Introduction and research questions

This report provides a synthesis of 48 studies of the effects of the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain. It was announced in the “Actieplan tegen geweld” [Action plan against violence] (Tweede Kamer 2005-2006, 28 684, no. 65) and is a result of the conclusion that was drawn in the policy study “Van afzijdigheid naar betrokkenheid: Preventieve strategieën tegen geweld” [Getting involved. Preventive strategies against violence] (Van Erpecum, 2005) that little is known about the effects of preventive projects. However, a preventive approach to violence is of great importance and knowledge about the effects of preventive measures regarding violence in the Netherlands and abroad is essential. A research synthesis is a sound method of obtaining this knowledge, because, if carried out correctly, it yields the most complete and reliable information about what does and does not work in a certain field. Among policy makers there is also a need for knowledge about the nature of the mechanisms that underlie effective prevention measures and about the conditions under which those mechanisms work. Such knowledge can be used to adopt proven effective or promising measures to prevent violence in the public and semi-public domain in the Netherlands.

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

1. What measures for the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain are known and have been studied for their effects in the Netherlands and abroad?
2. What mechanisms underlie effective measures for the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain?
3. Under what conditions are the results of effective measures for the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain expected and achieved?

For this project, violence is defined as

*The deliberate use of physical strength or power and/or the threat thereof, aimed against another person or group of persons and which results or is likely to result in injury, death, or psychological damage.*

By focusing on the public and semi-public domain, we place violence between persons who are close to each other (i.e., [ex-] partners, family members, relatives, and housemates) outside the definition. Relational violence is regarded as domestic violence, regardless of its location (Lünnemann & Bruinsma, 2005). Public domain is taken to mean the public space accessible to all. The semi-public domain consists of places that may be accessible to the public, but only by appointment or with
a ticket, for instance, and places where an owner or supervisor is entitled to refuse someone access.

This study distinguishes between *person-oriented prevention measures*, which try to influence the person of the potential perpetrator, and *context-oriented prevention measures*, which try to prevent crimes by intervening in the potential crime situation. In addition, there are those that combine person- and context-oriented measures and that focus on influencing the potential perpetrator and the crime situation; these are the *person- and context-oriented prevention measures*. Within this distinction, a further division is made into primary prevention of new cases among the entire population and secondary prevention aimed at persons/groups/locations that are at increased risk.

**Research method**

In order to answer the questions of this study, a research synthesis was carried out. In a research synthesis, relevant evaluation studies are collected and critically evaluated in order to find out which programmes are effective. The current research synthesis attempts to combine the method advocated by the Campbell Collaboration with the model of context-mechanism-outcome of Pawson and Tilley (1997). Following the method of the Campbell Collaboration, the effect evaluations involved in this research synthesis are first assessed for their internal validity using the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS). This is a five-score scale that enables us to decide on the methodological quality regarding the internal validity of effect evaluations (Farrington et al. 2002). On the SMS, score 3 (quasi-experimental design) is the minimum research design required to draw reliable conclusions on the effectiveness of a measure. In addition to internal validity, attention is also paid to external validity. The better the findings from an evaluation can be generalised into other situations (areas, individuals, times, etc.), the higher the external validity. In order to involve external validity in the research, the model of context-mechanism-outcome of Pawson and Tilley (1997) is used. This approach particularly focuses on the theory that forms the basis of a(n) (behavioural) intervention. By finding out for each intervention which mechanisms yield results in which target group and under which circumstances, programme theories can be developed. On the basis of such theories, expectations with regard to the ability to generalise results can be formulated, and by verifying such theories insight can be obtained into the way a measure works. In the current research synthesis, an attempt was made, on the basis of the studied publications, to arrive at a description of the mechanisms that underlie the evaluated prevention measures, and the contexts in which these would be effective or ineffective.
The publications used in this study were collected by searching online databases, consulting websites of relevant organisations and institutes, studying the bibliography of relevant publications, and writing to members of the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) requesting information about evaluation studies carried out in their countries. The first selection of studies was made on the basis of titles and abstracts by means of a number of inclusion and exclusion criteria drawn up in advance. The main question was “Does this study concern an evaluation of an intervention to prevent violence in the public or semi-public domain?”. Each study was assessed by two researchers and if the researchers differed as to whether the study was to be selected, they made a decision in mutual consultation. The complete publications of the selected studies were requested. These texts were read by one of the researchers and assessed for their relevance to the current research. The publications selected in this way were summarised and the quality of the research design for each study was assessed on the basis of the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale.

In total, 48 studies of the effects of the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain were included. These 48 publications relate to 36 interventions. The majority of the studies were carried out in the United States. Extra efforts were made to find European studies, but they were rarely available. The majority of publications appeared in the period between 1995 and 2005. By far, most (n = 25) describe the evaluation of a prevention measure applied at school. Ten publications relate to measures applied in the neighbourhood, in the street, or at specific locations in a city, and four deal with interventions for banks or post offices. Only one or two describe interventions in licensed premises, at public events, at the workplace, and in both schools and families.

The effectiveness of the prevention measures in regard to the reduction or prevention of violence was assessed on the basis of the results of the 48 evaluation studies used for this synthesis. The effectiveness of a number of measures was researched in two or more studies, but many included in the current review were evaluated in only one study. In those cases, therefore, we drew on the knowledge about the effectiveness of certain measures gathered previously by other authors. The work of Sherman and his colleagues (2002) was frequently used, as were numerous other meta-analyses and reviews. Based on the information from the 48 publications used in this study and from meta-analyses and reviews by other authors, the prevention measures studied were divided into four categories: 1) effective, 2) potentially effective, 3) potentially ineffective, and 4) ineffective. Not all studies could be grouped in one of the four categories on the basis of the criteria used. If the quality of the design of a study was not good enough for us to decide on the effectiveness of a measure and if
no further information was available from meta-analyses or reviews by third parties, the measure was not categorised. No decisions were made on the basis of some studies that had contradictory results. However, when no decision could be made on the effectiveness of a measure, it did not mean that the measure could not be effective. Further, qualitatively sound research should provide this information.

Results

In chapters 3 and 4, the mechanisms, contexts, and results of the studies involved in this research are described. The following conclusions are drawn on the basis of these descriptions.

Person-oriented prevention measures
On the basis of the available literature, two person-oriented measures presented at schools in order to prevent violence can be regarded as an effective form of prevention. Two other person-oriented school prevention programmes and a community-based intervention are also regarded as potentially effective, and three school programmes are regarded as potentially ineffective. No decisions about effectiveness can be made on five other person-oriented prevention measures.

The effective person-oriented prevention programmes can be distinguished from the potentially ineffective programmes by their intensity. One programme is used throughout the school with continuous activities whereas the other consists of 25 weekly classes, followed by twelve classes at the start of the next school year. The fact that such an intensive approach works was also demonstrated in the meta-analysis of the effects of school programmes to prevent aggressive behaviour conducted by Wilson, Lipsey, and Derzon (2003). They concluded that programmes that are implemented correctly, apply an intensive approach, and are presented by teachers are often more effective than those in which these features are absent. In addition, Wilson, Lipsey, and Derzon concluded that person-oriented prevention programmes yield better results when the target group already displays a certain amount of aggressive behaviour prior to the start of the programme. The most positive effects can be achieved in this group. This is also demonstrated by the evaluations of the effective school programmes: youngsters who displayed more aggressive behaviour prior to the interventions benefited most from the programmes.

Context-oriented prevention measures
Three context-oriented prevention measures proved to be effective: improved street lighting, “hot spots” policing, and targeted surveillance.
A potentially effective measure to prevent violence in bars is training pub staff to prevent incidents. It may also be effective to implement tailor-made situational prevention measures to prevent robberies in shops and businesses. As regards the underlying mechanisms of these measures and the way in which they are implemented, this latter measure seems to show similarities to the policing efforts aimed at hot spots and targeted surveillance: a detailed analysis of the situation can lead to the targeted implementation of opportunity-reducing and deterring measures.

A context-oriented intervention that may be ineffective is the use of a self-help book to prevent sexual violence, and camera surveillance certainly is ineffective when it comes to preventing violence. Camera surveillance seems to have a preventive effect on property offences, but in cases of violent crime the strength of the camera lies in the possibility of coordinating a fast response to incidents and preventing incidents from getting out of control.

Context-oriented prevention measures with regard to which no decisions could be made about their effects on preventing violence are the application of bullet-proof glass in banks and post offices, training bank staff, and preventing crime at large-scale events. Other measures about which no decisions could be made are neighbourhood watch programmes, prevention in extremely violent neighbourhoods, and the agreements signed by Dutch municipalities to restrict nightlife violence.

**Person- and context-oriented measures**

Training young children (whether or not in school) in combination with parent training is effective in preventing violence during adolescence. The current study only includes two programmes that combine both child and parent training. However, they are not the only ones that appear to have a favourable effect on long-term crime prevention (Farrington & Welsh, 2003). Such interventions are usually aimed at reducing the number of risk factors or negative effects that these factors have on the development of the child. Because multiple negative developmental outcomes often share the same risk factors, such programmes are generally not explicitly aimed at preventing crime. Crime prevention appears to be a side effect. This is why very few evaluation studies of such interventions were included in this synthesis. It is therefore advisable, with regard to early interventions for problem behaviour among very young children, to verify in the literature to what extent effective interventions affect the long-term prevention of violence.

Another effective form of person- and context-oriented prevention is training young people before they start dating so as to prevent victimisation as well as perpetration of dating violence (Safe Dates
and Youth Relationship Programme). Such programmes appear to be ineffective among older adolescents and young adults.

A possible effective person- and context-oriented approach to prevent violence uses targeted measures to reduce specific risk factors. This form of secondary prevention requires proper cooperation between the involved parties to influence varying risk factors.

Based on the available literature, no conclusions could be drawn with respect to the effectiveness of preventing violence in relation to two Dutch person- and context-oriented measures – a nationwide campaign against violence at school and the Marietje Kessels Project. The same applies to a psychodynamic school programme to prevent violence.

Conclusions

The objective of this study was twofold. First, it was designed to provide an overview of effective or promising measures for the prevention of violence in the public and semi-public domain in the Netherlands and abroad. Second, it was meant to provide insights into the mechanisms that underlie effective or promising prevention measures and the conditions under which those mechanisms work. However, this study found that the effects of many prevention measures have never been evaluated. In addition, it appears that when a measure is evaluated, the quality of the study design is often not good enough to draw conclusions about its effectiveness. As a result, the overview of effective and promising measures to prevent violence is incomplete.

The second objective of this study (gaining insights into the mechanisms and contexts of effective and promising prevention measures) was only realised to a limited extent. It is striking that only a small number of effect studies pay explicit attention to the underlying mechanisms that should ensure that a prevention measure generates the intended result. The context in which a measure was used is usually not described in sufficient detail, and measures that have been evaluated have often been verified in only a very limited number of contexts.

Despite the fact that the objectives of this study could not be fully realised, a number of recommendations with regard to preventing violence in the public and semi-public domain can still be made.

1 More attention to evaluating prevention projects
More attention must be paid to the evaluation of prevention projects. Many projects are either not evaluated or improperly evaluated, as a
result of which it is unknown how effective they are. This applies to projects abroad as well as Dutch projects. To secure the evaluation of measures in the future, an evaluation study must be in place from the very start of a prevention project. Existing projects must also be studied for their effects.

2 Early interventions for young children
Early interventions for young children with behavioural problems and their parents appear to be effective in preventing violence during adolescence. Such programmes are not explicitly aimed at preventing violence in the public or semi-public domain, but because most of the violence committed by young people takes place outdoors, it is plausible that such programmes will actually have a favourable effect on violence in the (semi-) public domain. Deploying them is therefore recommended. It is also advisable to verify which preschool interventions, such as High/Scope Perry Preschool, have a favourable effect on preventing violence and could be offered in the Netherlands.

3 Prevention programmes in schools
Deploying prevention programmes in schools can make a positive contribution to reducing violence. Programmes that are highly intensive, that are implemented throughout the school, or that comprise more than a limited number of lessons are likely to be given preference. The best effects in this respect can be expected among students already displaying violent conduct. However, if such programmes are to be adopted in the Netherlands, the possibility must be recognised that effects of school programmes in urban contexts are limited to the conduct of students at school and do not include the behaviour of children and young people in the street and at home.

4 Improving street lighting
Improving street lighting in stable neighbourhoods with a homogeneous population can contribute to the prevention of street violence. It is therefore advisable to use improved street lighting in such neighbourhoods.

5 Targeted implementation of secondary prevention measures
When implementing secondary prevention measures in public and semi-public zones, it is advisable to focus on specific targets. To this end it needs to be carefully verified what problems or risk factors are present, after which tailor-made interventions can be implemented. Policing efforts aimed at hot spots and targeted deployment of surveillance (e.g., truancy prevention) are good examples of such a targeted approach. Investigation should determine how these measures can be used more often.
6 Specific prevention measures

Specific prevention measures that appear to be promising include the programme Safer Bars, to prevent violence in pubs; the programmes PeaceBuilders and Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways, to prevent violence in schools; and Safe Dates and Youth Relationship Programme, to prevent dating violence. Whether these measures can be implemented in the Netherlands needs to be considered.

7 Implementation and evaluation of prevention measures

When specific measures are adopted for deployment in the Netherlands, it is obvious that a great deal of attention needs to be paid to their careful implementation and to securing a high degree of programme integrity (Is the measure being carried out as intended?). These conditions are necessary in order to replicate the effects achieved elsewhere. In addition, the implementation of a new measure must be accompanied by a high-quality evaluation study to verify the extent to which the results achieved elsewhere can be repeated.