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# Scholierenonderzoek Kindermishandeling 2016

*Summary*

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31 maart 2017

Projectnummer: 34002129  
Opdrachtgever: WODC, Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie  
Opdrachtnemer: ITS, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

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# Summary

## **Aim of the study**

The aim of the *2016 Pupils on abuse* study is to investigate the prevalence of child abuse among pupils in the first four years of secondary school in 2016; which pupils are the most at risk, and under what circumstances; and which pupils are current or former victims of one or more forms of child abuse.

## **Embedding and location of the study**

This study is part of a wider research programme that aims to determine the prevalence of domestic violence and child abuse in the Netherlands. This study among pupils will be followed by study among informants, in which professionals will be asked about the incidence of child abuse. The combined results of both studies will ultimately be used to estimate the prevalence of child abuse in the Netherlands.

## **Results of the first two measurement periods in the study among pupils**

The *2016 pupils on abuse study* is the third national study on the prevalence of child abuse in the Netherlands among pupils in the first four years of secondary school. Previous measurements were taken in 2006 and 2010. Various definitions of child abuse were used in the study. The initial 2006 study distinguished between the following forms of abuse: neglect, psychological aggression on the part of the parents, physical domestic violence, sexual abuse within and outside the family and conflicts witnessed between parents (physical confrontations and threatening with a weapon).

In 2006, 373 out of 1000 pupils had experienced an event regarded as child abuse *at some point in their lives*. Furthermore, 195 out of 1000 pupils reported having experienced child abuse *during the last 12 months*.

The 2006 pupil study was repeated in 2010. The key conclusion of the second study was that the prevalence figures showed no decline compared to those from 2006. Using the same definition of child abuse experienced *over the past year*, the researchers calculated that 187 out of 1000 pupils had suffered abuse. In absolute figures, this represents 184,000 young people aged between 11 and 17. In this second study, a stricter definition of child abuse was used to calculate prevalence figures (NIS/NPM-2010 definition), which meant that neglect, sexual abuse outside the family and psychological aggression on the part of the parents no longer counted as forms of child abuse. The stricter definition still considered sexual abuse within the family, physical violence towards the pupil and confrontations between parents to be forms of child abuse. Applying this modified definition, the researchers arrived at prevalence figures of 99 per 1000 pupils in the Netherlands.

In absolute figures, this represents a little over 97,000 young people aged between 11 and 17. The stricter definition was also used to recalculate the prevalence in 2006, which totaled 95 per 1000 pupils. Based on these comparisons, the researchers concluded that child abuse in 2010 showed no decline relative to 2006.

### **2016 pupil study: design and implementation**

The 2016 study among pupils in the first four years of secondary school was nearly an exact replication of the previous studies from 2006 and 2010. This strategy was employed to facilitate an effective comparison of the child-abuse prevalence figures between the three studies. Prevalence is determined by estimating the number of pupils per 1000 who consider themselves victims of child abuse. This prevalence is calculated according to the broad definition used in 2006, as well as the stricter definition applied in 2010.

In addition to estimating the prevalence of child abuse in the Netherlands, this study is also intended to provide insight into trends (increased/decreased child abuse) and the influence of risk factors associated with the prevalence of child abuse. The risk factors investigated in the previous study were also included in the current study, i.e. age and sex, school type, ethnicity, socio-economic status of the parent(s), single parent yes/no, and family size. Based on a literature study, two risk factors were added to the 2016 study: religion, and the presence of a step-parent in the family.

The present pupil study was expanded to include two material topics that were not included in the previous two studies. The first of these concerned the combination of physical violence between parents with forms of child abuse against the pupil directly, as well as a suspected correlation between physical violence between parents and divorces (potentially those involving malicious acts between the parties). The second addition concerned help-seeking behaviour and disclosure on the part of the victims, where 'disclosure' refers to telling others that one has been abused, or talking about it.

The 2016 study was conducted among 1935 pupils in the first four years of secondary school. They attended years 1-4 in 22 schools spread throughout the Netherlands (preparatory vocational (VMBO), senior general (HAVO) and pre-university (VWO) secondary schools). Of the 1935 completed questionnaires, 1908 qualified for inclusion in the analysis.

The pupils completed the *Vragenlijst Vervelende en Nare Gebeurtenissen* (VVNG, Unpleasant and Distressing Events Questionnaire) during class time. Parents and pupils were asked to give informed consent prior to taking part in the study. To protect their privacy, pupils whose parents did not allow them to participate were given a dummy questionnaire during the above-mentioned lesson, as were a number of other pupils in the same class. The dummy questionnaire had exactly the same design and layout as the study questionnaire, but contained questions on sport and exercise. Fifty-nine pupils completed the dummy questionnaire.

Recruitment of schools began in December 2015, and concluded in June 2016. Because the recruitment process was extremely slow, data collection at schools ran concurrently with the recruitment. The last school was visited and the final questionnaires completed in June 2016. The approximately 2000 completed questionnaires were processed in June/July 2016. In the months thereafter (August-December 2016) the researchers cleaned up the data set, analyzed the data and reported on the results.

## **Results: Child abuse among pupils 2016**

### *Prevalence*

Based on self-reporting by pupils in the first four years of secondary school, the prevalence of child abuse in the Netherlands in 2016 was lower than in 2010 and 2006. This reduction applies to all three definitions:

- Prevalence according to the SOM-2006 definition, *at some point*: 247 out of 1000 pupils in the first four years of secondary school have been victims of child abuse *at some point in their lives*. This definition includes neglect.
- Prevalence according to the SOM-2006 definition, *during the past 12 months*: 123 out of 1000 pupils in the first four years of secondary school have been victims of child abuse *over the past year*.
- Prevalence of child abuse according to the NIS/NPM-2010 definition: 65 out of 1000 pupils in the first four years of secondary school have been victims of child abuse *over the past year*.

Psychological aggression is the most frequently occurring form of child abuse, with prevalences of 81/1000 (in the past year) and 143/1000 (at some point in their lives) among pupils in the first four years of secondary school (according to the SOM-2006 definition). Physical violence inflicted by parents on the pupils themselves is the next most common form of child abuse, experienced in the past year by 48 out of 1000 pupils in the first four years of secondary school, and by 101 out of 1000 pupils at some point in their lives (according to the SOM-2006 definition).

### *Multiple forms of abuse*

One-third of the pupils who reported abuse are victims of multiple forms of child abuse, which often occurs in combinations of psychological aggression, physical violence and physical confrontations between parents.

### *Risk factors*

A further key result concerns the fact that pupils in preparatory vocational (VMBO) schools suffer abuse more often than pupils from other schools. Pupils whose parents are from non-western ethnic minority backgrounds are also more likely to experience abuse than pupils from Dutch backgrounds, as are pupils in urban areas compared to pupils in non-urban areas. The key risk factors for child abuse are therefore: school type, ethnicity and urban living environment.

### *Trends (2006, 2010, 2016)*

Analyzing the results of the various studies reveals the same risk factors in each iteration.

The figures show a drop in child abuse in 2016 compared to 2010. This drop is significant in terms of child abuse according to the SOM-2006 definition that took place *at some point*, but not for abuse according to the SOM-2006 definition that took place *during the past year* or according to the NIS/NPM-2010 definition.

A relevant note to this drop in prevalence from 2010 to 2016 is that the two studies are not comparable in terms of the demographics of the participating pupils. There may also have been selectiveness on the part of the participating schools in 2016 (school recruitment was very problematic). The drop in figures from 2010 to 2016 can only be properly evaluated once the study among informants has been carried out.

#### *Help-seeking behaviour and disclosure*

Of the pupils who reported child abuse (and who meet the criteria for child abuse *at some point*), 59 per cent claim never to have sought help and 41 per cent claim they did seek help. Girls seek help more often than boys (72 versus 28 per cent), and boys at HAVO/VWO schools seek help more often than boys at VMBO (55 versus 45 per cent).

In many cases, boys who seek help do so from friends, neighbours or people they know (49 per cent). They also seek help within their own immediate family (33 per cent), from their extended family (32 per cent), from someone at school (29 per cent) or, less commonly, from a youth worker (18 per cent).

#### *Physical violence between parents, divorce and child abuse*

There is convincing evidence to support a correlation between physical violence between parents, divorce, and child abuse. 2.5 per cent of pupils in the first four years of secondary school report a combination of physical violence between parents and child abuse. The demographics of these pupils do not differ from other groups of pupils who suffered child abuse.

Pupils who experienced their parents' divorce also more frequently report having witnessed physical violence between parents. The causal relationship between physical violence and divorce cannot be determined with certainty, however.

## **Conclusions**

The prevalence of child abuse as measured among pupils in the first four years of secondary school in the Netherlands has dropped since 2010. The drop is significant only for child abuse that occurred *at some point* (according to the SOM-2006 definition).

However, it may be affected by demographic differences between the pupils participating in the various studies, or other selectiveness factors. The results of the 2016 pupils on abuse study cannot be effectively evaluated until the study among informants has been carried out.

A drop in prevalence in no way indicates that the problem has become less urgent or significant. The fact remains that 65 out of 1000 pupils in the first four years of secondary school report having been abused during the past twelve months, a figure that was calculated according to the stricter NIS/NPM-2010 definition that distinguishes between thirteen indicators of child abuse.

According to a broader definition of child abuse that incorporates 32 indicators, 123 out of 1000 pupils in the first four years of secondary school reported experiencing some form of child abuse *during the past year*. Furthermore, if neglect is counted as a form of child abuse, 247 out of 1000 pupils in the first four years of secondary school report having been abused *at some point in their lives*.

