

Summary

Set-up of the survey

This study of the extent and nature of domestic violence covers a wide range of topics. A total of 516 men and 489 women aged between 18 and 70 have been questioned about their experiences with domestic violence. The respondents were selected at random. The interviews were held from mid-May to mid-July 1997. An important goal of this survey was to generate *general information* on domestic violence. Many other surveys in the field of domestic violence are based on small samples. Large-scale quantitative surveys that have been conducted only cover a part of the domestic violence-related problems or focus on a specific group of the population or victims of domestic violence.

The survey of which the report now lies before you was aimed at obtaining information on domestic violence among men, women, elderly and young people. It was also conducted to gain insight into all possible aspects of domestic violence. Another wish was to survey violence occurring during childhood as well as in the years thereafter. Because of the broad set-up of this survey the results are wide-ranging too.

Although the respondents were selected at random, the inquiry is still seen best as a 'white survey'. Since the questionnaire was written in Dutch, only respondents who spoke Dutch were interviewed. Insight into the extent of domestic violence under migrant population groups requires additional research specifically concentrated on these groups.

Definitions and design of the questionnaire

Domestic violence is understood to mean a violation of the personal integrity of the victim by a person from the victim's family circle. This includes (ex-)partners, family members and family friends¹. As regards the set-up of the survey, it was decided to centre on the whole of incidents that occur between the offender and victim of domestic violence: the *complex* of domestic violence. Firstly it was asked in relation to 32 different forms of domestic violence whether the respondents had *ever* been victims themselves. Although only adult respondents were interviewed, the data gathered from these interviews refers to victimization below the age of 18 as well. The incidents include mental, physical and sexual forms of violence. For each incident it was established who the offender was. Next, the emphasis on separate incidents was replaced by general questions on the complex of domestic violence in respect of each offender. To limit the duration of the interview and to ease the burden on the respondents, questions were asked about a maximum of three offenders. If a person had become the victim of more than three offenders, questions were asked in respect of the three offenders who had committed most of the offences.

The questionnaire has been tested in trial interviews held with victims of domestic violence and randomly selected respondents. These trial interviews showed that the questionnaire was not too difficult or too threatening. According to the respondents the questions about domestic violence in particular were pleasantly formulated. As most data could be obtained without going too deeply into the details of the violence, the trial interviews only resulted in a few technical adjustments to the questionnaire.

1) For an explanation of these definitions see section 1.2

The field work

In the first stage of the survey a letter was sent to a random sample of 4600 Dutch persons introducing the subject of the survey with a request to participate in the project. A reply coupon was attached to this letter which people could fill in and return if they did not want to participate. This coupon was returned by a little less than a quarter (24%) of the addressees. The remaining respondents were contacted by telephone by an interviewer to make an appointment for an interview. In principle the interviews were only held by women but during the first contact by telephone the opportunity was offered to ask for a male interviewer. Only four respondents preferred this option. The response of the addressees who had not returned the reply coupon was high: 58 per cent. Most persons who had been contacted but who were unable or unwilling to participate, mentioned that they were not interested (51%) or did not have time for an interview (25%). The remainder (24%) gave all kinds of practical reasons such as a holiday, moving house, or even child-birth. Only five 'refusers' gave a contents-related reason for objecting to the interview or being unable to participate. As regards age, gender and place (region) of residence, the questioned sample is fairly representative for the Dutch population. In fact, by using weighting variables it was ensured that as far as age and gender were concerned, the sample exactly matched the Dutch population.

The interviews were held at the respondents' homes with the use of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) on portable computers. The use of computers makes it possible to correctly implement complex referrals and calculations during the interview; something that is far more difficult during a written survey. Moreover, the respondents were given the opportunity to answer the most intimate questions directly by entering the information into the computer themselves. This privacy was highly appreciated. In general, the interviews went smoothly. The major part of the respondents stated that they had felt entirely comfortable during the interview.

The results

In this report a distinction is made between 'incidents' and 'domestic violence'. Incidents are involved if the violence:

- did not result in bodily harm, and
- did not have noticeable effects (e.g. eating disorders, anxiety, problems with intimacy/sexuality), and
- lasted less than one year, and
- happened only once, or on a few occasions at the most.

All other cases involve non-incident domestic violence which is referred to as 'domestic violence' in this report. This violence has caused either physical harm, or noticeable effects, or has lasted for more than one year or has occurred at least every month. If we use these criteria and translate the outcome into the Dutch population as a whole, the results are as follows.

Victimization and domestic violence

- 45% of the Dutch population have at any time been victims *themselves* of nonincidental domestic violence.
- 11% of the Dutch people are the victims of domestic violence that causes physical harm.
- 30% of the Dutch people are the victims of domestic violence with noticeable after-effects such as divorce, anxiety, depression, eating disorders or problems with relationships and/ or intimacy.
- 21% of the Dutch people are the victims of domestic violence that lasts longer than five years.
- 27% of the Dutch people are the victims of domestic violence in which the incidents occur every week or every day.
- Mental, physical and sexual forms of domestic violence often occur together in one complex of domestic violence.
- Two-thirds of the Dutch people know someone (or think they know someone) who is/was the victim of domestic violence.

Who becomes a victim?

- Most victims suffer domestic violence during their youth (between the ages of 10 and 25). This particularly involves physical and mental forms of domestic violence. The level of sexual violence among youths more or less equals the level among grown-ups. Nevertheless, 45% of the victims of sexual violence were younger than 18 years at the time the incidents first occurred.
- Boys and men become victims of domestic violence to the same extent as girls and women. Men (especially boys aged between 10 and 20), become more often the victims of *physical* forms of domestic violence than the female peer group. Especially women become the victims of *sexual* forms of domestic violence. Men and women become more or less equally the victims of *mental* forms of domestic violence.
- Women more often fall victim to very severe violence (high frequency, long-lasting, bodily harm and other consequences) than men do.

Offenders

- 80% of domestic violence offences are committed by male offenders.
- Generally speaking, domestic violence becomes severer as the relationship between offender and victim gets more intimate. Domestic violence committed by a family friend usually concerns a form of incidental violence. If the violence is committed by the victim's (former) partner, it usually involves violence of a (very) severe nature.

Talking about violence and resistance

- 80% of the victims of domestic violence have talked to someone about the violence, either during the period in which the violence occurred or afterwards. This means that the rest of the victims (20%) have never spoken to anyone about the violence.

- It has *not* appeared that as the violence gets severer, the victims talk about it more often.
- The main reasons for not talking about violence are feelings of shame and guilt. Moreover, a large group of victims were too young to talk about the violence (21%).
- 13% of the victims of domestic violence talk to a doctor or an institution about the violence. The more serious the violence, the more help is sought from (victim) support agencies. Yet only 23% of the victims of (very) severe domestic violence have talked to a doctor or institution about what happened. This means that nearly 75% of the severest domestic violence cases remains beyond the scope of social workers.
- Two-thirds of those who had contact with a doctor or institution say that their problems were understood and 50% feel that the support had been useful to them. It appears that in most cases these victims of domestic violence had contacted their family doctor.
- Resistance against domestic violence is often successful. More than 50% of the victims who had tried to do something (talk to the offender, report him to an institution, fight back and so on) saw that the incidents stopped. Resistance failed to produce any result for 20% of the victims who stood up to the offender.

Report to the police

- Comparatively few reports of domestic violence are made to the police. A total of 12% of domestic violence incidents are reported to the police and 6% of these reports actually result in drawing up and signing a police report.
- In respect of very severe violence it is striking that although these cases are more often *reported* to the police than, for instance, incidental violence cases, it does not result in more police reports being *drawn up and signed*. Incidental violence is reported by 6% and a police report is drawn up and signed by 5%. Very severe violence is reported by 17% and results in a police report signed by – also – 5%.

Consequences of domestic violence

- 26% of the victims of domestic violence claim to have lost self-confidence as a result of violence. One in five victims suffers from anxiety complaints (19%). One in ten victims has problems with intimacy and/or sexuality (10%).
- 11% of the victims of domestic violence live separated from the offender.
- Victims of domestic violence feel unsafe far more often than non-victims. They also suffer health problems more often, have a lower self-esteem and keep less social contacts than non-victims. These effects are not only noticeable during the period in which the violence took place but also afterwards. ■