

SUMMARY

Risk factors for repeat victimization: A literature scan

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Risicofactoren voor herhaald slachtofferschap: Een literatuurscan

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Introduction

According to Article 22 of Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union on October 25th, 2012, Member States are obliged to ensure that victims are subjected to a timely and individual assessment, with the aim of identifying specific protection needs and determining whether and to what extent the victim should be provided with special measures during criminal proceedings (articles 23 and 24 of the Directive), given its particular vulnerability to secondary and repeat victimization, intimidation and retaliation. Possibly, this Directive will be implemented in the Netherlands by police officers assessing the victim using an assessment tool in the process of filing a criminal complaint. Therefore, this report identifies the risk factors for repeat victimization, intimidation and retaliation that were previously identified in research, by means of a literature scan.

Risk factors are categorized by characteristics of the victim and his or her environment (including historical, socio-demographic, economic, physical, mental, behavioral and environmental characteristics), characteristics of the offense (including the type of offense, the context of the offense and the relationship with the offender) and risk perception (to what extent do people expect to be a victim in the future). Because risk factors will vary for different types of offenses, the following offenses are separately discussed: property crimes, (semi-public) violent crimes, sexual, partner and family violence and violence against public service professionals. Also, the risk of retaliation and harassment is discussed separately.

Research question

According to the scientific literature, what are the major risk factors for repeat victimization of property crime and (sexual, partner and family) violence, among people with and without a public service profession, for repeat victimization or intimidation and retaliation?

Research design

The risk factors for repeat victimization are identified through a literature scan. Key words related to the repetition of victimization were used. The used search engines are the search engine of the Erasmus University Rotterdam (sEURch), of the Dutch government, PsychInfo and National Criminal Justice Reference Service. Additionally, studies were searched through snowball and citation methods. In total, 2092 studies were found. Based on selection of the studies by inclusion and exclusion criteria related to the methods, content and language, 267

studies remained. Due to the large number of available studies, of all studies about sexual, partner or family violence, only overview studies and studies with a stronger research design (prospective studies) were included. The total sum of studies included in the report is 106.

Studies were often published within the last 15 years and were either prospective (N = 46), retrospective (N = 41), or overview studies (N = 19). No studies using meta-analysis were found. It is possible that some 'risk factors' developed after victimization, as victimization is often measured by asking questions about a period of time previous to the study, whereas the potential risk factor is measured by questions about the risk factor at the time of the study. This applies to dynamic (changeable) characteristics and not to static (unchangeable) characteristics. Furthermore, it is not always possible to establish whether a risk factor affects repeat victimization directly, or is indirectly associated with repeat victimization, through other characteristics. Thus, it is unclear whether and to what extent a causal relation exists between risk factors and repeat victimization. For example, if studies suggest that age is a risk factor, it is plausible that not the age itself, but the accompanying lifestyle influences the risk of repeat victimization. Also, the strength of relations is sometimes discussed by the literature. This is often influenced by the connection to other risk factors that are studied. In addition, studies examine different populations. Therefore, it is difficult to compare findings between studies.

Risk factors for different crimes

As the ultimate goal is to develop an assessment tool, based on the risk factors that were found in studies, ideally, we would like to rank the most important risk factors. However, because of the difficulty of comparing the relations between the risk factors and repeat victimization, this proved impossible. Based on the effect sizes that have been reported in the studies though, some characteristics seem stronger related to repeat victimization than others. In the paragraphs below, we will first report what seemed to be the strongest associations and subsequently other characteristics that were related to repeat victimization.

The strongest risk factors for repeat victimization after being a victim of *property crime* are living in a high crime area ('hotspot') and living in a neighborhood with many terraced houses, compared to (semi) detached houses. The strength of the relationship with regard to other risk factors is either unknown or not strong. According to studies about socio-demographic and economic characteristics, men and people who are younger, who have a university degree and who live alone are more at risk. Furthermore, people who own one or more cars, who live in their home for a shorter period of time at the same place, who have a

home that is often vacant (unoccupied or when people are rarely at home) and those who rent their property through public housing, are more at risk. People who have a lower income and who live in a terraced house are more at risk for repeat victimization of burglary, while people who have a higher income and who live in a detached house, are more at risk of repeat victimization of other property crimes, such as theft and vandalism. A behavioral risk factor for repeat victimization after property crime is performing delinquent behavior. Also many environmental risk factors are related to repeat victimization. People who live in the city center, who live in a big, deprived and urban area and those who live in a house with a clear line of view for neighbors, are more at risk. Moreover, if the district includes more cars per household, more youngsters (between 5 and 15 years) and older residents, more preventive measures by the neighborhood, more small households, more privately rented accommodations and more flats, people are more at risk for repeat victimization. Repeat victimization following property crimes occurs more often if the crime occurred recently and if the offender of burglary used force, if the offender searched all rooms, if the offender left the home through the window, if the offender left in the same way as he or she entered and if the alarm was not activated.

A large number of risk factor for repeat victimization after (semi-public) *violent crime* is strongly related to repeat victimization. People who have (also) experienced other victimization, who have been in prison and who have a low income, are at highly increased risk. Similarly, people who use heroin, who have lost their job as a result of alcohol abuse and those who deal drugs, are at greatly increased risk of repeat victimization. Finally, people who have threatened to commit a violent crime, have fought with someone, have stabbed someone are at greatly increased risk of repeat victimization, as well as people who live in a hotspot. The strength of the relationship with regard to other risk factors is either unknown or not strong. A historical risk factor is having been raised in a single parent family. Socio-demographic risk factors include being male (however, women are more at risk at work), being younger, not being married and having children but not living with children. To have a lower income, being unemployed, renting a home by public housing, using social services, not having health insurance and living in a home for a shorter period of time, are risk factors for repeat victimization after a violent crime. Also, people who work in the health or legal sector, who work with others, who work more at night and those who work in an urban area, are at greater risk for repeat victimization after a violent crime. Mental and physical characteristics related to repeat victimization include having mental health problems, psychosomatic symptoms, anxiety, depression, aggressive fantasies, lower self-esteem and

trauma characteristics. For repeat victimization after violence at school, enjoying oneself less at school less fun and less commitment to school (and the people at school) are risk factors. Behavioral risk factors include having more behavioral problems, substance abuse and delinquent behavior. Environmental risk factors are characteristics related to relationships with family and friends, namely substance abuse in the family or receiving poorer care, receiving inconsistent discipline by parents and being in a gang. For repeat victimization after violence at school, being in a school with more (disadvantaged) pupils and having poorer relationships with teachers and classmates are risk factors. Finally, people are more at risk if the crime has taken place recently. For repeat victimization after violence at work, people are more at risk if a weapon was present and if the offense took place outdoors.

Strong risk factors for repeat victimization after *sexual, partner or family violence* are having been victimized frequently, having used shelter after victimization, being reliant on substances and perceiving oneself to be 'somewhat safe' from experiencing victimization in the future. Also, relatively strong risk factors are not being able to regulate emotions adequately (and specifically impulsivity), having borderline symptoms, blaming oneself for the crime, having less believe in talking about the victimization to 'make it better', seeing fewer new opportunities and being a perpetrator. Of the other risk factors the strength of the relationship has either not been studied or is not strong. A risk factor that origins in a person's youth is the lack of a secure attachment style. Socio- demographic and economic risk factors for repeat victimization after sexual, partner or family violence include being female, being younger, being less educated and being unmarried. Also people who are unemployed, who have a lower socioeconomic status and who have a lower income are more at risk. Physical risk factors include having a disability, having more health problems and somatic complaints. Mental risk factors include having more difficulty recognizing and describing feelings, having reduced skills for assessing risks, being angry and having a greater need for sensation. People with a psychiatric disorder, a diminished psychological well-being (anxiety, depression, suicide attempts) and with less self-efficacy (confidence in their own ability to perform behaviors) are more at risk. In addition mental characteristics related to the offense, namely being ashamed of victimization, having more trauma characteristics, having more difficulty with coping with victimization, acknowledging the victimization less and having poorer coping strategies, are risk factors for repeat victimization after sexual, partner and family violence. Behavioral risk factors are exhibiting more sexually risky behavior and offending. Environmental risk factors include experiencing interpersonal difficulties, experiencing family dysfunction and being blamed for victimization. Risk factors related to

the crime are having been a victim over a longer period of time, having been victimized recently and being a victim of a more serious offense. The relationship with the perpetrator, i.e. being dependent on the perpetrator, and being close and remaining close to the perpetrator, is a risk factor. Finally, the risk perception is a risk factor. People who think that they are at greater risk of repeat victimization, are at greater risk.

Relatively strong risk factors for repeat victimization among *public service professionals* are having experienced victimization that was not related to ones duties, belonging to a particular profession (police officers and train ticket inspectors more), having more contact with citizens, delivering more 'bad news', doing heavy physical work, being interrupted frequently, having negative ideas (evaluation and self-efficacy) about assertive responses and experiencing less tension. Among the risk factors that do not have a strong relation with repeat victimization or whose strength is not studied, historical risk factors include having a history of social and emotional problems or being rejected by parents in childhood. Socio- demographic and economic risk factors are being male, being younger, and having a lower education. Job characteristics associated with repeat victimization are having received less training, having less work experience (among police officers and nurses), having leadership tasks, working more hours per week, having more contact with unacquainted people, having a freely accessible work space, and working in an organization with less staff. Also people who work more at night, during evenings, on the street, weekends, alone (without colleagues) and in an urban area, are more at risk for repeat victimization. The physical and mental risk factors can be divided into general characteristics and characteristics related to work. General physical and mental risk factors include having more physical symptoms, having more sensation seeking needs, experiencing more stress and experiencing more emotional exhaustion. Also experiencing more depersonalization, anxiety, irritability, negative emotions, difficulty in coping with victimization are more at risk of repeat victimization, as are people who are less able to take criticism and have a more negative evaluation of people in general. Physical and mental risk factors related to work include experiencing more time pressure, less sense of having influence at work, more dissatisfaction with their working hours, more dissatisfaction with the transfer of duties, more dissatisfaction with their work in general, uncertainty about treatment of patients (among people who work in healthcare) and the intention to quit the job. Environmental risk factors are also related to work. People who experience less support, experience more conflicts at work on the division of labor, consider the quality of teamwork to be lower, have more informal interactions, experience more violence by colleagues, experience more pressure

from the organization to perform work unsafely, and indicate less that the organization acts against victimization and develops policies against victimization are more at risk of repeat victimization.

At last, the risk factors for experiencing intimidation and retaliation after victimization are described. The strength of the relationships is not studied but several characteristics were found to be related to the risk of intimidation and retaliation. Socio-demographic risk factors are being female and being a child. Environmental risk factors are living in the city center and living in a community with less social cohesion. Risk factors related to the offence include being a victim of violence (and especially of partner and sexual violence), being a victim of repeat victimization and having also been a perpetrator during the offense. If the crime was reported to the police, was part of a series of incidents, and was recently experienced, people are also at increased risk. Finally, people are more at risk of intimidation and retaliation if the perpetrator is known to the victim, to the spouse or to a family member, if the victim lives with the offender, and if the offender is close to or connected to the perpetrator by finances or parenting.

Discussion

The findings show that many characteristics have been identified as risk factors of repeat victimization. Risk factors that correspond between the different offenses include having experienced additional victimization (in addition to the reference offense), being younger, experiencing less psychological well-being, abusing substances, performing more delinquent behavior, having more family problems, living in a neighborhood that is urban and high in criminality and being connected to the perpetrator. These factors could be used for the assessment of individual victims if it is decided that assessment occurs early in the process of filing a criminal complaint, for example at the front desk of the police station. The most notable risk factor for repeat victimization is performing delinquent behavior and being an offender, because it does not fit into the existing idea about victims. However, this risk factor is consistent with the risk factors for general (single) victimization, as are many other risk factors that were found.

Methodological limitations of this literature scan are that possibly not all characteristics and populations have been fully explored in research, or have only been researched in a single study, and that possibly not all identified risk factors also apply to Dutch people. In addition, it should be taken into account that due to the design of studies, it is possible that some risk factors may not have been present before the (first) victimization

episode, and that relations between risk factors and repeat victimization might work indirectly, through another characteristic, or that another risk factor could be responsible for the relation. Future research may want to distinguish between risk factors for different types of repeat victimization, such as the same or a different type of offense and the same or another offender.

A joint interview with two police officers shows that when victims file a criminal complaint, police officers mainly discuss crime characteristics, including the type, context and relationship characteristics, and not discuss many of the risk factors identified by studies. However, at times some of the other risk factors that were identified by studies were covered during the process of filing a crime report, but they were not yet systematically covered and these factors were often not registered.

Based on the literature scan, several recommendations can be made. In addition to the strong risk factors, also other risk factors should be considered, as the strength of the relations is often not comparable or not studied. The selection of risk factors should also be based on when and where the assessment tool will be used. If this occurs prior to the official crime report, it may be best to assess victims based on the risk factors that apply to multiple types of offenses. If this assessment will take place at a later stage, the risk factors for individual offenses should be used. In addition to the selection, we recommend to evaluate the instrument and to monitor developments with respect to research and implementation of the Directive in EU countries and to modify the Dutch implementation of the Directive based on these developments, if relevant for the Netherlands. Based on the information obtained about the process of filing a criminal complaint, the recommendation would be to develop systematic sub-questions or checklists to assess the risk of repeat victimization.