

# Domestic Violence and violent criminal behaviour

A RESEARCH-BASED EXPLORATION INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIOLENCE WITHIN FAMILY SETTINGS AND VIOLENCE IN THE (SEMI)-PUBLIC DOMAIN

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# SUMMARY

Little attention has been devoted in the Netherlands to the relationship between violence inside and outside the home. This is demonstrated by the fact that the first research relevant to this topic, conducted by Lünemann and Bruinsma, dates from 2005, and that little has been added to it since then. The Ministry of Justice and Safety requires a report concerning the current state of knowledge about who is mapping and interpreting possible connections between domestic violence and child abuse on the one hand, and violent criminal behavior on the other. Such knowledge can contribute to improving the development of interventions in the field of justice and safety aimed at diminishing recidivism and violence in general. Also, research can highlight which issues have not been adequately studied and how those issues could be explored in greater depth.

## Question, background, and goal

This report describes a research-based exploration into the relationship between violence within family settings and violence in the (semi)-public domain. It is based on a study of the literature concerning the relationship between violence in both settings **with a focus on the perpetrator** and on conversations with experts, including a meeting of such experts. The central question addressed by this research is:

1. **To what extent is there a relationship between domestic violence, child abuse, and violent criminal behaviour in the public domain, and what is known about the underlying causality?**
2. **To what extent can this knowledge contribute to interagency cooperation and interventions to achieve greater justice and safety?**

Because this research is exploratory, a logical first step is to seek to understand better the structural relationship between violence inside and outside the home. Achieving that understanding is a huge and complex task in itself, demanding long-term efforts and continuous attention.

## Methods and effects

The research design for this study employs three methods of data acquisition:

- A literature search.
- Interviews with individual experts.
- A meeting of experts (some of the interviewees joined by others).

The research team regularly gathered to reflect on the criteria for selecting which literature should be included in the literature search, and how to structure its organization and analysis. The team also debated how to interpret the contributions of the experts, both individually and together in the meeting of experts.

Three strategies were employed for selecting the literature to be searched:

1. Literature identified in the research based on criteria, key-words, and search strings, described in Chapter Two. Several literature searches similar to this one have been done to meet the need of refinement.
2. Literature recommended by the experts, who contributed nine investigations.
3. Literature identified via the snowball method, starting with the literature described in the first strategy. Using that method, ten articles were included by three members of the research team based on titles.

Beforehand, researchers agreed on three criteria for inclusion:

1. The selected research addresses a link between violence inside and outside the home that is directed to a person. (Research about violence occurring either inside or outside the home but not both was excluded.)

2. Also selected is peer-reviewed research that is retrievable after 2005, i.e. after the one and only Dutch study on the relationship between violence inside and outside the home.
3. Also selected is research focused only on the role of the perpetrator (ignoring the exclusion of victimisation, interventions, and gender).

In total, 45 articles were included in the literature search; these articles are discussed in detail chapter three and summed up in an overview.

Thereafter, the articles are categorised based on the three research lines discussed in Chapter one and summarized in figure 1:

1. Abuse in the family of origin as a child and (later) committing violence as an adolescent (21 articles).
2. Abuse in childhood and the longer-term consequences in adulthood: lifespan, inter-generational (14 articles).
3. Violence committed in the intimate relationship or against the children as well as in the public domain: interpersonal violence in adulthood (13 articles).<sup>1</sup>

Each of these three lines of research address different aspects of violence in the private (domestic) and public domains. The articles in the first research line, 1 and to a lesser extent 2, particularly address research on abuse in childhood and its impact on later perpetratorship and delinquent behaviour. The third research line concerns the relationship between violence of adults inside and outside the home and encompasses a relatively shorter period.

In the first few months, the researchers held fifteen conversations via telephone, video-conference (Skype), and face to face with sixteen experts concerning the connection between violence in the home and violence in the public sphere (see attachment 2). The experts were asked to express their opinions about: 1) the core and relevance of the link; 2) the sources of (current) research in their fields of practice that could shed a light on that link; 3) insights and observations from their professional practice; and 4) thoughts about interventions.

The experts were affiliated with academic institutions and expert practitioners affiliated with the police, prosecution, or probation. Four researchers and two expert practitioners focused specifically on the relationship between violence inside and outside the home. The others focused on sub-areas in the fields of domestic violence (including child abuse) and violence in the public domain. (see attachment 2).

The expert meeting took place in October 2018 in accordance with an agenda reviewed in advance with a representative of the Ministry of Justice and Safety. Five domain experts attended from research and practice; the latter group comprised the organisations Safe Home, Prosecution, Probation, and Police, as well as researchers (see attachment 4). Also shared in advance was a recent article, 'Professionals in care and criminal justice cross boundaries for values-based cooperation to treat domestic violence' (Dijkstra, 2018). The expert affiliated with Prosecution was asked to submit a case. Experiences of participants were articulated in several rounds of reflection, partly in relation to a case (see attachment 5). The interviews with the experts, in the group conversation were recorded, transcribed, and just as the interviews with experts, used for the presentation of the research and practice-based observations of the connection between violence within and outside (chapter 4).

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<sup>1</sup> The count of the number of articles is 48 instead of 45 because three articles whose themes overlapped with themes of other articles were placed in two categories.

## Results

The study of literature contains mainly international (American) research that is by far mostly grounded in self-reports, sometimes supplemented with additional kinds of research. It focuses on general cross-sections of populations as well as on specific target groups, for example referents in detention or based on reports or convictions of child abuse and partner violence. The selected studies are methodologically advanced, retrospective, and sometimes prospective in nature. They often use big data and sometimes secondary data analyses based on matching. Relatively few research studies included in the literature search use mixed methods or encompass qualitative in-depth methods. The results of the literature search are described in chapter 3.

The articles selected did not yield an unambiguous result. The fact that there is a positive correlation between violence inside and outside families is evident from diverse research sources, but that correlation is rather inconsistent in the literature that was studied. The consistency looks more robust for the first and second research lines compared to the third, probably due to the use of different research designs.

Furthermore, experts as well as other participants in the expert meeting stated explicitly that they observe a connection between violence inside and outside families. The expert practitioners pointed to cross-connections in cases from the cooperation between juridical measures after convictions, and care in the so-called Carefully Selective Customisation (ZSM) practice. The experts also noticed from their practices that this connection is often overlooked and (usually) not further investigated. When offenses are seldom committed outside the home, there are in-depth or follow-up questions asked about the situation and relationships at home. According to the experts, follow-up questions should be asked in ways that can bring those structural connections to light, so that interventions can be made earlier and monitored more effectively.

Almost all selected studies that have compared different kinds of child abuse retrospectively distinguish between direct and indirect kinds of abuse; an example of the latter is when a child is exposed to violence between parents. Most kinds of abuse have a causal effect on violent behavior committed as an adolescent. The more direct and indirect violence youngsters experience at home, the more violent criminal behavior they tend to display later on, especially when violence in youth is correlated with violence as an adult—a well-established relationship. Here an interesting differentiation has been noted: in general, violence in youth increases the risk of committing violence within an intimate relationship, yet it reduces that risk in the public domain.

In summary, the more children experience severe violence in their childhood setting (direct or indirect), especially if they also commit violence themselves, the more likely it is that they will commit violence in future intimate relationships, and the *less* likely in the public sphere. In either case, it seems conclusive that being a victim of violence at a very young age is invariably harmful to a child's development. The studied connection is weak if it concerns violence between adults (based on a comparison with the population). A significant percentage of adults are only violent in the home. Conversely, adults frequently convicted of criminal behaviour outside the home also commit troubled behavior at home.

In research reports from the literature review, males (boys and men) are over-represented compared to females when it comes to committing violent crimes at home and outside. Strangely, the conclusions of those reports typically make no note of that obvious imbalance, neither explaining it nor proposing it as a topic for further analysis, as if the researchers in each case suffered from a kind of gender blindness. With the exception of the research of Spatz-Widom, almost no research delves into how gender differences might figure in the experiences of child abuse and the commission of violence outside the home.

Alcohol problems are a mediating factor for women as well as men. Child abuse increases the risk of alcohol abuse when the child is grown, and that increases the risk of criminal behaviour. In contrast to men, women rarely present a direct connection between being victims of child abuse and perpetrators of criminal behavior even when there were problems with alcohol.

Expert practitioners have observed that there is not enough depth, analytical power, and vigor present in daily practice. This excludes easy connections between violence inside and outside the home when after many violent incidents (years later) the relationship comes to light. There is also insufficient attention to patterns of violence and insufficiently early detection of those patterns. After a violent incident, a perpetrator is usually released after only six hours because of a lack of evidence, without a house search. The position and reaction of children to domestic violence and criminal behaviour outside the home have not been made clear enough in a justice case. The probability of such a connection is not considered as a standard part of the investigation and is overlooked in efforts to determine and carry out sustainable interventions. Professionals who often deal with severe cases tend to underestimate the requirements of those cases and may fail to set limits based on a norm, which can aggravate a case so that the violence is repeated.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### Connections between violence inside and outside in a fragmented field

A relationship was evident in the studied research literature between violence inside and outside the home, as well as in the conversations with experts and during the expert meeting. This relationship is present in the selected studies, but not strongly present. The experts and the expert practitioners have a stronger opinion about the evidence and find it better to pay more attention to the relationship between violence inside and

outside, theoretically as well as in content and on a case level. At the same time, the expert meeting and the individual conversations with experts showed that in daily practice as well as in research there is often insufficient attention to this relationship and its specific effects and impact. Most research focuses on either domestic violence or criminal behavior outside the home, so that they often operate as separate domains of knowledge and practice, lacking sufficient structural cross-connections to bridge the two types of violence. Added to this is the fact that both types of violence can be severely harmful in widely varying contexts and situations.

### Possible causes of violence

In the selected research literature, several different theories have been advanced to explain the perpetration of violent acts, but such theories are rarely embedded in sufficient theory, and even when they are, the empirical testing of that theory is often minimal. There are resemblances as well as differences in how theories are applied in the domains of violence inside versus outside the home. The theory of social learning is infrequently applied to either domain, and even less often are theories of social bonding or social control theory applied in the selected literature.

There are also different traits in how such theories are used. The literature search revealed that psychological theories are more often applied to understanding violence within families, such as attachment theory, trauma theory, and neurobiological theory, where these have greater explanatory power on a more individual and micro-interaction level. Theories stressing the distinction between meso- and macro levels are more often used to explain violence in the public domain, such as anomaly theory and social bonding theory.

### Interventions within the interagency cooperation of justice and safety

From conversations with individual experts and in the expert meeting, it became clear that there is an acute need for further research on specific, evidence-based knowledge about interventions and how they work, known as interventions studies. Which interventions benefit whom, and why? Are there integral interventions that focus on violence inside as well as outside the home? The expert practitioners and the participants of the expert meeting agreed that professionals who have the ambition in daily practice to recognise and reduce violence are confronted with problems in the execution, embedding, feedback, and efficacy of the existing interventions. There is insufficient analytical power, and the relationship between violence inside and outside is often revealed too late, with not enough monitoring and feedback in the interventions that are selected.

A really useful overview of interventions is lacking, and in this research we found few examples of integral interventions directed toward the link between violence inside and outside the home. In daily practice, the ambition to achieve early detection and to control the reoccurrence of violence faces challenges in execution, embeddedness, feedback, and efficacy of existing interventions.

In the selected research literature, interventions are mentioned, but usually only in a brief paragraph of discussion, or sometimes at the end as a recommendation to translate the research results into intervention programs. The crucial question—how is that to be done cost-effectively? —remains excluded from the zone of contemplation; or to put it another way, the observations from research or practice do not lead directly to beneficial actions. For that reason, much academic research lacks direction and power of implementation and delivers only a few relatively superficial action-based recommendations on the application and utility of interventions and how the collective and interdisciplinary learning of professionals can contribute to a significantly beneficial result.

### Reflection on research and the state of the art

Underlying the issue of the lack of effective integrated interventions, there is a more fundamental problem. It is true that in the past several years' juridical policy has made changes to achieve a more meaningful settlement: one not focused only on juridical issues, but on the context of the offense and its impact on the victim and society. The achievement of such changes has created more space to understand and treat the relationship between violence inside the home and in the (semi)-public sphere. But this shift in attention from a delict-oriented approach towards a more in-depth approach based on the specific context and family systems has not been an easy one.

In the case of domestic violence, that space may allow more attention to a systemic and family-orientated approach in place of being concerned only with the alleged perpetrator. Furthermore, it is important to observe with sharp eyes that the client in one context or situation can also be a suspect, and in another a perpetrator and/or a parent.

This exploratory research is only a beginning of efforts to make the relationship between violence inside and outside the home a topic of broad, deep research. From the study of literature described here, it can be concluded that the results of the research differ according to its design, focus, and research participants. We have, so to speak, dredged up scraps of this specific theme. Other themes such as revictimisation, gender, and interventions are largely absent from the specific literature examined in this research and should be explored via their own in-depth study.

With this exploration, we begin to face the problem that we know the whole field and body of knowledge insufficiently, and that the issue has been scattered in fragments. The relationship between violence inside and outside comes to the surface now and then, in certain cases, but it does not yet have a structural place in our mindset and our everyday practice as professionals. The urgency of this issue begs for a more robust effort to understand and ameliorate it, with a longer time horizon.

## Final comment

Research has real value only when its observations can be converted into actions. This meta-analysis of relevant literature and the insights of interdisciplinary experts have produced several recommendations that could possibly be embedded in a longer-term practice-orientated research program. It makes sense for this to occur under the auspices of the Ministries of Welfare and Sports and of Justice and Safety and the VNG, the Federation of Dutch Communities, possibly appended to the national policy document 'Violence does not belong anywhere home'. Along with the recommendation to initiate a practice-orientated research program, the results of the present research point toward the urgency of following up with research especially on the relationship between violence inside and outside families, continuing the three research lines described here.

Such further research is needed to give attention across agencies and affiliations to themes including (re)victimization, gender influences, and the development and monitoring of integral and above all sustainable interventions to prevent further fragmentation in attention and focus. This would be greatly facilitated by a comparison of the application of theories and key concepts in both the field of domestic violence and the field of violent criminal behaviour in the public sphere, with the intention to investigate how connections between these theories can be made to achieve greater awareness and deeper insight into the relationships between violence in the domestic and public spheres.

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