

BERNARD VAN LEER FOUNDATION
NETHERLANDS VIOLENCE STRATEGY SUMMARY

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Overview

In the Netherlands the Bernard van Leer Foundation has separate strategies for reducing violence in young children's lives and for early learning. In our analysis of the Netherlands, we found that issues related to the physical environment were not a major priority for children, and for that reason we elected not to programme on that goal.

This document contains the strategy for reducing violence in young children's lives. In order to formulate the goal for this strategy, we looked at the different forms of violence affecting young children and considered how severe the problems are, how many children are affected, and whether there is an indication of unmet need. Our selection and rationale are as follows.

Goal: A reduction in violence in families with children under 4 years of age growing up at social and economic disadvantage

Violence in the family (which refers both to situations where children are direct victims of violence and to situations where they are witness to intimate partner violence) is the most prevalent manifestation of violence experienced by young children in the Netherlands. One way to understand the magnitude of the problem is to look at data for intimate partner violence: 1 in 8 people in the Netherlands has experienced intimate partner violence during their lifetime – a phenomenon more likely to occur in families with young (as opposed to older) children)ⁱ. In 2008 alone, there were nearly 64,000 cases reported to the police. However, it is estimated that only 10–12% of incidents are registered, which means that the actual figure is probably closer to 600,000 incidentsⁱⁱ.

Another way to understand the magnitude is through the National Prevalence Study of child abuse and neglect conducted in 2005ⁱⁱⁱ. The study estimates that there are 107,200 cases of child abuse and neglect per year – 30 cases per 1000 children in the age range 0–17 years. One-third of child abuse cases (31% or 33,660 cases) involve children under 4 years, despite the fact that they represent only 22% of the child population. The Study found that in 88% of all cases of child abuse and neglect, the perpetrator was the child's biological parent. Family factors correlated with child abuse and neglect included: having parents with a very low level of education (risk increases 7 times); parental unemployment (risk increases 5 times when both parents are unemployed); being in a large family (risk doubled); being in a single-parent family (risk doubled); and a combination of parents being from an ethnic minority and having a low level of education (risk increases 3.5 times).

Amid the current situation of economic instability, violence in the family is likely to increase in line with family stress levels. At the same time, the government in the Netherlands is cutting funding for social services, including that allocated to violence prevention and child protection.

Outcomes and strategies

In our analysis and vetting process, we identified values and norms surrounding child rearing, gender, and stress on families as key root causes of violence in families with young children. In this context, we have developed a three-pronged approach aimed at addressing these root causes in a systematic manner.

The first line of approach is a set of strategies that are intended to motivate the Dutch government, at the national and municipal level, to continue to invest resources in addressing domestic violence and violence against children. Outcomes are described below.

A sustained interest by politicians and government in the issues of domestic violence and violence against children. A demand from citizens that the government addresses domestic violence and violence against children. Sufficient budget allocated at the municipal level for prevention and protection.

Strategies to achieve this combined set of outcomes include:

- 1. Document data on domestic violence and violence against children, for use by advocates.** We aim to fund a special edition of the Kinderen in Tel in 2011 (Kids Count) on violence, with research undertaken by the Verwey Jonker Institute. This dataset is to be used by advocates to influence municipal behaviour, to highlight good examples of municipal responses, and to foster knowledge exchange.
- 2. Advocate for the continuation of RAK at the municipal level.** The current Rutte government of the Netherlands has decided to continue funding the implementation of RAK (a monitoring programme for child abuse) for one year. We can support activities to ensure national funding in the coming years and an increase in municipal investments in the programme.
- 3. Develop a platform for advocacy on domestic violence and violence against children at the national level in cooperation with other organisations that focus on child abuse.**
- 4. A national campaign to fight violence in the family.** Children's voices can be made heard in the public domain through consultations with children, and support for awareness raising can be generated through social media. Master classes or organised breakfast briefings can be held for newly elected officials and civil servants, to educate them on violence in the family. Public figures (especially men) will be involved as ambassadors against violence in the family. This strategy will publicise existing research on the life course consequences and the economic costs to society of family violence against children and connect it to the Dutch context.
- 5. Promote regional governmental actions.** Regional work (such as the OECD's Starting Strong network, the Council of Europe's work on violence against children, or the EU Declarations

on child rights) has yet to be promoted within the Dutch national debates on violence in children's lives. More Dutch participation in consultations at the EU and Council of Europe could enhance the issue of domestic violence and violence against children in regional and national policies and declarations.

The second approach is a set of strategies to work in specific disadvantaged neighbourhoods in an effort to change deeply held social norms and values around child rearing, gender and violence. The outcome is:

Community leadership (including men) to change social norms where community members increasingly see domestic violence and violence against children as socially unacceptable.

Local campaigns and community organising (involving men, women and children) to change social norms around child rearing, gender and violence. This strategy involves building on existing successful experience and working with neighbourhood and immigrant associations to run media campaigns, combined with father and mother discussion groups.

The third approach is a set of strategies to influence the practical response of the government (for example, in the kinds of programmes they choose to operate once resources are available) with an emphasis on the decision-making process at municipal level. The outcomes are:

An increase in the number of municipalities using home visiting and the number of families of low socio-economic status with children under 4 reached by home visiting. An increase in the number of municipalities that link other services to home visiting and the number of referrals to these services that take place. An increase in early signalling and reporting of domestic violence and violence against children.

Strategies to achieve this combined set of outcomes include:

- 1. Documentation and evaluation of home visiting programmes combined with linkages to other social services.** Investing in scientific evaluations to examine the cost–benefit ratios of existing home visiting programmes linked to social services (such as employment, health insurance, daycare) would help advocates present a package of alternatives to different municipalities around the country.
- 2. Advocacy to encourage municipalities to link home visiting programmes with other social services** such as employment, substance abuse counseling, victim support, child rearing, healthcare, health insurance, family planning and early learning (childcare and playgroups).
- 3. Development and implementation of the Regional Approach Child Abuse Monitoring system.** We are supporting the Netherlands Youth Institute to develop and implement a national monitoring system.

Evaluation

We conduct evaluations on a continuous basis at three levels: individual grants; clusters of grants intended to work in tandem; and at the level of the overall strategy. Here we describe how we measure change in relation to the goal and key outcomes.

In order to get a baseline and measure change over time, we use three significant pieces of ongoing research. The first is a **national prevalence study** already underway by the University of Leiden. This study provides data indicating the extent of violence against or around young children in households, and associated variables related to family stress such as employment, income, parental education, family health, etc. We have not funded this, but may fund additional analysis to disaggregate findings for children of low social and economic status and in specific municipalities.

The second is a **public opinion survey** on violence against and around children. We fund a representative random sample and do short telephone interviews with questions on these topics. This can be supplemented by focus groups to help interpret the results. Information gathered allows us to measure the change in public opinion and social norms about child rearing, gender and violence.

The third piece of research is **systems and policy mapping** which helps to measure change in government priorities (national and municipal), how much budget they allocate, and which programmes and services are provided for children and families. Part of this is already being carried out to get better insight into the new government priorities, but we need to do a more exhaustive exercise. This includes both a desk review and targeted interviews with politicians and civil servants during 2011.

Evaluation Indicators

1. Sustained interest from politicians and government in the issues of domestic violence and violence against children;
2. Change in social norms and values around child rearing, gender and violence;
3. Municipalities providing quality and sustainable home visiting programmes linked to other services.

ⁱ Dijk, Flight, Oppenhuis & Duesmann, 1997

ⁱⁱ Ferwerda, 2007

ⁱⁱⁱ IJzendoorn, 2005