

# IMPROVING GENDER SENSITIVITY OF PREVALENCE STUDY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- advice -



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PREVALENCE STUDY DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE

- summary advice -

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## SUMMARY

In 2016, the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) will be repeating the prevalence study into domestic violence, which was last conducted in 2010. The WODC is also aiming to improve the study. Gender sensitivity is one of the points on which improvement possibilities are being examined. Between end January and end April 2016, Regioplan and Bureau Dijkstra, conducted research with the aim of providing WODC with substantiated advice regarding this. This report contains the results of this study.

### Question, focus and conditions

The following questions are central to the advice:

1. Which improvements flow from relevant theory concerning gender and domestic violence regarding questions to be answered in the gender sensitive prevalence study?
2. Which data (variables) are required in order to be able to answer these questions?
  - a. Which data are already collected using existing methodologies and instruments and can be used in a better way?
  - b. Which additional data should also be collected, if possible?
  - c. To what extent is the collection of additional data possible using existing measurement instruments?
  - d. To what extent is additional data collection required and possible using other measurement instruments (see also question 4)?
3. Which improvements are suggested by relevant theory regarding content analyses that will be carried out using these data?
4. Which improvements regarding methods, variables and analyses are desirable in the sense of the sub-studies that are to be designed?
5. How can the report be made more gender sensitive?
6. Which other improvements may also be desirable or necessary?

In answering these questions, the focus lies on the following sections of the prevalence study conducted in 2010:

- Research into victims of domestic violence (Van Dijk et al, 2010).
- Research into perpetrators of domestic violence (Van der Knaap et al, 2010).
- The global report (synthesis report) of the various sub-studies (Van der Veen and Bogaerts, 2010).

In this advice, gender is understood to mean: the social-cultural roles that are linked to the two sexes and the differences in power that flow from this (De Vaan et al., 2013). Gender refers to the meaning(s) given to a sex in a specific





context. Gender is thus different to sex, which indicates the biological difference between men and women.

Gender can play a role in domestic violence in all relationships in which this takes place. This advice focuses on partner violence. There is a great deal of literature regarding this form of violence in relation to gender; literature that forms the basis for this advice. The focus on partner violence is a logical consequence of this. Partner violence also forms a substantial part of domestic violence; in the 2010 measurement, partners and ex-partners were the most often mentioned categories (by victims) of perpetrators of domestic violence (Intomart Gfk, 2010).

In formulating the advice, the WODC conditions for the repetition of this prevalence study were taken into account:

- The results of the new study also need to be comparable with the results of the 2010 study; the most important methods, the broad definition and focus on both victimhood and perpetratorhood among men and women will be retained.
- Large-scale (representative) face-to-face interview research is not achievable.
- The resources for additional research are also limited.

In the context of the advice process, an assessment framework was developed using literature research and interviews, to which the 2010 study was compared. An expert meeting was then held and secondary analyses were conducted on the 2010 victim data. This advice was produced in accordance with the outcomes of these various stages.

## Results

### Assessment framework

Gender sensitivity in the context of a prevalence study means that the research must indicate clearly the meaning of differences and similarities between men and women and perpetratorhood and victimhood and the impact of these, and to what extent these similarities and differences correlate with gender. For this it is necessary that there is a clearer picture of the characteristics of violence (physical, mental and sexual) and how these correlate: not only the violent behaviours themselves, but also the context in which these behaviours take place. To gain this insight, it is important that the prevalence study is used to answer the following questions:

- Who is violent towards whom and with what effect?
- What is the role of (concealed) power, coercion and control throughout the entire process of violence?
- Does violence continue after the end of the relationship or does violence start after the end of the relationship, and if so, how?

The assessment framework developed for this study, identifies and substantiates why these questions are important and for which variables



information is required in order to be able to answer these effectively. Table S.1 provides an overview of this. The substantiation of the questions and variables included in the table can be found in chapter 2.

**Table S.1 Assessment framework**

Question (analysis)	Variables
Who is violent towards whom and with what effect?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency and duration of the violence.</li> <li>• Number of incidents.</li> <li>• Limiting psychological violence to stalking and punishable threats <u>or</u> defining physical violence very precisely and linking this clearly to seriousness, frequency/intensity, context and types of impact of the violence in an analysis and report.</li> <li>• Perpetrator-victim relationship (dependencies (various types), equality and inequality, power, having children together/bringing up children together).</li> <li>• The consequences of violence (physical, psychological, relational, financial, fear, assistance-seeking behaviour in the short and long term).</li> <li>• Focus on perceptions of violence by perpetrators and victims, men and women.</li> <li>• Victimhood/witness of partner violence as child of the victim and perpetrator, combined with such things as attachment problems/trauma (non-intervening parent).</li> </ul>
What is the role of power, coercion and control throughout the entire process of violence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control and the impact of this as continuum, with intimate terrorism at the extreme end of the continuum.</li> <li>• Focus on the relationship order<sup>1</sup>, power and norms in relationship to perpetratorhood and victimhood.</li> </ul>
Does violence continue after the end of the relationship and if so, how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinguish ex-partners from current partners (also violence starting after the relationship).</li> <li>• Specific nature of ex-partner violence (other forms of control, undermining relationship between parent-child etc.).</li> </ul>

An important focus point for the above assessment framework is that it is not intended as a minimum norm for a prevalence study, but contains a total picture of which information is desirable with a view to the role of gender in the prevalence of domestic violence. It is up to the prevalence study implementers to convert this into a workable set of questions.

### Analysis of 2010 studies

The next step in the advice process concerned comparing the assessment framework with the above-stated studies and reports from 2010. This analysis demonstrates that:

- Both the victim study as well as the perpetrator study obtained a lot of in-depth information about the variables that are included in the assessment framework, albeit not over all variables.
- In theory it is possible to conduct analyses using this that connect with the central questions posed in the assessment framework, particularly the first

<sup>1</sup> Reference is made here to Emery's typology, referring to the order within relationships (see par. 2.2.2).



two of these. This applies to a lesser extent to the question of ex-partner violence, as it is suspected that questions about this were not understood properly by respondents.

- This analysis was partly carried out on the victim data in 2010, but to a lesser extent on the data from the perpetrator study, as far as this can be inferred from the reports.
- Much of this information is incorporated generally in the synthesis report.

The analysis of the sub-reports also demonstrates various improvement options. These lie in the area of collection of information on variables that were lacking in 2010, and on the area of the analyses that were carried out with these variables. Both are explained in detail in chapter 3. The core is:

- That analyses can be improved by:
  - including the relationship in the analysis and always making a distinction regarding both the perpetrator and victim's sex;
  - examining more carefully which behaviours are considered as 'serious' violence and which additional information can offer insight into the seriousness of the violence;
  - analysing the violence in relationship to the impact, including injury, seeking assistance behaviour and categorised consequences;
  - relating the violence to expressions of power and control, to items that say something about relationship order and about possible isolation of the victim and other family members;
  - where possible, making a distinction between violence between partners and violence between ex-partners.
- That report will be more gender sensitive by:
  - always making a distinction according to sex and reflecting on the meaning of this;
  - reporting all relevant outcomes into the relationship between the involved parties, and in doing so also making a distinction between partners and ex-partners;
  - spending more time on the synthesis of the various sub-studies.
- Although the above additional analyses can partly already be conducted using existing data, they will gain further strength through additional data collection regarding background characteristics of perpetrators and victims, about specific forms of violence (for example stalking, cyber violence and specific forms of ex-partner violence), about the impact of the violence and about motives for committing violence.

### **Secondary analyses**

During the advice process, a number of exploratory analyses were conducted on data from the 2010 victim study; this is reported in chapter 3 and attachment 4. These analyses demonstrate that differences between victimhood between the sexes (and with this the possible correlation of victimhood with gender) become clearer when a selection is used of the more serious forms of violence and linking these with injury, motives for the violence





that indicate power/control, the frequency and duration of the violence, and forms of impact that indicate fear.

Detailed overviews of the variables and analyses and the 2010 studies are included in chapter 3.

### Existing versus additional methods and instruments

Not all improvement points arising from the advice process can be used with the methods and instruments used in 2010, or with minor adaptations to these. Table S.2 gives an overview.

**Table S.2 Overview of missing information in relation to sub-studies**

Desirable, but missing information	Possibilities offered by the sub-studies
Similar and full background characteristics of perpetrators and victims in both perpetrator as well as victim research (incl. dependencies, sub-culture and role patterns)	Complete the background characteristics in the survey to such an extent that the following is known about both the perpetrator and victim: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sex</li> <li>• Substance use</li> <li>• Educational level</li> <li>• Paid job/education yes/no</li> </ul> Further examine the dependencies, sub-culture and role patterns in in-depth studies
Violence in the perpetrator's and victims' original family (preferably also within the same case)	According to experts this is not easy to ask in the survey. Research in in-depth studies
Forms of violence: stalking (precisely defined) and cyber violence/violence via new technologies	The addition described below can improve stalking data in the survey. Cyber violence/violence via new technologies: overlaps partly with physical violence, which makes it difficult to combine with other questions in the survey. Incorporate in in-depth studies by further questioning on forms of violence
Impact of violence, particularly pain, fear and relational	Survey: add three questions regarding the extent to which the violence used was experienced as a threat, caused pain and led to anxiety regarding own safety. Ask more extensive questions in in-depth studies
Information required about permanent anxiety and threat	Lends itself to in-depth studies
Motives of perpetrators, including justification	However, it is questionable that questions via a survey among victims regarding the motives of perpetrators can offer a precise indication of the motives. This can possibly be used less in survey and then more extensively in in-depth studies.



**Table S.3 continued**      **Overview of missing information in relation to sub-studies**

<b>Desirable, but missing information</b>	<b>Possibilities offered by the sub-studies</b>
Role of culture/environment	Research in in-depth studies
Forms of violence that indicate typical ex-partner violence	Considering the specific character of this violence, it is better to investigate this in a sub-study

### Advice

Small additions to the phase 1 questionnaire in the victim and perpetrator study will contribute to more possibilities of reaching a gender sensitive picture in the analysis. A more radical modification of the questionnaire, however, will make it possible to achieve a better and more gender sensitive measurement of domestic violence; for example by using measurement instruments that include questions about the impact of forms of violence.

The in-depth studies can also contribute to:

- in-depth research among victims and perpetrators;
- research into ex-partner violence;
- research into male victimhood;
- research into the various types of concurrence of perpetrator and victimhood.

When in-depth research is carried out prior to the prevalence research, the results can be used to formulate improved questions for the prevalence research from the gender perspective, and to better cluster the requested variables.

The challenge lies in achieving a multi-method research that uses content knowledge about the nature and impact of violence to supplement research into behaviours to achieve the most complete and nuanced image possible of the prevalence of domestic violence. Improvement points can be found in the area of the existing frameworks and the additions to these, as described above. Improvement points can also be found in the area of the research process:

- The research should be supported by a group of experts from academia and practice who can contribute their content and methodological expertise and discuss the best possible methods for measuring and explaining violence.
- Connections with international developments and expertise should be identified.
- The impact that the prevalence study has had on policy makers, researchers and frontline staff should be considered: this will affect the message and the way in which this is presented.



## Conclusion

This advice was realised within a limited time period. The advice demonstrates that examining a prevalence study from the perspective of gender sensitivity can result in new insights and concrete improvement possibilities for this research. The improvement possibilities are limited to partner violence, but will also apply to other forms of domestic violence distinguished by the government, such as child and parent abuse; it is expected that gender will also play a role in these relationships and in-depth research such as this will offer added value.

The monitoring committee for this advice process discussed the design of the future prevalence study into domestic violence. Although these discussions exceed the frameworks of this assignment, they offer several important insights:

- It is possible that a prevalence study will result in an improved representation of reality if a more precise focus is selected. The current scope (both regarding the relationships addressed as well as in the spectrum from light to extremely serious violence) leads to a complex study. It is likely that introducing more focus will offer better insight regarding the issue.
- Prevalence studies into domestic violence aim to make the *extent* of domestic violence clear. Methods that capture the *core* of this issue are needed: the violence that people generally consider as 'real' violence and on which the approach towards domestic violence focuses. After all, the research must offer suggestions for this approach and the time series should deliver insight into the effectiveness of this.

As the assessment framework that was developed for this advice generates important questions about whether the chosen research methods effectively map out this specific violence, the disadvantages of breaking up the limited time series are possibly fewer than the disadvantages of continuing with this method of research. Progressive insight can be used to improve the research. An interesting possibility in this connection is to conduct research parallel to the repeat of the 2010 prevalence study, using a CBS sample as comparison material that, at the same time, can serve as a possible start for a new, improved time series.



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