection) and of the effectiveness of interventions and treatment programmes for perpetrators of intimate partner violence in general. It is therefore not easy to set up an effective intervention or treatment programme for perpetrators of intimate partner violence.

Although this study did not find an indication for the effectiveness of the BORG training programme, it was, however, shown that BORG participants who completed the training programme reoffended less than BORG participants who dropped out. This finding is in line with previous studies: dropout among perpetrators of intimate partner violence attending an intervention program is one of the key indicators of recidivism. Completion of the BORG training programme could therefore have a positive effect, however, this relationship could equally be accounted for by a confounding variable such as motivation. In this context, motivational interviewing, one of the six intervention methods that is used in the BORG training programme, appears to be a crucial technique. Although to date there is insufficient evidence to show that motivational interviewing reduces recidivism for intimate partner violence, previous studies have shown that motivational interviewing results in fewer dropouts and more engagement with the intervention. More focus on motivational interviewing seems all the more crucial, given that a recent study showed that the number of participants dropping out of the BORG training programme has increased significantly over the years.

Finally, two specific findings that emerged from the interviews should be discussed. First of all, it was shown that there were differences between regions and trainers in the way the BORG training programme was executed. This is in line with the findings of previous studies, which likewise found regional differences and differences between trainers. These differences appear to stem in part from a lack of national coordination and intervision for BORG trainers. Such differences do not benefit the programme integrity of the BORG training programme. A second finding that emerged from the interviews that deserves some discussion is the fact that for half of the interviewees the group consisted of only three to four participants. The manual for the BORG training programme stipulates that groups should consist of eight to twelve participants, however, it seems that this number is often not achieved. This finding is in line with a previous study. In the case of groups of three or four participants, the question arises whether the added value of a group training is still sufficiently present, because the interviews showed that sometimes there is little recognition or connection if the group only consisted of a few members.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. A first limitation is that the present study used judicial data from the OBDJ. This means that only crime that comes to the attention of the Public Prosecution Service is included in the current study, while by no means all crimes committed are traced and prosecuted. As a result, there is a systematic underestimation of recidivism. This underestimation applies in particular to domestic violence recidivism, because domestic violence often remains hidden from the outside world. Furthermore, it should be noted that the use of judicial data does not provide insight into the reciprocity of intimate partner violence. It is often male perpetrators who end up in the criminal justice system. Thirdly, the use of judicial data only allowed recidivism for domestic violence to be identified rather than recidivism for intimate partner violence, given that the type of domestic violence has only been properly registered since 2017. The first and third caveats, however, apply to both the research group and control group and therefore have no impact on the recidivism comparison.

A second limitation relates to the matching of the research and control group. One initial caveat in relation to matching is that, despite the matching process, there can still be a selection effect at work. Matching can only take place based on measured

characteristics, while the research and control group may also differ on other characteristics that are important in the assignment and outcome measure. A second caveat in relation to matching is that it leads to a restriction of the population about which a statement is made, given that only the perpetrators in the research group are retained for which a match has been found in the control group. In this study, 91% of the research group could be matched. However, based on the measured background characteristics, the matched group was representative of the overall group of BORG participants.

A third limitation is that the results of the interviews should be interpreted with some caution. First of all, these results may not be generalisable, given that only thirteen former BORG programme participants were interviewed. Representativeness, however, was never the goal of the interviews and the findings of the interviews do appear to align with the quantitative results of the study and with results from previous studies. A second caveat is that for two former BORG participants who were interviewed, the training programme took place a long time ago (training in 2015 or 2016), meaning that memory problems may play a significant role. Memory problems could likewise play a role in the case of other interviewees, however, the objective of the BORG training programme is precisely that what participants learn should last, meaning that intimate partner violence should not start again after a year. In that light, not knowing what the BORG training programme entailed is more of a finding than a limitation.

Recommendations for adjusting and revising the BORG training programme

Although this study did not find any evidence to support the effectiveness of the BORG training programme in respect of recidivism, several starting points have been identified to improve the training programme that could allow the programme to be effective. In addition, a substantial percentage of participants seems positive about the training programme. It therefore seems worthwhile to make (extensive) modifications to the BORG training programme. There were already plans for adjusting and revising the BORG training programme and various recommendations can be made in this regard based on this study.

A first recommendation would be to determine which target group would be most suited to the BORG training programme and to clearly define this target group by using selection criteria that can be assessed clearly, with strict observance of those selection criteria. At present, there appears to be a discrepancy between the intended target group and the actual group of participants, which most likely does not benefit the effectiveness of the intervention.

A second recommendation relates to adjusting the objectives of the BORG training programme and the formulation of those goals in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based). The current primary objective and secondary objectives may be overly ambitious for a relatively short-term intervention such as the BORG training programme. Formulating the intervention's objectives in SMART terms may allow a thorough evaluation to be carried out at a later stage to assess whether the goals have been achieved.

A third recommendation is for participants' partners to be involved in the training programme. The BORG training programme focuses on common couple violence, meaning reciprocal intimate partner violence. This requires that both partners should be involved in the intervention.

A fourth set of recommendations relates to the content of the BORG training programme. First of all, it is recommended that the BORG training programme should be based on the most recent scientific insights and on a robust integrated theoretical framework. It seems advisable that there should be a stronger focus on motivational interviewing within the BORG training programme. A second recommendation would be to ensure that the theoretical foundation underpinning the training should be properly aligned with the practical realities and participants' experiences. A third area of focus would be to ensure that the content of the training is retained by the participants. Finally, it is recommended that the training programme be developed in consultation with domestic violence experts and intervention specialists, for instance from forensic healthcare services.

A fifth recommendation would be to (continue to) ensure a proper selection process for and an appropriate training of BORG trainers, alongside regular intervision and refresher courses, coordinated at national level. Trainers, with all of their attributes and expertise, form an essential part of the training programme. There should be greater focus on providing a BORG training programme that is consistent in quality nationwide, given that many local, regional and trainer-specific differences suggest that the programme integrity of the BORG programme is under pressure.

A sixth recommendation is to consider whether providing the BORG training programme as a group programme is still desirable. Although a conscious decision was made in favour of a group intervention during the development of the BORG training programme and the added value of this is endorsed by various trainers and participants, there are a number of caveats at play that do not apply to the individual variant of the programme. If it is decided that the BORG training programme should continue to be offered as a group intervention, it is recommended that the BORG programme should be given significantly more focus within the Probation and Parole Services and among chain partners to ensure that the influx into the programme is increased structurally and across all regions.

A seventh recommendation is to consider the desirability of the dual role of trainer and Probation and Parole officer. The advantage of such a dual role may be that the connection that has been established between the client and the Probation and Parole office/trainer can continue to be fostered. However, these roles may equally cause friction with one another and it is highly questionable whether or not it is prudent for a trainer/therapist to also be given a legal and monitoring role.

A final recommendation for adjusting and revising the BORG training programme is to have perpetrators of intimate partner violence begin the training programme within one or two months after their arrest and to examine whether it would also be possible to offer the BORG training programme outside a judicial framework. Participants' motivation appears to be at its highest shortly after the partner violence has taken place, which most likely benefits the effectiveness of the intervention. Moreover, by letting go of the judicial framework, a larger group of perpetrators of intimate partner violence may be reached, given that less than 10% of domestic violence cases known by the police lead to prosecution and conviction.

Recommendations for future research into the BORG training programme

A pilot study of the improved version of the BORG training programme will be carried out as part of the planned revision of the BORG training programme. A first

recommendation in terms of future research would be to set up this pilot in such a way, in consultation with a research institution, that the training programme can be thoroughly evaluated. The best method to determine the effectiveness of the training programme is to conduct the pilot study within a randomised controlled trial. This will involve perpetrators of intimate partner violence who qualify for the BORG training programme being randomly assigned to the programme or not.

A second recommendation in the context of future research is to systematically record and retain data on the BORG training programme and the (potential) target group even after the pilot study has taken place. This information can be used to examine whether the correct target group is being reached, whether the training is being implemented as intended and whether the objectives of the training are being achieved. In this way, it will be possible to monitor whether the BORG training programme is continuing to run smoothly and, if necessary, adjustments can be made to the training programme.

Policy recommendations for tackling domestic violence

Finally, there are two policy recommendations related to tackling domestic violence in general. As of 1 March 2021, it is no longer an option to attach special conditions, such as a behavioural intervention (and therefore the BORG training programme) to conditional discretionary dismissals. These kinds of special conditions can now only be imposed via a sentence from the Public Prosecution Service or a conviction by the court. This change could have adverse consequences in respect of cases of domestic violence, because in the Netherlands a quarter of the domestic violence cases to date have been settled by a conditional discretionary dismissal, the combination of care and criminal law is key to domestic violence and domestic violence requires a quick response and immediate intervention. It is therefore recommended that the consequences of the change in the regulations governing the conditional discretionary dismissal should be monitored for domestic violence cases so that timely adjustments can be made in the event of any adverse effects.

A final policy recommendation is that the Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport should establish better framework conditions to allow for an integrated and system-oriented approach to tackling domestic violence. The fact that the BORG training programme is currently tied to a judicial framework due to its financing structure entails a number of adverse effects. For example, it is difficult for participants to involve their partner in the programme, the training programme will often start over six months after the intimate partner violence has taken place and a large group of potential participants are precluded from taking part. In order to be able to use the BORG programme effectively, merely adjusting and revising the content of the BORG training programme is insufficient: the context within which the BORG training programme operates likewise required modification. An integrated and cross-domain approach is particularly suited to domestic violence, in which organisations within the criminal justice chain and healthcare services cooperate and which likewise tackles the financial barriers between the criminal justice and healthcare domains.

In conclusion

This study found no evidence to support the effectiveness of the BORG training programme in terms of recidivism among perpetrators of intimate partner violence. In

accordance with and in supplement to previous studies on the BORG training programme, various problems and barriers in the execution of the programme have been identified. For example, the programme does not appear to be reaching the intended target group, the set objectives do not seem feasible and are not formulated in SMART terms, participants' partners are insufficiently involved in the programme, the content of the programme is insufficiently based on evidence-based techniques and on a robust comprehensive theoretical framework, and there is insufficient nationwide management and control of the execution of the programme. These problems, however, provide starting points for the improvement of the BORG training programme, which may make the programme effective after all. In addition, a substantial percentage of participants seems positive about the training programme. Furthermore, the BORG training programme could potentially be used at an early stage for a large group of perpetrators (couples) of intimate partner violence, given that the Probation and Parole Service is already involved by the police in any arrests due to domestic violence. By devoting attention to the aforementioned problems identified in this study within the planned revision of the BORG training programme, and through the establishment of better framework conditions for an integrated, cross-domain, system-oriented approach to domestic violence by the Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, an effective intervention could be created that would contribute to reducing intimate partner violence in society.

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