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## IPV-PRO&POL

**Intimate Partner Violence: impact, processes, evolution and related public policies in Belgium**

**IPV PRO&POL**

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## IPV-PRO&POL

**Intimate Partner Violence: impact, processes, evolution and related public policies in Belgium**

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## FINAL REPORT

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## ABSTRACT

The issue of intimate partner violence (IPV) appears to be gaining ground on the political agenda, after centuries of confinement to the private sphere. On the basis of the state of the art, several questions have been raised concerning the effectiveness, efficiency and place given to a (strictly) penal response as well as its counterproductive effects; the interest and difficulties in implementing a multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral approach in a context of multi-level governance; the difficulties in defining IPV (in the face of several reading grids) and lastly the need for analysis in terms of exiting violence and desistance. The objective of the IPV-PRO&POL project was to study the issue of IPV both from the perspective of the impact of the phenomenon and the complexity of the processes involved and from the perspective of the public policy practices developed, and more particularly the effectiveness of multi-level governance and transversal practices. To do this, the partnership developed a multidisciplinary approach based on various types of data: mapping of actors, interviews with key-actors from different sectors, analysis of judicial files, interviews with victims and perpetrators of IPV, analysis of statistical data, analysis of documents and press, validation questionnaire with a wide range of actors. This led to new results in the Belgian field, resulting in the formulation of a series of recommendations.

Keywords : Intimate partner violence, Gender violence, Family violence, Feminism, Desistance, Policy analysis, Multi-level governance, Multidisciplinary approach, Intimate Partner Homicide, Femicide

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This final report describes the research work carried out within the framework of the research programme 'Intimate Partner Violence: impact, processes, evolution and related public policies in Belgium' (IPV-PRO&POL), coordinated by a research team from the *Institut National de Criminalistique et de Criminologie/ Nationaal Instituut voor Criminalistiek en Criminologie*, in partnership with teams from the *Université de Liège*, the *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* and the *Université Catholique de Louvain*. It reports on the work of these different teams in an integrated manner. This programme was financed by BELSPO within the framework of the Brain.be programme (call 2016 Axis 4: Federal public strategies).

This report presents successively the state of art and objectives (2), the methodology (3), the scientific results and recommendations (4) before reporting on dissemination and valorisation (5) and publications (6). The realisation of this research work was made possible by a number of people whom we thank warmly (7).

## 2. STATE OF THE ART AND OBJECTIVES

### 2.1. THE CONTEXT AND SOCIETAL ISSUES OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC

In recent decades, and particularly in recent years, partner violence (IPV) has become a major societal challenge and an increasingly important issue in national and international public debate. This was not always the case. Historically, it was long been confined to the private sphere (Vanneau 2016, Glowacz & Vanneste 2017, Vanneste 2017) and feminist movements were the main agents in defining it as a real public issue and bringing it to the forefront of political agendas (Weldon 2002, Barner & Carney 2011, Herman 2016, Delage 2017). After a long silence in criminal law and policy, recent decades have also been marked by growing recourse to legal action and a rise in criminalisation and penalization of intimate partner violence (Hagemann-White & al. 2014).

In Belgium, the law of 24 November 1997 is the first specifically devoted 'to combatting violence within the couple'. It represents a key breaking point with respect to an earlier concept of IPV in our country, *i.e.* that such violence falls exclusively within the private sphere. Furthermore, although it took a long historical process for IPV to appear on the political agenda, the successive implementation from 2001 of 'National Action Plans' (NAPs) against gender-based violence - as a first structured political enterprise - can be considered as a second milestone in the Belgian policy on IPV. These NAPs aim at coordinating actions taken by different authorities at the levels of the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions. They concern different sectors such as police, justice, health, psycho-social assistance, education, etc. The planned actions are structured around strategic axes to develop knowledge, public awareness, prevention and detection, assistance to victims, follow-up of offenders, police and judicial interventions, and so on<sup>1</sup>. Lastly, the year 2006 was a third milestone in the public policy on IPV implemented in Belgium. That year, the Belgian Parliament stated: '*We Parliamentarians [...] publicly and univocally condemn domestic violence [...] It has no private character but concerns the whole society*'<sup>2</sup>. The struggle against domestic violence is then explicitly defined as being a priority of the political agenda at all political levels. The Parliament also committed to combatting domestic violence by asking the judicial authorities to prosecute and sentence authors of domestic violence systematically. The 'Common Circular of the Minister of Justice and of the College of General Prosecutors' in 2006 (COL 4/2006) both defines the notion of domestic violence - as being either physical, sexual, psychological or economic -, and a criminal policy in order to fight against this phenomenon implying a firm and rapid intervention in line with a principle of 'zero tolerance' (Vanneste, 2017).

The starting point of this IPV-PRO&POL research programme is to be found in the results of a previous research commissioned by the College of Prosecutors General. This research aimed to evaluate, on the basis of statistical data, the criminal policy implemented since the COL 4/2006 circular, the judicial practices and their effects in terms of recidivism. The results published in 2016 highlighted three main conclusions (Vanneste 2016, 2017). Firstly, the very high volume of IPV situations reported to the public prosecutor's office has been relatively

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr/activites/violence/pan>

<sup>2</sup> Belgium Chamber of Representatives, 2006, point 1



stable at around 50,000 cases per year since 2007, the first year for which these cases could be identified (see 4.4). However, this volume of cases is still only the tip of the iceberg. The survey commissioned by the *Institut pour l'Égalité des Femmes et des Hommes* (IEFH) in 2010 estimates the proportion of victimizations experienced (as self-reported in the survey) for which a complaint is made to the police at 12% overall (Pieters & al. 2010). The second finding highlighted the large gap between the so-called zero tolerance objective and its actual implementation: almost 70% of the IPV suspects for whom an offence is considered to have been established (in 2010) had not been the subject of any judicial decision, or at least an official one. This varies greatly from one district to another. Finally, the third conclusion was that the research did not show that districts applying a more systematic judicial response (zero tolerance) were more effective in preventing recidivism. There was no correlation between the proportion of judicial reactions to reported situations and the rate of recidivism of the perpetrators. The research also showed that recidivism rates were higher the more repressive or only repressive the judicial response was.

These results from the Belgian data generally confirm what the international scientific literature points out, namely that the criminalisation of IPV and the zero tolerance message are of fundamental importance at a symbolic level, but in practice they remain rather ineffective in preventing future violence (Hoyle & Sanders 2000, Johnson & Goodlin-Fancke 2015). The literature shows that the judicial and penal response alone is certainly not sufficient to achieve the objectives of combating IPV, and none of the studies show greater effectiveness in terms of recidivism when the perpetrator is incarcerated (Davis et al. 1998, Smith et al. 2002, Woolregde & Thistlethwaithe 2005). Studies of IPV treatment programmes also show equivocal results (Vanneste 2021). Finally, research shows that the - mainly or solely – penal response also fails to meet victims' expectations and may even have counterproductive effects by working against their empowerment (Finn 2013).

In view of the results of the research carried out in Belgium (Vanneste 2016, 2017), it was therefore necessary to continue the work in order to better understand the problems and contribute to the implementation of more effective public policies that more adequately meet the victims' expectations. This is what we tried to do, by submitting a research project to the BELSPO's BRAIN.be call for projects, developed in partnership, consisting of research teams from the INCC/NICC, the ULiège, the VUB and the UCL universities.

## 2.2. THE OBJECTIVE AND TYPE OF RESEARCH APPROACH

**The objective** of this research is twofold: (1) to study the impact of the phenomenon (IPV) and the complex processes from which it arises, as well as those that allow the exit from violence (desistance) and (2) jointly, to study the public policies developed in this field, and do so in a context of multi-level governance with the elaboration, since 2001, of National Action Plans involving the Federal State and the federated entities, as well as the different sectors concerned.

In order to develop this twofold approach, it was necessary to diversify the research material, as well as the research approaches, this time predominantly integrating so-called qualitative approaches, while also pursuing as yet unexplored statistical research directions. Diversification also implied diversification of skills and disciplines: the research was therefore

developed by a multidisciplinary partnership including criminologists, sociologists, psychologists, historians, demographers, specialists in gender studies and in public policy analysis.

The **research data** collected is also of multiple natures: (1) documentary information made it possible to draw up a map of the actors in the field of IPV - situating them in the structure of the federal State, the federated entities and the various sectors - which highlighted the growing complexity and the different developments in Flanders and the Walloon-Brussels Federation; (2) interviews with nearly 100 key actors who, it must be emphasised, are predominantly women in this field (80%) (87% in the south of the country and 69% in the north); (3) judicial files (142) from French and Dutch-speaking courts; (4) interviews with 88 victims (78 of whom were women) and 19 perpetrators (all of whom were men); (5) interviews with doctors in Flanders<sup>3</sup>; (6) statistical information, both judicial and socio-demographic, on a cohort of nearly 40,000 IPV suspects; (7) both statistical and press information about homicides and feminicides in the context of IPV; and (8) finally, data from an extensive validation survey with 219 IPV actors.

### 2.3. THE QUESTION OF DEFINING THE IPV PHENOMENON

It is clear that the IPV's that are the subject of this research are defined as all forms of violence, whether physical, psychological, sexual or economic, that occur between partners or ex-partners, whether or not they are or have been married, whether or not they are or have been cohabiting, the common factor being that they are or have been in an intimate relationship.

While there is a consensus on this first definition among all actors, the same cannot be said for the way the phenomenon is conceived. As can be seen from the analyses detailed in this report, conceptions of IPV can be very different in the north and south of the country, by sector or within a professional body. The same can be said for the ways in which the resulting intervention models are conceived. These debates, dissensions and even divisions are not specific to Belgium but echo the debates that have been taking place on the international scene and in the scientific literature since the late 1970s (Carlson & Dayle Jones 2010, Vanneste 2017). Among these debates, we should note in particular the one between the supporters of a feminist reading of IPV, defined at the time as a symptom of the structural domination of men over women (Dobash & Dobash 1979, Walker 1979), and the supporters of a familialist reading that sees IPV as one effect of dysfunctions that can be encountered in the family and stresses instead a gender symmetry in the violence suffered (Straus & Gelles 1986). Between these two approaches, there is a whole series of more nuanced positions, which also underline the limits of these initial approaches.

The majority of studies on the dynamics of violence follow in the footsteps of the original works by Walker (1979) and Johnson (Johnson 1995, 2006, 2008, 2014, 2017, Johnson & Leone 2005) which remain references for professionals today. However, new research is beginning to question these studies. In particular, this new research highlights the limits of the authors' patriarchal perspective, questions the bidirectional aspect of violence (Straus & Gozjolko

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<sup>3</sup> These results are the specific subject of Eva Vergaert's PhD thesis carried out within the framework of this programme.

2014, Straus & Gozjolko 2016, Johnson 2017) and reminds us that these models remain limited since the individual trajectories of victimization are heterogeneous and evolve (Piquero & al. 2006, Blondin & al. 2018). Furthermore, research carried out from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1991, Sokoloff & Dupont 2005) has highlighted the impact of different axes of inequality (sex, race, disability, sexuality, etc.) on the definition and the experience of violence, the exit from this violence and institutional trajectories.

#### 2.4. ANALYSIS OF THE DYNAMICS OF VIOLENCE AND EXIT PROCESSES

The analysis of the interviews with victims and perpetrators, in particular, will focus on the dynamics of violence while paying particular attention to the exit processes of victims and perpetrators. Indeed, the issues of the exit from violence for victims and the desistance from violence for perpetrators remain central to the concerns of both stakeholders and scientists.

**Exiting violence, for victims**, is a long process that can start within the relationship and extend beyond physical separation (Reisenhofer & Taft 2013) just like the violence itself (post-separation violence). The cyclical dynamics of violence hamper victims' attempts to get out from intimate partner violence (Torrent 2003, Ali & McGarry 2018). The exit process will, indeed, depend on the relational dynamics and the nature of the violence (Stith & al. 2004, Chen & Chan 2021), as well as a number of factors. These may be personal: feelings of self-efficacy, the perception and the recognition of violence by the victim and the perpetrator (Enander & Holmberg 2008, Ali & McGarry 2018); available resources: financial income, available and/or perceived external support (Torrent 2003, Bostock & al. 2009, Reisenhofer & Taft 2013, Keeling & al. 2016); and factors specific to the political and cultural environment (Hardesty & Ogolsky 2020). It is the dynamic interactions between these internal and external factors that will facilitate or hinder exit (Anderson 2003, Cluss & al. 2006). The most recent studies show that the search for help is oriented primarily towards informal resources and, secondly, towards formal help services, which may be judicial and/or psycho-social (Paul 2016, Lysova & Dim 2020, Goodson & Hayes 2021). Moreover, support that mainly focuses on the judicial elements of a particular complaint and is less concerned with accompanying and enhancing the victims' strengths appears to be an obstacle to the exit process (Voth & al. 2020).

**With regard to the perpetrators**, bringing an end to their violence is a major challenge for public policymakers and those tasked with psycho-socio-judicial interventions. This is in line with studies on desistance in crime, which has recently included the issue of IPV. While individual change remains the main point of reference for desistance (Whitaker & al. 2010), this process can be approached from the perspective of marital dynamics and relational changes associated with partner behaviours (Walker & al. 2013, Giordano & al. 2015). Learning new styles of communication and conflict management for both perpetrator and victim, and perceived changes can lead to lasting transformation in a relationship (Wuest & Merritt-Gray 2008, Scott & Wolfe 2000, Walker & al. 2013, Merchant & Whiting 2018). These types of interventions focus on the complementarity of approaches based on the development of individual skills and the enrolment of the subject in a network of formal and informal interventions offered by community actors (Lowe & al. 2019, Dufour & Villeneuve 2020, Mathlouthi & Rullac 2020).

## 2.5. A FOCUS ON HOMICIDES IN THE CONTEXT OF IPV

Part of this research programme is devoted to homicides in the context of IPV. The scientific study of violence has developed over the past century, both at the inter-individual level and in relations between states, in ordinary times and in times of exception (Liem & Pridemore 2012). The most serious form of violence, marked by irreversibility, has been defined as homicide, the violent death of a human being.

The work of historians and social scientists (Liem & Pridemore 2012, Eisner 2000, Mucchielli 2008, Spierenburg 2009, Rousseaux & Verreycken 2021) has made it possible to move away from an atemporal conception of lethal violence and to understand the phenomenon in its contextual aspects. The main finding, at least for Europe, is the long-term decline in ordinary homicide. A second observation is that this decline is due to the decrease in inter-individual homicides, in particular between male individuals. As the relationship between the protagonists appears to be a determining factor in the decrease in serious violence, interest has shifted to homicides between men and women. In gender terms, these have three characteristics. Although a minority, homicides against women appear to be more enduring in societies that are experiencing a decline in the general homicide rate, they are between 80 and 90% committed by a man, and very largely perpetrated in the context of family, couple or intimate relationships (Gartner 1990). Research on homicide is thus grafted onto another stream of criminological research, dealing with family and domestic violence.

Depending on how IPV is conceived, the approach to intimate partner homicide (IPH) will also have emphases that differ widely. Based on the way in which one limits the field in which violence is observed (the victim, the couple, the family) domestic violence can be broken down into three types of violent configuration: intimate partner violence (IPV), family violence or gender violence. The concept of gender-based violence emphasises the specific nature of violence against women. The focus on women in certain forms of violence in times of war (rape, sexual slavery, targeted homicide) has reinforced the idea of a gendered specificity of homicidal violence. In particular, a term has become part of the current debate since the 2000s: femicide or feminicide (Radford & Russell 1992). The term has been used by feminist movements, particularly in Central America. Activists and researchers in countries such as Guatemala and Mexico have noted, in the context of military dictatorships, civil war or organised crime, the specific targeting of women by killers as a means of fighting their opponents.

In order to understand how homicide is part of IPV in Belgium and constitutes the majority of homicides against women, it is important to cross the two lines of research and measure the phenomenon both in terms of violent mortality and domestic violence. On homicides, due to the lack of systematic monitoring, there is no work in Belgium comparable to that carried out for Spain (Palacios 2021) or the Netherlands (Bijleveld & Smit 2006, Nieuwsbeerta 2007, Nieuwsbeerta & Leistra 2007, Liem & Koenraards 2007).

The literature on Intimate Partner Homicide (IPH) highlights the gendered nature of this phenomenon. Indeed, when analysing homicide rates in general, men make up to 80% of victims (UNODC 2014). However, women constitute about two-thirds of IPH victims (UNODC 2014). One study also found that women are six times more likely to be killed by an intimate

partner than men (Stöckl & al. 2013). A second finding is that trends in IPH do not follow overall homicide trends, with homicide rates decreasing while partner homicide rates remain relatively stable (UNODC 2014, Spencer & Stith 2018). Finally, in 67-75% of cases, IPH involves violence between partners that is part of the relationship history (Campbell & al. 2007).

## 2.5. THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PERIOD: A SHARPENED ATTENTION TO THE PHENOMENON IPV

The context of the period during which this research programme was carried out (from 2017 to 2021) was marked by a sharp media and political focus on the social phenomenon IPV. It was a context in movement, teeming with numerous debates, new works and reports rich in new knowledge on the subject.

It should be emphasised that our research subject is not defined by the term 'combatting violence against women', and therefore does not completely overlap with that of the Istanbul Convention (2011) which considers other forms of violence than just violence between partners, and does not, however, consider violence against male partners. It is clear, however, that since the number of victims of IPV is much higher among women than among men, the movements or initiatives that have brought the issue of violence against women to the media and political agenda have also had a direct impact on the attention paid to the subject of our research (IPV).

In particular, we will mention: (1) the #MeToo movement which has experienced a tremendous expansion since October 2017 following the Harvey Weinstein affair; (2) the timetable for evaluation of the application of the Istanbul Convention (ratified by Belgium in 2016) punctuated by the submission of several reports: the submission of Belgium's official report (February 2019), alternative reports including in particular the one from the associative sector of the coalition '*Ensemble contre les violences*' (February 2019), the official report of the Council of Europe's evaluation body (GREVIO) in September 2020, and the comments of the Belgian government also in September 2020; (3) the work on partner violence carried out within the Senate by the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, which published its report in June 2020; (4) broader policy action plans to combat violence against women, whether sexual violence, violence at work, violence in public places, etc. (*plan intra-francophone de lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes 2020-2024*); (5) the health crisis that occurred since March 2020, during the last phase of the research, which highlighted the impact of containment measures on IPV and the measures to be put in place in the emergency; (6) new legal provisions that have emerged in this context, including two circulars on the implementation of a risk assessment tool (COL 15/2020), and on the practice of revisiting by police services (COL 20/2020); (7) other initiatives that have developed in the context of the health crisis and that have been under study since October 2021 in the framework of a new IPV-DACOVID research programme (BELSPO Brain.be)

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. MAPPING AND INTERVIEWS WITH ACTORS<sup>4</sup>

The research undertaken in a first workpackage on professional actors dealing with IPV is based on two types of qualitative research. The first exploratory work consisted in mapping the professionals involved in dealing with situations of IPV in the three regions of the country. 'Through mapping, [we can] identify the role and position of the actors in the wider social, institutional and political context of a given society, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, thus enabling us to analyse their influences in that same context' (Falisse 2008, 24). Combating IPV mobilises different areas such as gender equality, health, justice, teaching and continuing education, etc. In addition, the federal political organisation of Belgium divides the competences in this area between different levels of governance. Identifying the actors involved in Belgium in the field of IPV was thus a prerequisite for the recruitment of respondents for the interviews in this part of the research. Started in October 2017, this descriptive mapping was fed by a review of the information available on the Internet. It resulted in an initial inventory of organisations dealing with the issue, from near or far. Within this process, an 'information sheet' was drawn up for each identified actor, with the information available on the Internet. The cartographic work was thus conceived both as a research tool and a structuring tool for the research. Indeed, it proved to be particularly useful as a base for the theoretical sampling for the interviews by identifying, among all the stakeholders, the key actors concerned by the issue and likely to share their practices, their experiences and their perceptions with regard to the implementation of public policies in this area.

In a second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the three country's regions on the basis of a common interview schedule. The guide was written by the teams that carried out the interviews (INCC, ULiège, and VUB). It focused on the knowledge, representations, practices and attitudes of the actors in the field of IPV (public policies, intersectionality, networking). The INCC and ULiège teams were responsible for conducting the interviews with the actors in French, while the VUB team was responsible for the interviews in Dutch. The key actors were recruited on the basis of descriptive mapping. The recruitment of key actors was carried out on the basis of descriptive mapping. The criterion of diversification specific to the qualitative approach was used for the selection.<sup>5</sup> This was done on the basis of the following criteria: 1) the different sectors (police, justice, psycho-medico-social (PMS)<sup>6</sup>, associations, coordination) and levels of action (national, regional, provincial, communal); 2) the distribution of interviews throughout the whole country, including both geographical areas where there is a high concentration of actors (e.g. Brussels, Liège-city and its surroundings) and others

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<sup>4</sup> Workpackage produced by Lemonne A., Mahieu V., Vanneste C. & Vergaert E., Coene G., Withaecx S., with the help of Dziwka A. & Jaillé M. to conduct the interviews

<sup>5</sup> The exception was two types of key actors, who, due to their limited number, were all interviewed (reference magistrates in the field of IPV and, on the French side, the 'Provincial Coordinations' for the IPV axis).

<sup>6</sup> We will refer to the PMS sector, but in reality the medical sector itself is very much in the minority among the professionals interviewed. It was, however, the subject of a specific analysis in Eva Vergaert's PhD dissertation (2022) (Intimate partner violence in the general practice: towards an intersectional caring).

where this concentration is lower; 3) the degree of specialisation of the actors in the field of IPV; 4) their background and status (management, coordination, fieldworkers, volunteers).<sup>7</sup>

The interviews were then transcribed for analysis. Those in French were analysed by the INCC team and those in Dutch by the VUB team. An initial analysis grid was drawn up based on the literature on public policy analysis with a more specific approach, namely intersectionality.<sup>8</sup> The interviews were then analysed using the general inductive approach (GIA) (Thomas 2006, Blais & Martineau 2006), which is characterised by a long coding process that gradually brings out the themes raised by the actors. Widely used for research and evaluation in the social and health sciences, the GIA enables “1. to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format; 2. to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure that these links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research); and 3. to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the text data.” (Thomas 2006, 238).<sup>9</sup> This method is particularly suitable for evaluative research, where specific objectives guide the collection and analysis of data (Thomas 2006, 240). It allowed us to attain our research objectives (i.e. the evaluation by the actors of public policies on IPV in Belgium) while leaving room for the emergence of unexpected results.<sup>10</sup> This work was carried out for each region and each sector of activity in order to respect specificities as far as possible. The main categories that cut across all regions and sectors were identified and made it possible to draw up an initial thematic tree, without however excluding the emergence of sectoral specificities .

The analysis of the words of key actors was also completed by the analysis of official speeches and reports (scientific, normative, etc.), and enriched by elements from the cartography and grey literature that was occasionally made available during the interviews.

### 3.2. ANALYSIS OF JUDICIAL FILES<sup>11</sup>

The 142 judicial files analysed were selected on the basis of diversification criteria based on four variables. Firstly, as geographical variable we chose one judicial district in each federal entity. Secondly, we integrated a temporal variable by focusing on three different years (2000, 2010 and 2018). Thirdly, we took care to include files based on different judicial qualifications in order to reflect the content of COL 4/2006, which extends the definition of violence between intimate partners beyond physical violence. The files indeed contain various situations: quarrels without a specific judicial qualification, physical violence (intentional assault and battery, attempted murder and homicide), sexual violence (rape) and psychological violence

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that children, who are also victims, of IPV were excluded from our field of study: the structures specialised in this area are thus not included in the mapping. This issue was nevertheless addressed on several occasions by the key actors.

<sup>8</sup> The general inductive approach was developed in particular by the INCC and the intersectionality approach by the VUB. For the analysis of Belgian public policies to prevent IPV, literature on the analysis of public policies and on gender and partner violence in general were also used.

<sup>9</sup> Free translation.

<sup>10</sup> This method is similar to Grounded Theory in that it allows for the development of new knowledge and 'theorising' (Paillé 1994) while holding the advantage of enabling researchers to limit the development of their framework or model to the presentation and description of the main categories resulting from their analysis.

<sup>11</sup> Workpackage produced by Ravier I., Van Praet S., with the help of Plavsic A. for data collection.

(harassment and threats). Lastly we varied the judicial reaction by selecting cases closed with no further action as well as cases prosecuted in court.

82% (119 on 142 cases) of the perpetrators<sup>12</sup> are men, 18% (27 out of 142 cases) are women. Two cases involved same-sex couples, both all-male couples. Many age groups are present amongst the couples, ranging from young adults to the elderly, but on average perpetrators were 39 years old and victims 38 years old. Over 60% of the protagonists are of Belgian nationality, regardless of their origin, and many couples have a mixed background (28%). Separations and reunions are somewhat frequent in the relation between the protagonists in our files: in two thirds (65%) of the files we read references of an episodic separation, either in progress or completed<sup>13</sup>. 70% of the files mention the presence of children with the couple; in total we listed 206 children in 142 files.

Grounded Theory (Paillé 1994) enabled a qualitative and inductive analysis of the files by creating a 'dense description' (Geertz 1998) of the file's narrative content and axial coding into three categories: the circumstances of reporting IPV to the police, the dynamic of IPV (the protagonists, the relationship, the forms of violence reported, the context of this violence), and the social reaction (by the police and the judicial system).

### 3.3. INTERVIEWS WITH VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS<sup>14</sup>

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 88 victims and 19 perpetrators of violence between partners in the territory of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and Flanders (2019–2020). Recruitment took place through newsletters, which were aimed at professionals in the medico-psycho-social and legal sector, posters and announcements shared on social media, as well as by word of mouth. In the FWB, no specific definition of partner violence was put on the posters in order to collect the testimonies of all those who considered themselves to be victims or perpetrators. From an intersectional perspective, we sought to reach vulnerable and marginalized populations using inclusive and accessible language (e.g. in our posters) where stigma was avoided (Gray & al 2015). All the participants were over eighteen years of age, had suffered from violence or acted violently and/or had been taken care of by a judicial and/or psycho-medico-social institution on Belgian territory. During our semi-structured interviews, which were based on a life course perspective (Band-Winterstein & Eisikovits 2014), participants were able to discuss, at their own pace, their representations and experiences of violence; perceived changes in the dynamics of violence and the process of exiting the abusive relationship(s); their needs in terms of intervention and disengagement from violence; and their opinions on public policies in Belgium. In order to assist interviewees, express themselves, a qualitative version of a life history calendar (LHC, Nelson, 2010) (Fig. 2) was used. The LHC allowed for a dynamic analysis of violence by capturing events and their sequence, as well as the temporality and the context in which the events occurred. The intersection of the semi-structured interview method with the LHC helped victims recount their narratives and researcher analyse the trajectories and processes at play. In order to achieve

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<sup>12</sup> We will speak throughout this WP of 'victims' and 'perpetrators' even if for the main part of the files these are persons where no judge confirmed these roles.

<sup>13</sup> Sometimes the separation was formalized by a divorce.

<sup>14</sup> Workpackage produced by Dziewa A. & Glowacz F., with the help of Vergaert E., Schils E., Goblet M. to conduct the interviews.



this, thematic (pencil-and-paper and Nvivo) (Smith & Sparkes 2012, Paillé & Mucchielli 2016) and process (pencil-paper) analyses were applied to the interviews. The thematic ramifications were identified through comparison with the individual life calendars so as to highlight temporality and trajectory. This process made it possible to trace the trajectory of violence and the exit from violence in stages (see figure 1). The cross-sectional analysis of these stages emphasises the dynamics, experiences, subjective representations and changes underlying the output. Moreover, NVivo software was used to allow for more precise coding and sub-coding of each unit of meaning and the emergence of new categories, broader categories and finer trees (Daigneault & Pétry 2017). In the analysis, we also applied an intersectional perspective by considering how inequalities and power dynamics contributed to the experiences of violence but also to the interaction with institutions in the trajectories. A reflective position was mobilized to confront our own prejudices, judgments and stereotypical views. The victim-perpetrator categorization was based on how the subject presented themselves when responding to the recruitment call (self-identification) and during their interviews. We spoke to people who were still confronted with IPV (time of crisis) and other in retrospective accounts (retrospection).

In this section of the report, we present emerging data from qualitative analyses of the narratives on the dynamics of exits from violence and experiences during institutional trajectories for victims and perpetrators. The figure 1 provides a breakdown of the sample in FWB and Flanders.

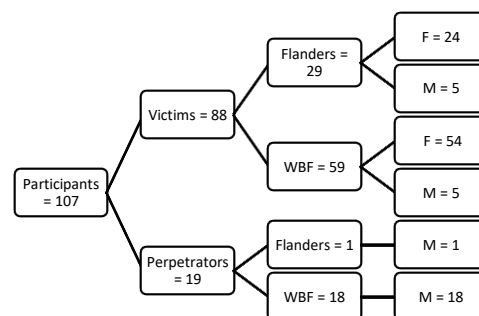


Figure 1. Interviews with victims and perpetrators. Total sample of participants. F = Female; M = Male. WBF = Wallonia-Brussels Federation

## Total sample

**Wallonia-Brussels Federation.** Seventy-seven interviews were conducted. Fifty-four women and 5 men who identified as victims, aged between 20 and 66 years. Only one participant identified themselves as gay (N = 1). Twelve respondents came from a racial minority background (they or their parents were not born in Belgium). Eighteen perpetrators responded to the call for participants, all of whom were male, aged 27 to 70, four of whom were from a racial minority background. Five subjects were met in prison for acts that were not IPV. The socio-economic status (SES) and level of education varied by sample.

**Flanders:** Twenty-nine victims and one perpetrator of IPV were interviewed. The participants were aged between 20 and 70 years old. The only perpetrator was a 50 year old man and white (caucasian). The sample of victims consisted of 24 women and five men. Three

participants described themselves as gay (N = 1) or lesbians (N = 2). Five respondents came from a racial minority background (they or their parents were not born in Belgium). The socio-economic status (SES) and level of education varied by sample.

### 3.4. ANALYSIS OF STATISTICAL DATA<sup>15</sup>

The aim of this IPV-PRO&POL research did not include a new prevalence survey, as this was planned as part of the more general Eurostat survey. It was intended to explore the potential of institutional sources other than those already known, from police or justice. The medical data of the DM-RHM<sup>16</sup> collected from all Belgian hospitals were thus examined. The codes of the ICD-10-CM classification<sup>17</sup> make it possible, in principle since 1999, to provide information on cases of IPV that led to a trip to the hospital. However, this approach was abandoned due to access constraints and the difficulty of linking the information with the socio-demographic characteristics of the victims.

Despite the significant limitations of the overall statistical information available (Vanneste & al. 2012), in particular with regard to victims, including their gender (Vanneste 2020), Belgium has a database of registrations made at the level of the correctional prosecutors' offices which, since 2006, has been enriched with unique information on IPV situations. The statistical approach on IPV therefore focused on the richest available data and the most promising for new scientific results. Due to previous research, we already had very detailed information on the cohort of nearly 40,000 suspects reported in 2010 to the prosecutors' offices for at least one case of IPV<sup>18</sup>. A whole range of judicial variables (type of IPV offence, other offences, antecedents, judicial decisions, recidivism) was already available and analysed, completed by some basic socio-demographic information (gender, age, nationality) as recorded in the public prosecutors' database (Vanneste 2016, 2017).

In order to draw up a more complete and detailed socio-demographic profile of the population reported for IPV, the research focused on the possibility of matching these judicial data with those from another (demographic) database, that of the 2011 population census. These data make it possible to characterize people according to their age, sex and nationality, but also according to socio-economic variables such as the level of education, the situation on the labour market and the housing conditions (property, size, etc.) or according to the household situation. Geographically, these variables make it possible to draw up the socio-demographic context at the level of judicial districts and municipalities.

As the judicial data had been anonymised for privacy reasons, the procedure first consisted of cross-referencing the two databases using the year of birth and the street name (as recorded in the public prosecutors' database). The lack of automation of address encoding<sup>19</sup> and therefore the diversity of writings for a same address implied manual processing of standardisation on a case-by-case basis for about 50% of the cohort. It was then possible to link each street to the corresponding statistical sector and then, using a key that included the

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<sup>15</sup> Workpackage produced by Sanderson J.-P & Vanneste C., with the help of Plavsic A. for data collection

<sup>16</sup> DM-RHM - Medical Data-Minimum Hospital Summary.

<sup>17</sup> International Classification of Diseases - 10th revision - Clinical Modification.

<sup>18</sup> This information was extracted from the database of correctional prosecution offices, College of Public Prosecutors, Statistical Analysts <https://www.om-mp.be/stat/corr/start/f/home.html>

<sup>19</sup> As it could be from access to the National Register.

sector/municipality code, date of birth, sex and marital status, to match the two databases. From a total of 39,438 people composing the cohort, 34,584 were found in the National Register, i.e. 87.7% of the initial sample.

Analyses of the profile of the cohort, descriptive statistics and logistic regressions, were then made with particular focus on socio-economic variables by using a multidimensional indicator of social positioning (Eggerickx & al. 2018, 2020). This index was also employed for spatial analyses. Finally, it served to analyse judicial decisions according to the social positioning of suspects reported for IPV.

### 3.5. ANALYSIS OF HOMICIDE (FEMINICIDE)<sup>20</sup>

#### 3.5.1. Introduction

In terms of counting partner homicides (IPH), these cases are still poorly identified by official statistics, which rarely provide information on the motives for homicide (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000, Kimmel 2002). But what emerges from the available statistics on the relationship between victims and perpetrators is that a significant portion of lethal violence against women takes place in a domestic environment (UNODC 2014).

In Belgium, the blog Stop féminicide<sup>21</sup>, created by associations dealing with IPV has undertaken to count IPH victims on the basis of publicly available information: reporting in the daily press. This data has been carefully collected since 2017 but is limited to women (and children) killed in the context of a family dispute. The data reported in the press is very rich: we have the names, surnames, ages of the victims and, depending on the case, information on the context, the victim and the presumed perpetrator. This information comes from the family, the police and the public prosecutor's office, and even from other sources. The blog Stop féminicide lists the victims and refers to press articles. Apart from this source, there are potentially two others: death certificates and data from public prosecutors' offices.

#### 3.5.2. Death certificates: an inconclusive lead

In Belgium, each death occurring on the territory is the subject of a death certificate before being entered in the Civil Status Register. This report is completed by the doctor who reports the death. Since 1998, causes of death have been coded according to the ICD-10-CM nomenclature developed by the WHO as a revision of the previous ICD-9-CM version. The change from one to the other is explained by the possibility and necessity of better documenting certain causes. Thus, the ICD-10-CM classification adds two categories relating to domestic violence. The Belgian ICD-10-CM user manual states that one of the reasons for this change is the fact that abuse of adults and children is under-reported and under-diagnosed.<sup>22</sup> In addition, it is possible to combine several causes. If the relationship with the spouse is not the immediate cause of death, but the physician considers or finds a relationship, it is possible to indicate this by using one of the available codes.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Workpackage produced by Rousseaux X., Sanderson J-P., Plavsic A. & Eggerickx T.

<sup>21</sup> <http://stopfeminicide.blogspot.com/p/une-de-trop-eeen-is-te-veel.html>

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.health.belgium.be/sites/default/files/uploads/fields/fpshealth\\_theme\\_file/manuelicd10bev0.1beta.pdf](https://www.health.belgium.be/sites/default/files/uploads/fields/fpshealth_theme_file/manuelicd10bev0.1beta.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Z630, Difficulties in dealing with spouse or partner (Spouse, partner conflict) ; Y060, Abandonment and neglect by spouse or partner; Y070, Other abuse by spouse or partner and Z635, Difficulties related to family breakdown by separation and divorce (Spouse, partner problem with divorce or separation).

The manual makes it clear that the cause can only be what the physician has indicated, it is impossible to code anything other than what they have indicated even if it is found that the facts show homicide. Bear in mind that child and adult abuse codes are assigned only when the physician documents the abuse; the coder can never interpret a narrative description as abuse without the physician confirming it.<sup>24</sup> With these limits in mind, we worked on the basis of death certificates for the period 1998-2016. Overall, for the entire period, there were 170 deaths for which the partner was implicated.

*Table I. Number of deaths in which the spouse/partner is implicated (1998-2016)*

Causes of death	Number
Marital conflict or divorce	168
Abusive spouse	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>170</b>

Source: Death certificates (1998-2016), authors' calculations

Of these 170 deceased, 15% were women and 85% men. This result is the complete opposite of what one might expect. The reason for this result lies in the details of the causes of death; the majority of the cases identified (156 out of 170) correspond to suicides linked to marital conflicts (Table II). Suicide rates are generally higher for men than for women (Hawton 2000, Canetto & Sakinofski 1998).

*Table II. Causes of death in which the spouse/partner is involved (1998-2016)*

	Natural cause	Other accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined	Total
Marital conflict or divorce	7	1	156	2	2	168
Abusive spouse	1	0	0	1	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>170</b>

Source: Death certificates (1998-2016), authors' calculations

The obvious conclusion is that death certificates do not identify cases of spousal homicide. This result, disappointing as it is, is the direct consequence of the procedure for filling in death certificates. These are essentially filled out by the doctor who notes the death. The latter intervenes at an early stage in relation to the judicial procedure. The doctor's role is to establish the apparent causes of death, not to identify the culprit; this is the responsibility of the courts. As it stands, however, the procedure for drawing up death certificates does not provide for a correction by the court at any stage of the process. This step would be extremely useful for obtaining more complete statistical information on domestic violence. In the case of a violent death, the court, after rendering its judgment, would have the fact that the perpetrator was a third party, the spouse (ex-spouse) or another relative, mentioned in the death certificate.

Another recent phenomenon, since the 2000s, is the low recourse to autopsies in the case of suspicious deaths. In Belgium, autopsies are performed for only 1% of deaths. According to a study by two forensic doctors (Beauthier 2004a b & 2009, Van de Woorde 2003), 75 to 100 homicides escape identification each year in Belgium, due to a very low rate of post-mortem

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.health.belgium.be/sites/default/files/uploads/fields/fpshealth\\_theme\\_file/manuelicd10bev0.1beta.pdf](https://www.health.belgium.be/sites/default/files/uploads/fields/fpshealth_theme_file/manuelicd10bev0.1beta.pdf)

investigation<sup>25</sup>. In 2005 this decline in autopsies led to a draft law to modernise the post-mortem examination<sup>26</sup>. In its explanatory memorandum, the lawmakers make the following points: there are no official statistics in our country, but according to some estimates, autopsies are performed in only 1 or 2% of deaths, which is in sharp contrast to what is needed for quality improvement, i.e. an autopsy in 10% of cases. Autopsy rates are higher in other countries: 8% in Germany, 12% in the USA, 19% in Switzerland, 24% in England and even over 30% in Scandinavian countries. A case in 2010 highlights the effects of these weaknesses in post-mortem investigation on homicides. The death of Brenda Rollier was treated as a suicide for two years in the absence of an autopsy, before it turned out to be a murder committed in the context of an intimate relationship between partners<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, in the parliamentary debates, an allegation that has not been answered by the Ministry of Justice estimates that 10% of suspicious deaths each year are incorrectly assessed on the death certificate. At this stage, there is only one conclusion to be drawn: the data contained in the death certificates do not make it possible to identify partner homicides.

### **3.5.3. Data from the stop femicide blog**

As a reminder, the blog lists femicides but also child victims of homicide in a family context, based on information from the press. The methodology is not explained. The information is not sourced, and it is not possible to know whether it is cross-referenced and verified on the basis of several newspapers. However, almost systematically a link is made to a press article mentioning the facts. The information is updated without any trace of the modifications and the figure therefore changes from day to day.

The identifications produced by the femicide blog were checked via all the periodical press available on the subject, mainly the websites of the French-, Dutch- and German-speaking dailies in Belgium and the news aggregation sites accessible via the press rooms and university information sites. However, the data do not include all femicides<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, the blog does not mention the few IPH committed by women against an (ex-)spouse. Finally, the 'stop femicide' blog offers a slightly reduced version of the scope of IPH, since it does not take into account IPH committed by women against their (ex-)spouses, nor those committed by men against men in an intimate relationship.

### **3.5.4. Data from public prosecutors' offices**

The difficulty of accessing judicial homicide files, the uncertainties of distinguishing between attempted and completed homicides, and the impossibility of measuring lethal violence in the context of IPV have led associations to set up a count, based on cases reported in the press. These movements have also led the authorities (particularly the judiciary) to improve the quality of the data collected by their services. Thus, the gradual integration of judicial

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<sup>25</sup> *La Libre Belgique*, Décédé de mort naturelle, Vraiment ? , 30 juillet 2011.

<sup>26</sup> *Sénat de Belgique*, 8 mars 2005.

<sup>27</sup> *De Morgen*, 20 janvier 2016.

<sup>28</sup> For example, that of Solange H. (82 years old), committed by her son Frank P. in 2017, belatedly discovered, is not included.

databases should make it possible to obtain more reliable data on homicides committed in the context of intimate partnerships.

Indeed, the computerisation of justice data has been underway for some thirty years. There is now a database (the MaCH database) that makes it possible to measure recorded events that are likely to lead to judicial intervention. This database is widely used in the criminal justice system of public prosecutors' offices. Nevertheless, although this operational database can be used by analysts from the Ministry of Justice to provide statistics based on standardised and corrected extractions, it does not correspond to the standards of validation and verification of statistical data. The completeness of the data varies according to time and district. Coding practices remain very heterogeneous in the articulation of data collection frameworks among various levels of the criminal justice system (police, public prosecutors' offices, examining magistrates, courts and tribunals), the varying degree to which the context of recorded events is taken into account depending on the location, and changes in legal frameworks and societal concerns. These conditions do not always make it possible to respond with the desired precision to the questions that citizens raise with their representatives in parliamentary chambers. This is particularly the case with the issue of IPV and IPH which has received a great deal of media attention in recent years.

### 3.6. VALIDATION SURVEY (DELPHI)<sup>29</sup>

The validation survey of the research results develops an approach that takes into account the complexity of the network of actors: invitations to the survey were sent to persons involved in associations, public prosecutors' offices, police areas, public centres for social action (CPAS – OCMW) and judicial. Taking an interpretive analysis approach (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003), the actors were encouraged to answer to the survey by sharing their experiences and developing arguments based on their own activities. The discourses were thus rich in information about practices, enabling the analysts to highlight argumentative and critical logics as well as proposals. The two-round survey with intermediate feedback to the participants created the conditions for a form of deliberation neutralising power positions and institutional anchors (Mukherjee & al. 2015). The practice-based approach is based on a strong hypothesis: '*arguing for the essential unity of knowing and acting and a focus on practice in policy analysis*' on the basis of the propositions of Hajer & Wagenaar (2003) which underlines the problems encountered by policy analysts in reporting on a decentred, highly pluralistic, unpredictable and often unknowable policy environment. They proposed a deliberative policy analysis built on the three pillars of interpretation, practice-orientation and deliberation, anchored on pragmatist roots. Hajer & Wagenaar propose that policy analysis describes the integration of 'the actor, his or her beliefs and values, resources and external environment in one "activity system" in which social, individual and material aspects are interdependent'. It is a question of drawing on the situated histories and personal positions of those involved in order to understand this dynamic, which Matland (1995) presents as '*experimental policy making ... (where) contextual conditions dominate the process*'. Far from denouncing an absence of centralised harmonisation, the analyst considers each site as the local manifestation of an experimental implementation of public action, feeding a learning dynamic.

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<sup>29</sup> Workpackage produced by Thiry A. & Fallon C.

To ensure consistency in the perspectives mobilised by the respondents, the questions were based on the implementation of targeted public action instruments, presented as '*a socio-technical device that organises specific social relationships between public authorities and recipients, which are value-laden, nourished by an interpretation of the social, and a precise conception of the envisaged mode of regulation*' (Lascoumes 2006). An instrument mobilises a set of coordinated rules and procedures that organise interactions and behaviour and create a stable framework of knowledge that allows for anticipation and reduces uncertainty when actors collaborate. But it is also '*the bearer of a concrete conception of the political/society relationship and supported by a conception of regulation. It is a "compendium of knowledge about social power and how to exercise it"*.' This is what the interpretive approach highlights.

## **4. SCIENTIFIC RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1. THE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS WITH ACTORS**

#### **4.1.1. Mapping**

The mapping work provided a picture of the structure of the network of Belgian actors in IPV prevention strategies, by identifying and locating the sectors of activity. It has also helped to show how the organisations are linked to other official services or bodies, thus allowing us to see the impact of our state structure on the development of policies in Wallonia (including the German-speaking community), Flanders and the Brussels-Capital Region. This cartography revealed the diversity in management of IPV (in particular Wallonia Brussels Federation (WBF) /Region and the Flemish Community) and its increasing complexity over time (more and more services coming under various authorities with competence in this field). It also shed some light on its dynamics by showing, for example, either a massive investment or an under-investment, depending on the geographical entity (see below).

#### **4.1.2. Analysis of interviews with French-speaking actors<sup>30</sup>**

##### **4.1.2.1 Introduction**

The analysis is based on 50 interviews with 61 key actors in Wallonia Brussels Federation WBF in 2018 and 2019 (table III). These actors come from five different sectors of activity: the police, the judiciary, the parajudicial<sup>31</sup>, the psycho-medico-social (PMS) sector and the coordination bodies. For the police sector, police officers and members of the police victim support services<sup>32</sup> were interviewed. At the judicial level, we met with the 'reference' public prosecutors in the area of IPV. No trial judge or investigating judge was interviewed. The analysis of the police sector also drew from examination of information from *Committee P's monitoring survey on Reception and Assistance to Victims of Domestic Violence (2015)*, the *2019 survey on Police Care for Victims (GPI 58)* as well as informal documentation collected

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<sup>30</sup> Analyses conducted by Lemonne A., Mahieu V. & Vanneste C.

<sup>31</sup> The parajudicial sector includes professionals from the Houses of Justice who provide support to victims at the level of the public prosecutor's office, and those who monitor perpetrators subject to conditions imposed by magistrates in the context of a penal mediation procedure, probation, an alternative to preventive detention, a provisional or a conditional release (parole).

<sup>32</sup> These workers are integrated into the police services, which have two distinct professional statuses: 1) operational, composed of police officers, and 2) administrative and logistical, composed of civilians. The composition of the police victim assistance services is different in each police zone, but they are mainly composed of civilians with diverse profiles (social workers, psychologists, criminologists, etc.).

on training courses organised by police academies. The psycho-medico-social (PMS)<sup>33</sup> sector is made up primarily of associations specialised in the field of IPV (victims and perpetrators), generalist associations (public or private) that deal with victims of IPV or that, over time, have come to be specialised in this area (OCMWs, generalist shelters, ambulatory services, family planning centres, etc.), as well as associations working on the primary prevention of gender violence. Some interviews were conducted with several respondents, which explains why the number of interviewees is higher than the number of interviews. They lasted between 1 and 2.5 hours and, once fully transcribed, correspond to the coding and analysis of 1187 pages.

An analysis of the interviews made it possible to document the history, the structuring and increasingly complex management of IPV. It also allowed for better understanding of some of the current issues in the implementation of policies and the practices that result from them.

As in many Western countries, domestic violence was long relegated to the private sphere. No public policy was devoted to it and it was not identified as a problem requiring state intervention (Glowacz & Vanneste 2017, Vanneste 2017).

*Table III. Distribution of the number of interviewees between sectors of activity, according to the gender of the interviewees, the number of interviews and the number of pages of the transcribed interviews*

Sector of activity	Number of interviewees			Number of interviews	Number of pages of
	<i>W</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Total</i>		
<b>Police</b>	6	1	7	6	154
<b>Judiciary</b>	7	2	9	9	307
<b>Para-judiciary</b>	10	0	10	7	107
<b>Psycho-medical-social</b>	23	4	27	21	525
<b>Coordination bodies</b>	7	1	8	7	100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>1187</b>

In the WBF, in the late 1970s feminist activists, on their own initiative and without any intervention or public support, the first three shelters for battered women in French-speaking Belgium (in Brussels, Liège and La Louvière). These shelters were quickly fully occupied and were a great success. Gradually, this activism bore fruit and the issue entered into the political agenda, mainly thanks to women politicians. Quite quickly, in 1985 Miet Smet initiated the first policy for equality between women and men and combating violence against women; a policy in line with feminist positions. In 1997, Anne-Marie Lizin obtained a modification of the penal code in order to punish physical violence committed within the couple with aggravated penalties<sup>34</sup>. Some associations that did not claim to be specifically feminist also gradually began to take care of IPV victims (shelters, outpatient services, etc.) within the framework of more generalist missions, although they are not publicly recognised in this field. In 2001,

<sup>33</sup> We refer to the PMS sector, but in reality, the medical sector itself is very much in the minority among the professionals interviewed. It was, however, the subject of a specific analysis in Eva Vergaert's PhD (Intimate partner violence in the general practice: towards an intersectional caring).

<sup>34</sup> Law of 24 November 1997 to combat violence within the couple, M.B., 6 February 1998.



Laurette Onkelinx initiated the first Belgian 'Plan to combat violence against women' (NAP). Gradually, public aid came to support these initiatives and enabled these organisations to diversify/specify their aid offer, hire female workers and become more professional (Coruzzi 2019).

Since the 2000s, these national action plans (NAP) have been renewed every four years and attempt to coordinate the initiatives and measures taken by different authorities and sectors such as the police, justice, health, PMS assistance, education, etc. This coordination is especially important as the Belgian institutional structure implies a strong division of competences in this area between different institutions and different levels of power. In 2006, an official definition of IPV was given in the NAP.<sup>35</sup> That same year, the judiciary, particularly under the influence of a woman public prosecutor who was sensitive to the issue, was given two circulars defining a criminal policy in this area, described as 'zero tolerance'. The criminal justice system was indeed critiqued at the time, particularly by feminists, as being the weak link in the management of domestic violence issues, because of its lack of reactivity in this area. Many situations remained ignored, trivialized or very weakly prosecuted (Coruzzi 2019). These circulars defined the phenomenon and clarified the roles of the police and the public prosecutor in this area.<sup>36</sup> At the international level, the Istanbul 'Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence' (Council of Europe 2011), ratified by Belgium in 2016, underlines the gendered dimension of violence against women, including domestic violence<sup>37</sup>. In this context as well, the number of people involved in dealing with IPV situations has increased in WBF through various decrees subsidising shelters and outpatient services as well as continuing education<sup>38</sup>. Coordination bodies have also been created, along with Resource Centres (Pôles de Ressources) that provide training for professionals involved in the management of IPV situations (Simoens & Jacob 2019). These initiatives have certainly

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<sup>35</sup> This definition is as follows: 'Violence in intimate relationships is a set of behaviours, acts and attitudes of one of the partners or ex-partners that aim to control and dominate the other. It includes verbal, physical, sexual and economic aggression, threats or coercion that are repeated or are likely to be repeated and that affect the integrity of the other person and even his or her socio-professional integration. This violence affects not only the victim, but also other family members, including children. It is a form of intra-family violence. It appears that in the vast majority of cases, the perpetrators of such violence are men and the victims are women. Violence in intimate relationships is the manifestation, in the private sphere, of the unequal power relations between women and men still at work in our society' (free translation)

<sup>36</sup> COL 3 and 4 of 2006. Violence in couples is defined as 'any form of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence between spouses or persons who are cohabiting or have cohabited and who are or have been in a lasting emotional and sexual relationship' (free translation) <https://www.om-mp.be/fr/savoir-plus/circulaires>

<sup>37</sup> The compliance of Belgian initiatives in this area is subject to evaluation both by civil society and by a group of experts, GREVIO. At the time of the interviews with the French-speaking actors, the evaluation reports had not yet been published but we were able to take them into account in our analyses (State report 18 February 2019, First evaluation report 21 September 2020, Recommendations 18 December 2020) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/country-monitoring-work>

<sup>38</sup> See among others the numerous subsidy decrees : Commission communautaire française de la Région Bruxelles-Capitale, Décret du 27 mai 1999 relatif à l'octroi de l'agrément et de subventions aux maisons d'accueil et Arrêté 2000/279 du Collège de la Commission communautaire française de la Région Bruxelles-Capitale, portant application du décret du 27 mai 1999 relatif à l'octroi de l'agrément et de subventions aux maisons d'accueil, 20 juillet 2000 ; Code wallon de l'Action sociale et de la Santé, partie décrétable, articles 66 à 117 ; Code réglementaire wallon de l'Action sociale et de la Santé, articles 69 à 132 ; La législation concernant les services et dispositifs d'accompagnement des violences entre partenaires et des violences fondées sur le genre se trouve dans le Code wallon de l'Action sociale et de la Santé (CWASS, articles 149/13 à 149/19) ; le Code réglementaire wallon de l'Action sociale et de la Santé (CRWASS, articles 235 à 235/12) etc.

led to the gradual structuring of the field of IPV care but also to its increasing complexity in WBF.<sup>39</sup>

Documenting these developments provides the necessary framework for presenting the **three key issues** emerging from the analysis of the interviews with key actors in WBF: The first is related to the **dissensions or cleavages** among the sectors regarding the definitions and conceptions of violence between (ex-)intimate partners. The second is more about the **meaning of their intervention and the challenges** that have arisen from dealing with IPV in their respective organisations and institutions. The third deals with the **consequences** that these conceptions, rationalities and intervention practices have on the **networking** advocated by both public policies and field workers. Finally, the **conclusions** will focus on the dynamics at work in the field of IPV management between different sectors and/or types of actors.

#### 4.1.2.2 First issue: Contested definitions and conceptions of intimate partner violence

As we have seen, in 2006 the second NAP adopted an official Belgian definition of the phenomenon; the judiciary also defined IPV by means of circulars, and in 2016 the Istanbul Convention provided a new definitional pool. The analysis of these texts has shown that, while the official Belgian definition (NAP 2006) and the definition of the Istanbul Convention all include situations of IPV in a relationship of domination both at an individual level - between the protagonists - and at a more structural level - historical domination of women by men in society -, the official judicial definition differs. It does not refer to the notions of domination and *structural* unequal power relations between women and men in society, which are dear to feminist approaches. Nevertheless, COL 4 sets out a number of signals or characteristics that should guide police and judicial intervention. In so doing, it attempts to provide analysis and evaluation tools to enable police officers and magistrates to better understand the situation as a whole, without being strictly limited to the isolated acts of violence observed or reported, which do not always reflect the continuum of violence or the domination at work between the partners. Among these characteristics and signals, the mechanism of domination appears in the background at the level of police intervention, and more explicitly at the level of intervention by the public prosecutor. The police are effectively ordered to contact the public prosecutor when some characteristics are found, including a climate of terror, isolation, restricted freedom of movement or the victim's deteriorated psychological state. These elements illustrate the exercise of power by the perpetrator over the victim and the impact of this power on the victim, criteria regularly used to identify a situation of violence and differentiate it from a more symmetrical conflict (Johnson 2008, 2014, Mélan 2017, Beghin & Laouar 2020). The prosecutors, at their level, must assess each situation on the basis of certain criteria<sup>40</sup>, including 'the existence of elements that reveal the perpetrator's (desire for) domination of the victim' or 'the victim's state of weakness or submission in relation to the perpetrator'<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Later, the Act of 15 May 2012 on temporary residence ban in case of domestic violence (M.B., 1 October 2012), as well as other circulars of the College of Procurators General (including COL 04/2018 on 'Case consultation and professional secrecy' and COL 15/2020 'to generalise the use of a front-line risk assessment tool for partner violence by the police and public prosecutors' offices') completed this normative arsenal.

<sup>40</sup> The other criteria are: (1) the seriousness of the violence and its physical or psychological consequences; (2) the repetition of the complaints; (3) the existence of a criminal history of domestic or other violence and (6) the state of danger in which the victim or her children find themselves.

<sup>41</sup> Free translation.

Moreover, the circular refers to the 'cycle of violence' model theorised by L. Walker (1979) which does not directly evoke the notions of domination and power relationships but stresses the circularity, repetition and chronology of the stages of partner violence that contribute to establishing and reinforcing the authority, control, hold and ascendancy of the perpetrator over the victim, in other words, many of the constituent elements of this notion of partner domination.

The notion of domination is therefore not absent from the judicial logic, which attempts, via the directives given to the police and the prosecutors, to provide these actors with the means to apprehend it. However, it is nevertheless confined to a microsocial and interactional level. Indeed, it does not place violence between (ex-)intimate partners in the context of structural domination of women by men, but in the context of domination by (certain) individual perpetrators over their victims.

These different levels are important as they shed light on the nuances observed among the perceptions and definitions that the different professionals have of the phenomenon of IPV. In fact, these differences can be explained by these actors' understanding and/or their adherence or not to a feminist (or gendered) reading of IPV<sup>42</sup>.

A) Understanding and/or adherence or not to a feminist (or gendered) view of IPV

An analysis of the interviews shows that what indubitably raises the most questions and is the source of a good number of debates, even tensions, is the **'feminist' (or 'gendered') dimension** of the interpretation of IPV, which is indisputable for some, but needs to be qualified and relativised for others.

Indeed, the respondents did not frequently refer to the official Belgian definition of 2006 or to the Istanbul Convention. It is mainly mentioned by members of feminist or gender sociology associations encountered in the field of PMS care or among the actors in charge of coordination at local level. The actors of the judicial, police, PMS sectors or the coordinating bodies do not contest these inequalities, but they seem to downplay them and put them into perspective, attributing them to certain communities or, in any case, expressing a certain unease about this approach which, in their view, conceals both the violence committed by women against their male partners and the reciprocal violence, as well as that observed in same-sex couples.

While some tend to prefer a **'gender' approach** - which is 'broader' than the feminist approach because it includes violence against men and women on the basis of their sex or gender - others prefer a **'neutral' approach** of more egalitarian relationships between partners. In both proposals, the intention seems to be to qualify or discuss the feminist interpretation of the phenomenon according to which IPV is a manifestation of the persisting unequal power relations between women and men in society. The discourse also sometimes shows a strong

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<sup>42</sup> It is not, however, linked to the gender of the respective actors, because most of the people we met were women (see description of the sample).

*a priori* attitude towards a feminist vision, described as caricatured, radical, even outdated, but also little known, understood or debated by the actors we met.<sup>43</sup>

B) Variable adhesion to the theoretical models diffused in the field

Beyond the conceptions of IPV as a manifestation of persisting unequal power relations between women and men in society, a tension also arises when there is a place - or a need - for the respondents to refer to one or other of the theoretical models widely disseminated in WBF in the aim to enable actors to understand the IPV phenomenon: the 'Cycle of Violence' (Walker 1979) and the 'Conjugal Domination Process' (CDP) (Riendeau & Tremblay 2019, Tremblay & al. 2002).

The first, **Walker's cycle of violence** (1979), which has already been presented, is annexed to the Col 4/2006 circular, which enhances its legitimisation in the eyes of police and judicial actors<sup>44</sup>. The second, the **Conjugal Domination Process (CDP)**<sup>45</sup>, developed in Quebec and less widely disseminated internationally than the first, is used and disseminated mainly by French-speaking professionals. The CDP was conceived by Quebec psycho-social workers and imported by French-speaking Belgian actors who have long specialised in IPV. It has been widely distributed in WBF among the actors dealing with IPV, in particular via the Resource Centres (resulting from a collaboration between associations that have long been specialised in work with victims of IPV on the one hand and perpetrators on the other). It is a tool for assessing the safety of victims that promotes a systemic and dynamic approach integrating all the protagonists concerned by the situation of violence, namely the perpetrator, the victim, the children and the (protection) network (Lemonne & Mahieu 2017). This model is based in particular on the distinction between violence between partners ('intimate terrorism') and couple conflict ('situational violence'), derived from **Johnson's typology of violence** (Johnson 1995, 2006), which is internationally recognised. Johnson initially distinguished two types of violence in couples, 'patriarchal terrorism' and 'common couple violence' (Johnson, 1995), to which he later added a third type, 'violent resistance' (Johnson 2006, 2008), which has been much less mentioned by the respondents. The first type refers to systematic male violence that terrorises the family. The male partner works to gain and maintain power over his partner. The second refers to occasional outbursts of violence by either partner that do not

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<sup>43</sup> This categorisation of approaches is rarely presented in these terms in the respondents' discourse but can be cautiously deduced from their words and the arguments they put forward. Thus, when they stress the importance of also taking into account violence committed by women against their male partners and the existence of reciprocal violence, they seem to be mobilising the neutral approach. When they more clearly refute the feminist view of patriarchal domination, this neutral approach is clearer. If the actors, without refuting this domination, draw attention to the importance of widening the spectrum to all forms of violence against women, or even to all forms of gender-based violence, it is indeed this gender-based reading that is put forward. However, on the basis of the interviews, it is not possible to state that each person we met clearly and unequivocally claimed to have one or the other approach, with the exception of the members of associations in the psycho-social field with a feminist allegiance.

<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that the competing study by Straus et al (1980), which at the time was positioned at the top of the scientific citation scale as the first large-scale study of a national representative sample, was absent from reference framework mentioned by the respondents. The study came to very different conclusions from Walker's, based on the finding of a high proportion of two-way violence (49%), and a proportion of violence against men that is almost equal in number - but not in nature - to that against women (27%). They suggest that abusive relationships are perpetuated rather by a spiral and escalation between the behaviour of the two partners ('if hit, hit back') on the one hand, and by the type of socialisation at family level and the learning of violence that takes place there (Rothenberg, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> *Processus de domination conjugale* (PDC)

involve a power/domination relationship between them. It can be committed by both men and women, but the violence by the former is likely to have more serious consequences. The third and final type, 'violent resistance', refers to violence perpetrated by victims of intimate terrorism to counter or neutralise their partner's violence and therefore, most often, to violence by female victims against their violent male partners. The first type, 'intimate terrorism', characterised by the relationship of domination, 'refers to situations of conjugal violence highlighted by feminist researchers'<sup>46</sup> (Lapierre & Côté 2014, 72) and by shelter workers for battered women. Although the scientific literature proposes other relatively similar typologies with certain nuances (Deslauriers & Cusson 2014), it is Johnson's that seems to have had the greatest echo among practitioners.

The majority of respondents in all sectors refer to the cycle of violence. Professionals usually mention it to explain the ambivalence of the victim, her return to the perpetrator or the cyclical and repetitive nature of violence. It therefore seems that the model of the "cycle of violence" model was theoretically acquired by all the actors we met. The professionals also often refer to the difference between 'conjugal violence' involving domination by one partner over the other, and 'couple conflict' (also known as situational violence where the conflict is symmetrical), a distinction associated more with the CDP model. These actors also seem, at least theoretically, to have well integrated the inter-relational dimension, as many of them refer to this distinction.

On the other hand, the CPD tool for assessing the safety of victims has received more mixed support, not so much in terms of its relevance as in virtue of its more complex application in the eyes of the practitioners we met. Many of them often refer to the distinction between conflict and violence and try to take it into account in their daily work, but some police officers, prosecutors and members of the less specialised PMS sector express difficulties in making it operational in order to analyse the situations and to adapt it to the aims of their intervention.

This last observation calls for an examination of the modes of intervention followed in the various sectors and the challenges they imply in relation to certain political and managerial priorities.

#### 4.1.2.3. Second issue. Differentiated intervention logics in the field of IPV according to the sectors

The IPV issue was initially placed on the political agenda by feminist activists, who were also behind the first shelters for battered women. Subsequently, its emergence as a public problem was accompanied by a gradual structuring and complexification of the field of action surrounding it. Thus, institutions and actors from different sectors had to adapt their practices to this new phenomenon, leading to an evolution of the police and judicial - but also psycho-medical and social - handling of the phenomenon.

As we have seen, at the judicial level (police and justice), the actors have tried to translate interest in this issue into an operational level by adopting a criminal policy on the subject which has evolved and been re-clarified several times over the years. The 2006 circulars introduced what has been called a 'zero tolerance' policy at the level of the public prosecutor's office; they

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<sup>46</sup> Free translation.

provided the judiciary with a broader definition of IPV and the possibility of using an index (42: 'family dispute') to record behaviour reported to or observed by the police or the prosecutor that did not (necessarily) meet conditions to constitute an offence, but give an indication of a risk situation<sup>47</sup>. These circulars also attempted to provide the police and prosecutors with an embryonic form of risk factor identification and assessment of IPV situations (Leclercq 2012, Lemonne & Mahieu 2017). More recently, circular COL 15/2020 introduced a new risk assessment tool to be generalised (Beghin & Laouar 2020) and circular 20/2020, issued in the context of the health crisis, generalised the practice of 'revisiting' by the police service in the types of situations more specifically defined. Degrees of priority have also been established at the judicial level, making IPV a priority in criminal policies for a time. The CPD model and the evaluation of situations and risks that it allows have been widely disseminated among judicial actors, but also among more generalist PMS actors or those who have recently arrived in the field and are historically less aware of the problem of domestic violence.

At the psycho-medical-social level, the clinical approach has also been adapted. Over time, the intervention has become less dichotomous, as it has gradually been extended to include the follow-up and training of perpetrators of domestic violence, with a view to making them more responsible (Libert & al. 2013, Vanneste 2021). Bridges have also been built between specialised victim support associations and those that deal with the perpetrators of IPV.

Coordination bodies covering the various sectors have been set up to ensure the coherence of public policies and to promote networking around concrete actions and consultation meetings. These developments have contributed to debates on the distinction between violence (where a situation of control exists) and conflict (more situational violence), to setting up of tools to understand it, as well as to the transfer of this knowledge between actors within the same sector but also between sectors. However, the results of the research show that there are still a number of more structural issues facing all the stakeholders. As in other areas where a multidisciplinary and intersectoral network approach is required (Franssen & al. 2007), these relate, on the one hand, to the intervention rationalities specific to each of the sectors that have to collaborate and, on the other hand, to a certain number of difficulties inherent in the question of 'political priorities but also managerial logics' present in each of the sectors and which influence the possibilities and means of each of the sectors concerned.

#### A) Judicial logic versus aid logic

IPV is presumed to be handled in a multidisciplinary and integrated manner. However, the transversal analysis of the interviews shows that the intervention logic of each sector can create tensions when it comes to joint handling of the same situation. In particular, it is possible to identify two logics that are especially hard to conciliate: the judicial (criminal) logic and the aid logic.

**Police officers and public prosecutors** adopt a judicial rationality that - on the basis of evidence, traces and clues - leads them to seek, identify and gather the constituent elements of an offence as defined by the criminal law. It is then up to them to qualify the event or behaviour on the basis of the information they have been able to gather and decide on the

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<sup>47</sup> For example : a domestic scene during which one (or two) of the partners destroys their furniture.

direction the case should take i.e. whether to drop the case for lack of sufficient evidence, to try to remove the perpetrator to protect the victim, or to sentence the perpetrator.

The police in particular, but also the judiciary, are confronted with a wide range of very diverse situations, sometimes reported by the victim herself, sometimes by a partner who considers herself a victim and who gradually reveals herself to be a perpetrator of violence, sometimes by concerned relatives or neighbours, by institutions and services aware of the situation, by children or witnesses, by police officers, etc. It is also important to add that these actors (police officers and public prosecutors) are often called on to intervene in times of crisis and urgency. They are also called on to adopt a neutral and objective position in order to clarify the situation impartially before they take a decision that is binding on the individuals concerned and one that will often have serious consequences. These professionals must therefore be careful to respect legal and procedural guarantees before intervening. Police officers and magistrates are often required to hear several versions of the facts, those of the primary parties involved - the partners - but also those of their children and any witnesses. Furthermore, except for those police officers and magistrates designated as references in the field of domestic violence, the majority of these professionals lack specific training in the phenomenon and do not have the same sensitivity or openness to the sociological and psychological contributions in this field. Thus, they are occasionally led to take a decision quickly on the basis of the elements available (sometimes very succinct) with the only analytical tool being the legal categories and the strict framework of objectivist and dichotomising criminal law. The particularity of 'specialised' professionals in the police, judicial and even parajudicial sectors is that they are trained and receptive to the distinction between (symmetrical) conflict and (domination) violence, but they are also much more reticent about the structural dimension that denounces the patriarchal domination in which this violence is embedded. At the inter-relational level, these professionals generally stress the importance of symmetrical violence, which can be partially explained by the fact that they are familiar with a wide variety of situations and hear different versions, but also by the difficulty in obtaining sufficient elements to enable them to make distinctions; it may even be explained by their reluctance to adopt a feminist interpretation. In fact, these professionals sometimes question the ability of their more generalist colleagues to assess the context of the violence: despite the existence of the index 42 ('family dispute') and the police's possibility to provide the magistrate with contextual information, this assessment remains difficult for non-specialist actors. They also denounce the fact that the police and judicial actors - who are mostly poorly trained in the issue - are always perturbed by the victim's ambivalence, which leads to weariness and a feeling of powerlessness. In this respect, the specialised police officers we met often regret the limits of judicial follow-up, and the specialised prosecutors sometimes fear that their intervention will aggravate the situation.

The **psycho-medico-social** workers, on the other hand, essentially develop a clinical and empathic approach focusing on the experiences of the person being assisted and, on the meaning, and interpretation they give to their situation. This approach consists in identifying individual resources in order to set up strategies for managing and escaping from the violence. PMS workers do not seek to establish a 'judicial truth' but work alongside the person assisted in order to put in place, on the basis of his or her own experience and resources, the

accompaniment, follow-up and support necessary to 'regain power over one's life'<sup>48</sup>. They adopt an ethic of care, help and support that does not require the same duties of reserve and impartiality as the judicial sector but rather, on the contrary, a certain commitment to one or other of the parties in conflict. Many of the interviews reflect a logic of intervention centred on the pace, resources and wishes of the person. Unlike the judicial sector, PMS workers generally meet and follow up with only one of the two parties, either the victim or the perpetrator, even though bridges increasingly are being built between certain specialised victim support services and perpetrator support services which effectively recognise that this is a matter of helping to decode the situation. Intervention time is often longer and also taking place beyond the emergency intervention faced by police officers or magistrates on guard duty, for example. However, this sector is not uniform. Practitioners include both professionals with a long history of working in the field of IPV as well as professionals working in more recent public and private structures. While the specialised PMS sector considers that it encounters more situations of domination processes, at least in residential settings (even if it does not deny the existence of situational violence which is dealt with in the outpatient sector)<sup>49</sup>, other PMS actors seem to be less comfortable with this distinction and with the identification of situations at risk. While the specialised PMS sector considers that it encounters more situations of control, at least in residential settings (even if it does not deny the existence of situational violence which is rather handled by the outpatient sector), other more generalist PMS actors seem less comfortable with this distinction and with the identification of situations at risk.

In this respect, the analysis of the interviews shows that the **parajudicial sector** is at the intersection between the judicial logic and the aid logic. The same applies to members of the **police victim assistance services** who are subject to a double ethic: police ethics and psycho-social intervention ethics and therefore wear a double hat. The latter intervene upstream – and only with the victims – at the time of police action, whereas the former intervene in the execution of legal decisions, i.e., in principle, after the action of police and judicial filters. Some are responsible for providing assistance and support to victims on a voluntary basis, others are mandated by the judiciary to monitor and supervise certain sentences and measures, in which case they work with the perpetrators. None of these actors are specialised in a particular type of case, they deal with victims or perpetrators of a wide variety of offences. The parajudicial actors are responsible for the follow-up of either victims or perpetrators. However, they may have to meet both parties if they are considered to be co-perpetrators. This approach involves a psycho-social dimension that invites them to take time, to listen, follow the person for a certain period of time, help him or her meet the expectations and requirements of a legal decision (potentially of a nature to mitigate the sentence). It also has a normative and binding dimension, since it is often framed by a judicial mandate (except for victim follow-up), which places them in the 'forced assistance' sector. Therefore, while they

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<sup>48</sup> Several professionals in this sector refer to the concept of 'empowerment', which was born in the United States after the war and refers to the 'power to act' of individuals and groups. In the 1970s, it was disseminated by feminist activists with a view to emancipating and promoting the liberation of women. For more information on this concept, see Bacqué & al. 2015.

<sup>49</sup> According to our interviewees, the statistics of the helpline, which - like the Resource Centres that disseminate the CDP model - is the result of collaboration between specialised associations for IPV victims and a specialised association for perpetrators: 90% of the situations are identified with a process of domination and control.



are not police officers or magistrates asked to gather evidence to establish guilt, neither do they enjoy the independence of the associative world actors since they intervene in a restrictive penal framework. These professionals refer to the definition of IPV in terms of a relationship of domination but do not always fully identify with it. Most of the professionals working in these services, whether they are helping victims or supervising the perpetrators, recognise the existence of this power relationship and the fact that the majority of victims are women, but they also put these data into perspective by drawing attention to reciprocal violence and the importance of couple dynamics. While some clearly distance themselves from the feminist perspective by insisting on the existence of women perpetrators, others explain that when women are perpetrators of serious acts, it is often a case of reactive violence in the context of a situation of control exerted by the man (perpetrator of control but victim of the reactive violence of his partner) These professionals therefore seem to be situated at the intersection of the two rationalities, although they are undoubtedly more influenced by the penal rationality, since their action is part of it. They are only concerned with cases reported to the justice system or that are subject to legal proceedings, unlike the psycho-medico-social sector. They are only aware of situations if they are referred to the justice system or if the victim calls the police (even if no complaint is filed). This is very different from the PMS sector.

Finally, on the borderline between the judicial and psycho-social sectors, there are also **mediation programmes** that deal with victims and perpetrators of violence between partners. Although some of the actors interviewed often refer to 'penal mediation'<sup>50</sup>, it is unclear whether they really refer to victim-perpetrator mediation, given the variety of measures included under this heading by article 216ter of the Code of Criminal Procedure<sup>51</sup>. Some mediation services, however, take charge of mediation between perpetrators and victims, in addition to and at all stages of the criminal procedure within the framework of the 2005 law . In this context, they work without a mandate from the judicial authorities, although links are established with the latter, both in terms of informing the parties of the existence of the mediation offer available to them, and in terms of the possibility for the parties to refer the potential agreement to the judicial authorities, if they both agree. These programmes work according to their own methodology, which implies voluntary acceptance by both the perpetrator and the victim to take part in mediation. In this respect, these services also take on situations of violence between partners in certain cases and under certain conditions. However, they set strict guidelines in relation to these situations, particularly with regard to the risks of instrumentalising the victims in unequal power relationships with the perpetrator.

These elements suggest that it is relevant to discuss the question of the 'capacity' of each of the actors to correctly identify the nature of the situation, whether through their ability to integrate or operationalise the models disseminated (in this case, for a good number of actors,

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<sup>50</sup> Law of 10 February 1994 organising a penal mediation procedure, M.B., 27 April 1994. This law was reformed on 18 March 2018, removing the generic term 'penal mediation', but the actors did not refer to it because the interviews often took place either just before or just after the reform.

<sup>51</sup> Consisting either of training, therapeutic follow-up, mediation for compensation or another form of reparation, or community service, which may be combined. Although the statistical data do not enable us to differentiate between these different modalities, cross-referencing exercise with the 'Justice Houses' database carried out in previous research (Vanneste 2016) indicates that offers of training are largely favoured in the case of IPV, followed by treatment orders. Community service offers are almost absent.

the DCP), or because of the blind spots affecting their assessments due to the situations and the public they are led to meet.

#### B) Managerial logics and political priorities

In addition to these difficulties in dealing with IPV in a multidisciplinary and multisectoral way, linked to the different logics of intervention according to the sectors, two other dimensions were found to condition the implementation of such an approach: that of the managerial logics that primarily affect the judicial sector in the broad sense (police, justice and parajudicial sector), but also that of the political priorities and the allocation of means and resources which animate all of the sectors we met.

Indeed, a large part of the professionals in the **police, judicial and parajudicial sectors** refer to the 'zero tolerance' policy introduced in 2006 and associate it with a considerable increase in the number of situations to be dealt with. However, this new crime policy - like many others in different areas - has not been accompanied by an increase in the number of staff dedicated to its implementation. The reference magistrates and police officers were designated from among the existing staff and no staff (police, judicial or administrative) were specifically hired or assigned to this matter. Thus, the **managerialization** of the public sector and, in particular, of the police and justice, pursuing objectives of effectiveness, efficiency and, above all, optimisation of resources, can be summed up here as 'doing more without additional resources', or even with reduced resources and staff. Police officers have therefore been called on to get training in the issue, to write more reports, to pass on more information to the public prosecutor, who in turn has been required to appoint reference magistrates, to train and raise awareness of the issue among magistrates, and to ask them to apply specific directives without being given additional resources to do so. For these institutions, the problem of IPV remains one of many phenomena whose incoming flow must be managed in the same way as any criminal case. Even if, for magistrates, this zero tolerance policy does not mean the systematic prosecution of all perpetrators, it does mean that all situations are assessed, even if some dropped, which in itself represents a heavy additional workload.

These observations raise the question of **political priorities and the resources allocated** to them. The actors note that IPV has indeed been a political priority without sufficient material resources being devoted to it. Some questioned the relevance of this priority in the face of the emergence of other priority phenomena such as terrorism. Several professionals question the scope of this prioritisation, its effects and consequences, and question its effectiveness. It is seen more as an 'announcement effect' in view of the overload of work and the lack of resources from which the police and judicial institutions suffer.

Moreover, the question of political priorities and resources raises another difficulty, often cited by professionals in the police and judicial sectors: that of **training**. The majority of police officers and magistrates called on to intervene in cases of domestic violence are not specialised professionals trained in this area. It is indeed impossible for all these cases to be handled by the police officer or magistrate designated within a police zone or judicial district. The volume of cases is too large, the definition and qualification of cases too delicate, there are too few reference magistrates and police officers, and the organisation of work is subject to imperatives that make it impossible to ensure that every situation will be handled by a

trained police officer or magistrate. Many 'urgent' interventions in this area are required outside normal working hours and therefore rely on the on-call services, which are made up of police officers and magistrates with different profiles and skills. The police victim assistance services or the victim support services of the Houses of Justice often follow standard working hours and are therefore unlikely to intervene in the evenings, nights, weekends or public holidays. It is therefore inevitable that a large number of cases of domestic violence are dealt with by police officers and magistrates who are not specialised and trained in this field, and who therefore do not have the same sensitivity, the same interpretation or the same language as specially trained professionals. Furthermore, the police officers and magistrates we met also stated that training in the field of IPV is not highly valued and not followed by their non-specialised colleagues. More specifically, at the police level, there is no centralised information on existing training courses and their follow-up, even though this was provided in the 2010-2014 National Action Plan.

In the **psycho-medical-social sector**, some feminist associations less specialised in caring for victims of IPV regret the direction of the actions taken in this sector. According to them, only secondary and tertiary prevention are valued, (especially because the field of violence between partners is dominated by these specialised associations). According to these interlocutors, the leading associations in the fight against IPV 'are only picking up the pieces'. What is seriously lacking in the field, according to them, is primary prevention (not to be confused with awareness-raising campaigns) in all sectors in order to help women learn to detect and react to violence and teach men not to inflict it. According to some actors in the psycho-social sector, there is also a lack of expertise and training in dealing with IPV issues among certain populations such as members of the LGBTQIA+ community or people in an administrative irregularity situation as part of their migration process, for example. In addition, these PMS actors also note the lack of accommodation, the lack of services for perpetrators, the lack of services for certain victims (multi-vulnerable, men, LGBTQIA+, etc.), and the lack of places where perpetrators and victims could be jointly assessed.

The paradox in all this is that all types of actors, to some extent, question the 'all to the judiciary' approach. The actors in the justice system, with the injunction of zero tolerance, feel that they are spending a lot of energy and resources to achieve this objective. They also experience the lack of resources, upstream and downstream, available for the police and magistrates to refer victims and perpetrators of violence between partners. A good number of actors in the PMS sector also confirm this inadequacy of resources, they are still finding it hard to receive everyone. According to them, the justice system also remains inadequate and ineffective in its action, as it is often too slow, overloaded and struggles to provide adequate support for the victim.

Finally, some actors also question the more political dimensions: should the judiciary and the police be the ever more central actors in the field of IPV policy? Rather than an increasingly important role for the justice system, should we not, on the contrary, place IPV intervention more clearly at the heart of equal opportunities policies for women and men, with a particular focus on structural gender violence, which recognises that women are disproportionately affected by such violence? From the analysis of the interviews conducted in the Walloon-Brussels Federation, it appears that a good number of actors are of the opinion that it is not

relevant to offer justice such a central role as it seems to have in Flanders, in particular through the setting up of *Family Justice Centres*. They also question the approach - including the risk assessment tools - which, in their opinion, does not take sufficient account of the dimensions of power and control that characterise the most critical situations of violence between intimate partners.

#### 4.1.2.4. Third issue: networking undermined by heterogeneous approaches

The question of the networking promoted in the field of IPV and the issues surrounding the forms it takes or could take constitutes a final aspect of the analysis of the interviews carried out with the French-speaking actors working in the field of IPV.

The analysis reveals that the actors in the different sectors are undoubtedly working in a network. First of all, on an **internal and official level**, the police officers work in collaboration with each other, with the police officers of reference, with the police victim assistance services and with their (local) police hierarchy. At this stage of the intervention (police), however, there is no structural provision in the network for direct referral to any help or support service for the perpetrators, or possibly the couple, as is or can be the case in the Flemish Region through the CAW (Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk). These contrasting realities found in the two regions are due to different visions: a more joint victim/perpetrator approach on the Flemish side and a more split approach on the French side. Likewise, within the justice system, magistrates work with each other, with their reference magistrate colleagues, with victim support services (at public prosecutor's offices and courts) and Houses of Justice, and with their judicial hierarchy (locally but also supra-locally, such as the college of public prosecutors). Lastly, within the PMS sector, in the Walloon Region at least, the historical shelters and PRAXIS<sup>52</sup> work concretely in a network (by setting up the telephone line and the Resource Centres known for their role in the training of actors). In addition, they also occasionally work with non-specialised services (themselves integrated in other public and private networks). This internal networking involves both the exchange of information and good practice and the exchange of information on concrete situations. Indeed, the actors of the same sector share the same deontology and are therefore able to share and exchange information with each other.

At the intersectoral and official level, these different professionals meet within platforms managed and organised at in each province by provincial coordinators. There are also actors who assume coordination missions at the level of the Walloon Region, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the Federal State, but they were less mentioned by the professionals we met because they are more distant from day-to-day practices in the field. These platforms above all aim to put the different professionals concerned in contact with each other, create a network, share information and offer training, but in no case do they deal with concrete situations of domestic violence. It is therefore not a question of bringing together the actors to discuss concrete situations and work together to draw up intervention, care, treatment or follow-up mechanisms. A major obstacle to this type of inter-sectoral collaboration is highlighted by a number of actors: the exchange of information between professionals subject to different professional ethics, rationalities and deontologies. The exchange of information

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<sup>52</sup> Specialised service in WBF for the training of perpetrators of domestic violence.

between the PMS sector, on the one hand, and the police and judicial sector, on the other, is particularly problematic. However, some informal initiatives between professionals from different sectors do take place, often based on mutual knowledge and trust, with the safety of the persons concerned as the primary objective. Since the period of these interviews, new regulations have been introduced to promote and frame this information sharing: an article 458ter has been introduced into the criminal code and a circular COL4/2018 has been issued, both of which aim to promote the sharing of information and setting up 'case concertation'<sup>53</sup>.

At the level of the **provincial platforms**, major difficulties and challenges should be highlighted. The actors note the low presence and participation of the judiciary and, to a lesser extent, the police, other than the victim support services (Houses of Justice) and the police victim assistance services. Among the reasons for this lack of presence, the actors cite the high turnover of the reference magistrates and police officers, their busy schedules, difficulties reconciling the agendas of each, or the not very operational nature of many exchanges and discussions that take place during the platforms. Lastly, magistrates and police officers are reportedly bothered by the overly 'gendered' positions taken by certain associations involved in the provincial platforms (and conversely, feminist associations are bothered by the 'neutral' positions taken by judicial actors). In this respect, the police assistance victim services and the victim support services could provide significant opportunities for translation and understanding between these sectors (dual ethics, psycho-social knowledge and knowledge of the judicial world). These platforms would therefore be mainly composed of PMS actors active at provincial level. They would nevertheless already be a good resource for information and training.

The judicial and police actors tend to favour collaborations that would be a source of information for them on concrete situations. Some actors in the specialised PMS sector, in particular, are also in favour of setting up close collaboration with the judicial and police sectors in the context of 'case concertation'. However, they would like to give a more central role to the associations, and to the victims themselves, in the management of their situations; thus, less to the judiciary and the police, as they perceive from the functioning of the *FJCs* in Flanders.

#### 4.1.2.5. Conclusions

The analysis of the interviews with the WBF actors confirmed some progress in the field of IPV policy. However, it also revealed points of tension and challenges to the balance - in symbolic and material terms - between the different sectors. In particular, these include :

- tensions in terms of the approach to the phenomenon of intimate partner violence (gendered approach, neutral approach);
- the 'capacity' of the actors to identify the nature of the situation correctly, through the extent of their ability to integrate or operationalise the models disseminated (in particular the DCP), or due to blind spots that seem to affect each of their assessments in virtue of the situations and the public they tend to encounter most frequently.

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<sup>53</sup> Circular N°4/2018 of the College of Public Prosecutors at the Courts of Appeal on case concertation and professional secrecy..

- the massive investment in the justice system, so much desired initially, is increasingly called into question. The actors interviewed emphasised the limits of penal responses and the need to give greater value to more social, preventive and global approaches in dealing with situations of violence between partners. In their view, intervention, care, assistance and the search for a solution are never limited to penal intervention.
- the lack of resources devoted to more comprehensive preventive and social approaches. Key areas include management of IPV perpetrators; victims, and in particular for certain sets of victims (such as socio-economically or legally vulnerable groups, people in a situation of 'administrative irregularity', LGBTQIA +); primary prevention of this type of violence as well as long-term follow-up.

These tensions particularly hamper the much sought-after multidisciplinary collaboration. Although it is taking place within the framework of the Provincial Coordination, this collaboration remains limited to date. Some of the specialised actors in the WBF in the field of violence between partners are nevertheless in favour of developing systems of concertation around cases. However, contrary to what they perceive from the development of the FJCs in the north of the country, the judicial logic would not be overriding in the reading of the situations and in the logic of action.

These different elements therefore raise the question of the place and role of the judiciary and that of public policy choices (investing in which sector, to what proportion, providing for what collaboration, what to expect from the criminal justice system).

Finally, in these conclusions it is also necessary to highlight certain blind spots in the research itself: the interviews with the actors were carried out with actors from different sectors. But some of these sectors would deserve more investigation because of the complexity of their organisation. Indeed, for the police and judicial sectors, only the police officers and magistrates of the 'reference' public prosecutor's office were interviewed. In the police sector, the angle of approach should be widened to include non-specialised police officers in order to better understand practices. The same observation can be extended to the judicial sector, where it would be interesting to interview investigating judges and trial judges in particular. Finally, although we have attempted to cover a diversity of actors at the psycho-medico-social level, the medical sector, in particular, has been the subject of little investigation in this part of the research.

#### **4.1.3. The analysis of interviews with Dutch-speaking actors<sup>54</sup>**

##### **4.1.3.1. Introduction**

The results presented are based on interviews with practitioners and key actors in Flanders, grey literature<sup>55</sup> and information gathered from study days or training courses attended (e.g. police training). The key actors were identified by means of a cartography drawn up prior to the interviews. We looked for respondents working in different sectors and policy levels, such

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<sup>54</sup> Analyses conducted by Vergaert E., Coene G. & Withaekx S.

<sup>55</sup> Grey literature is defined as non-scientific or unpublished texts such as government reports, policy texts, brochures, (unpublished) reports, internal documents, ...

as policy officers<sup>56</sup> (e.g. former provincial coordinators<sup>57</sup>) and experts on IPV. In order to investigate the impact of policies, practitioners were interviewed in various sectors. These respondents are in direct contact with victims, perpetrators, couples or cases of IPV, such as first- or second-line social workers, police officers, public prosecutors and judicial assistants. Key actors could be identified easily, practitioners were found through snowball recruitment and through umbrella organisations such as the *Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk* (CAW) (Social Welfare Centre). We were not able to interview justice assistants working in mediation, respondents from the Centres for Mental Health Care (CGG) or the intervention police.

A total of 35 individuals from different sectors<sup>58</sup>, provinces and organisations were interviewed between March 2018 and January 2019: 25 individually and 10 in double interviews. The table IV shows the number of respondents by sector and organisation (for privacy reasons, the region is not listed).

*Table IV Distribution of the number of interviewees between sectors of activity, organisations and functions*

Sector	Organisation	Function	Number Interv.
Social welfare	CAW	Management	2
Social welfare	CAW	Social worker; counsellor (refugees; victim support or team IPV)	4
Social welfare	OCMW	Intake team psychologist	3
Welfare/intersectoral	FJC	Case manager (VK)	1
Welfare /intersectoral	FJC	Receptionist-social worker (OCMW)	1
Justice	OM-MP	Public Prosecutor's office (reference FV)	6
Justice	OM-MP	Criminologist at Public Prosecutor's office	1
Justice	Police	Local/community police, intervention, victim support	3
Government	Flemish government (VO)	Policy officer (Flemish)	1
Government	VO & chain approach ( <i>ketenaanpak</i> )	Coordinator chain approach/FJC (provincial coordinators)	6
Government	Local municipality	Policy officer	2
Justice/Social support		Justice-assistant	2
Non-profit	LGBT-organisation	Project manager	1
Welfare	Independent	Expert	1
Healthcare	Individual practice	General practitioner	1
		Total	<b>35</b>

<sup>56</sup> Policy officers within a government body, such as the Institute for Equality between Women and Men or the welfare department of the Flemish Government, .... As policy staff members, they participate in developing, setting up, monitoring and evaluating policies. Depending on the relationship with the competent government members (ministers), their work is executive.

<sup>57</sup> The provincial coordinators have been working for the Flemish Government since 2018 and have therefore changed positions. Their new function as coordinators of the chain approach to family violence is a function they hold as policy officers within the Flemish government. They are often closely involved in practice and thus form a link between policy and practice.

<sup>58</sup> By sectors, we mean the division according to a specific professional domain. Within the framework of this research, we identified different sectors from which we interviewed respondents: welfare, health care, government, justice & police and civil society (such as non-profit organisations).

#### 4.1.3.2. Vision & definition

In policy and practice, the terms 'partner violence' (IPV) and 'family violence' are interchangeably used (De Groof & De Gendt 2007). In Flanders, respondents mainly used the term 'family violence'. The use of this term is linked to significant political evolutions and also indicates a rupture with the initial focus on IPV and sexual violence that arose from the feminist movement during the 1970s and 1980s, which also gave rise to the first women's shelters (Franck 2011, Jaspaert & al. 2011). The majority of our respondents used this term because it is a comprehensive concept that, in addition to IPV, includes other forms of violence such as child abuse. It is clear to several respondents that IPV also has an impact on other family members and thus these types of violence cannot be disconnected. When children witness IPV, this is generally seen as a form of child abuse. For several respondents, the manner of defining violence is determined by a pragmatic approach to violence; many find this term more practical as it coincides with the violence that is encountered in practice, certainly in sectors where the whole family is involved.

In line with the use of the umbrella term family violence (FV), the respondents in the field of social work refer to the importance of a systemic approach to violence. By paying attention to how the family system and various members of the family interact in a violent situation, a univocal victim-perpetrator perspective is abandoned. The systemic-therapeutic or systemic view (Gurman & Jacobson 2002, Von Bertalanffy 2010) is considered to be a more recent, positive and useful approach in situations of IPV because it helps everyone in the violent situation and because couples do not always want to separate but want the violence to stop. This also implies that the CAW, for instance, does not necessarily link IPV to victim support or that every situation of FV falls under victim support. However, there are also respondents who, although they do not criticise the general systemic approach, do point out the risks of not distinguishing between victims and perpetrators. For victims, this can mean that their safety is compromised. During our discussions, various forms of violence, risk factors and types of violence were also discussed. For example, Johnson's typology (2008) is recognised in that actors speak of intimate terrorism and situational violence. Johnson's typology does not always turn out to be workable in practice and the distinction, for example, between intimate terrorism and situational violence is also not clear.

In several interviews, the systemic view is contrasted with what respondents describe as the earlier feminist view in which IPV is considered as an expression of patriarchal power relations. Several respondents question a feminist gendered perspective to IPV, especially in relation to the gender (or rather sex) of the victim or perpetrator, pointing to a lack of attention for male victimization. They associate a gender perspective with a reductionist view that relegates partner violence to the binary 'man beats woman', a view they describe as a common discourse among other professionals. The respondents themselves are highly critical of such a discourse: they reject this view in favour of a gender-neutral approach which, in their view, acknowledges male victimization and female perpetration. In some cases, a more complex understanding of IPV appears, which includes being attentive to different violence dynamics such as intimate terrorism and situational violence, gender differences in experience, coping



and dealing with violence. Nevertheless, some respondents also emphasise the importance of the gender perspective, as a continually evolving lens to interpret relational and power dynamics, but they are rather a minority.

These ways of understanding IPV reflect ongoing discussions in academic research, where the 'family violence' (Straus 2009, Winstok 2007) perspective is placed opposite the feminist perspective. Such discussions often debate whether IPV should be considered a gendered problem or not. But dismissals of gender as an analytical category are often based on very reductionist understandings of gender, which fail to acknowledge how gender refers to the broader political and socio-economic structures in which IPV is shaped.

The recognition of male victimization and a broad perspective on the family is important but has also led to ignoring the impact of gender inequality in IPV (Römkens 2016), whereby differences between the experiences of men and women risk being trivialised. The idea that violence is a gender-neutral problem entails the risk that violence against women is downplayed or that policies and practices fail to consider real differences, for example in the possibilities one has to escape from a violent relationship (Withaecx & Coene 2013). International research also consistently shows that women continue to be affected more and more severely by IPV and women are much more likely to be victims of domestic homicide (UNODC 2019). The gender inequalities that structure our societies - such as the still weaker economic position of women or the greater care responsibilities that women assume - mean that female victims face specific barriers that require an adapted approach. Poverty, lack of decent housing and good childcare are specific difficulties that women disproportionately face (Defever & al. 2013). In addition, gender inequality is not the only form of inequality that influences and/or shapes IPV; different axes of social positions and inequality, such as racial inequality and poverty also influence situations of violence. To this end, an intersectional perspective is important (see below).

#### 4.1.3.3. The evolution of policies and practice in relation to different organisations and sectors

Within the Flemish Government, most policies and measures are developed and implemented by the Flemish Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family (WVG). The department, established in 2006, consists of different divisions (e.g. department of Houses of Justice), agencies (e.g. care and health) and organisations (e.g. *Kind & Gezin*). Since the second State reform in 1980, welfare work has become a Flemish and regional competence instead of a federal competence. Since that time, a number of major evolutions have taken place, which have also had an impact on the policies regarding IPV and FV in Flanders. One of the most important changes took place following the 1997 decree on general welfare work. This decree brought together various small-scale associations - including non-profit organisations that provided support for sexual and partner violence - under the General Centres for Welfare Work (CAW), with the aim of bringing together the various associations under one organisation. In 2006, the competent minister, Inge Vervotte, played an important role in setting up a stronger political focus on IPV in Flanders and made additional budget available for this purpose. As a first-line organisation, the CAW was assigned a central role, including initiating collaborations with other welfare and health services as well as the police and judicial services within their region. Since then, FV has been a key aspect of the Flemish welfare policy from which several

initiatives resulted, such as the establishment, in 2012, of the helpline for violence: 1712. In 2013, the Flemish Parliament also agreed to the Istanbul Convention.

Strengthening of the welfare policy in 2006 is also connected to the developments in criminal law policy with the circulars COL3/2006 and COL4/2006 issued by the College of General Prosecutors and the Minister of Justice. The circulars also provided clear guidelines for practice, where previously the work around the subject was unregulated and dispersed. In addition, the competent authorities underwent mergers and transfers of competences that also had an impact on the criminal policy and approach to IPV. The prosecutor's office is managed at the federal level with differences between the judicial districts. In 2014, a merger took place within the prosecutor's offices, which meant that reference magistrates for FV, who previously worked for a small zone, suddenly became responsible for an entire province. The reform of the judicial districts was marked by merger regulation from 27 to 12 judicial districts and 14 public prosecutors' offices in Belgium. With this reform, but also after the evaluation and revision of the COL4 in 2015, more uniformity was pursued through provincial action plans regarding the approach to FV. The transfer of the Houses of Justice from the federal to the Flemish level was also significant for the functioning of the Houses of Justice and the competences at the Flemish level where, in 2019, a minister of justice was appointed for the first time.

Another major development in the Flemish policy is the multi-agency (chain) approach. This approach is based on multidisciplinary cooperation between the judiciary, police and social workers in complex cases of FV. Employees and experts from different organisations are brought together at roundtables where they discuss cases where various problems occur (e.g. violence combined with an addiction problem, financial difficulties) in order to arrive at a joint solution. This approach is considered as a methodology that brings together different partners and organisations who are in contact with these cases. How these approaches operate varies from region to region, as well as the organisations that are partners in it but the main organisations are CAW, OCMW (Public Centre for Social Welfare)<sup>59</sup>, police, prosecutor's office (section youth and family), Trusted Centre for Child Abuse, Houses of Justice and the CGG (or a service involved in mental health care). This initiative arose in Antwerp (CO3) and Limburg because of the need for more consultation and collaboration between the various services involved in these matters. The approach has existed in Antwerp since 2012 and has since grown into a 'Family Justice Centre' (FJC), a one-stop shop where you can receive social, legal, police and medical assistance at the same time. The first FJC was set up in Antwerp in 2016 and FJCs have also been set up in Mechelen, Turnhout and Limburg (Hasselt). In these regions, a whole process preceded the development of the chain approach and the FJCs. Various pilot projects and test phases took place in both Antwerp and Limburg. In Leuven, this type of cooperation started in 2015 and it has also been piloted in the Halle-Vilvoorde region since 2018. In East and West Flanders, the pilot projects started in 2017-18. Various forms of FV have been alternately included as a political priority in the Flemish coalition agreements and/or policy statements since 2006, and these initiatives were also part

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<sup>59</sup> 'Openbaar centrum voor maatschappelijk welzijn' (OCMW) or 'Centre public d'action sociale' (CPAS) that are managed by the municipalities

of the national actions plans for partner violence (the most recent plan uses the term gender-based violence). In addition to the Department of Health, Welfare and Families, other departments and/or government services (Equal Opportunities, Education, Media, Mobility, Youth and Culture) are also developing projects or initiatives on the theme. These are brought together with the actions of WVG within the Flemish government (VO) monitoring group for the NAP. The non-profit organisations working on this subject in the Flemish region are also subsidized by different departments. Recently, under the coordination of the Flemish minister of justice, Zuhair Demir, the first Flemish action plan to combat sexual violence (2020-2024) was drawn up. This plan included some Flemish initiatives that also relate to the FV approach, such as an investigation into the further investment in the intersectoral and interdisciplinary approach to FV (such as FJC) through an uniform approach that is spread over the whole region. Recent events such as the current COVID-19 crisis show a clear impact on the policies and the announcement of future initiatives and law changes regarding FV and GBV. In the follow sections, we discuss the insights gained relating to two different sectors (the welfare sector, justice and police sector) as well as to local policies and multidisciplinary cooperation.

#### A) Issues in the welfare sector

The social work sector plays a crucial role in the initial support and guidance for both victims and perpetrators of IPV. Since the founding of the first shelters in the 1970s and the gradual expansion and institutionalisation of social work in Flanders, this sector has experienced a number of important evolutions and reforms based on changing political priorities, set out in decrees. One of these reforms is the merger based on the General Welfare Work Decree (1998), whereby an amalgam of non-profit organisations that worked on sexual and partner violence and/or relational welfare (e.g., the centres for birth control and sexual education) were incorporated under the umbrella organisation CAW in order to provide accessible first-line care. Although the organisation of teams and operations differ from CAW to CAW, the main teams that come into contact with IPV are the reception office, the victim support teams - which mainly do individual counselling - the crisis team, the legal support teams, the shelters, and the FV or IPV teams (the latter offer couples counselling to stop the violence and do not exist in every region).

The shelters initially worked from a feminist perspective, which according to several respondents meant that they helped victims in their resilience and helped them to leave their partner. Respondents stated that shelters now start more from the client's choice of whether or not to stay with their partner whilst also trying to include the voice of the partner. Some shelters have shifted to secure accommodation and more individualised living arrangements, where clients live in separate studios. In some shelters, communal activities (e.g. group discussion and therapy) among the residents are organized while the support trajectories are individualised in others. Problems identified in relation to the shelters are lack of available beds (for men and women) and unaffordable daily rates. According to respondents, the daily rate to stay in the shelter often represents a threshold, with victims even accumulating debts as a result of their stay. The existence of the daily rate is vital for the survival of the shelters because they do not receive enough subsidies for their daily operations.

Another problematic aspect of victim support and the shelters' policy is the demand for targets and numbers to measure the impact of their work (number of clients, successful services, ...). For example, a guidance counsellor from the shelter explains that the requirement to reach a certain number of applications has an impact on their work and on who can be given a place in the shelter (e.g. a large family occupying two studios counts as only one application). This demand for 'figures' comes in part from the Flemish government, as proof of the 'turnover of the engagements' and determines the subsidization<sup>60</sup>. Another problematic measure, whose efficiency is questioned, is the use of a fixed number of follow-up calls after six months to check if the situation is still stable. These calls are used to assess whether the assistance has had a positive effect. However, it is hard to measure the success of support trajectories because of the complexity of the problem. Victims might return to a violent situation, and IPV in couples does not just end after a fixed number of sessions. Quality of care is difficult to measure in situations of violence and is not necessarily linked to the number of clients supported within a specific activity or organisation.

The CAW remains, in the first place, a first-line organisation that offers initial support and sets up short-term support trajectories, also within the shelters. When a underlying issue arises, such as a mental health or psycho-pathological diseases, the CAW tends to refer to a second-line organisation such as the Centre for Mental Health Care (CGG). Various organisations often maintain liaisons and considerable importance is attached to the various collaborations with long-term care. At the same time, collaboration and referral are hampered by long waiting lists. One respondent mentioned the long waiting lists, but also explained that the short term of their own assistance programme (CAW) also played a role in the shortage of long-term care and their own organisation also had waiting lists (e.g. for partner violence teams or for the visiting room for parents to see their children under supervision).

Another important organisation is the OCMW (Public Centre for Social Welfare). Victims do not usually report to an OCMW specifically for situations of IPV, but OCMWs do come into contact with cases on a regular basis. Several clients end up with financial difficulties because of divorce or leaving their violent partner and have to turn to the OCMW for help. Some OCMWs have staff specialised in these issues and, for instance, psychological support is provided to people confronted with IPV. The Family Justice Centres (FJC) also have specialised OCMW staff. However, many OCMWs are still lacking a specific operation, training or specialisation on this theme. Because of the OCMW's target group, IPV often occurs on the fringes of other, more pressing difficulties of housing and finances. Respondents working in an OCMW point out that they often have no time or insufficient knowledge to tackle the issue.

## B) Zero tolerance policy and issues for police and justice

The results of this study show regional differences in the application of the zero tolerance policy. The application of measures in the COL 4/2006 differs from region to region and is determined in regional action plans. The COL states that an official report should be made for every intervention involving IPV or FV, even if it concerns a non-crime according to criminal

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<sup>60</sup> The CAW work under an envelope of subsidies determined by the Flemish government (various decrees and decisions regarding the financing of facilities within welfare work). This means that they receive an annual subsidy envelope for the centre's staff and operating costs. Based on set parameters, the CAWs receive subsidies to carry out a broadly defined range of tasks.

law (e.g. family dispute, code 42). In the regions where this is applied, however, this entails a heavier workload and it appears to be hard to motivate police officers to draw up an official report for each intervention.

The cooperation between police and public prosecutors/magistrates differs from region to region and zone to zone. Although efforts are made to develop uniform practice per district, this does not always seem that evident. There are positive examples, but magistrates also point out that it is still problematical to convince both police and magistrates to always take FV seriously. The lack of uniformity across police zones and provinces is mentioned not only by magistrates, but also by police officers. Police officers also state that their training is often inadequate to deal with situations of IPV, especially since they need to deal with strained emotions at the time of the intervention. The lack of training is mentioned several times, as well as the lack of time to thoroughly write up reports during interventions.

Various respondents expressed frustration about the number of cases that received little follow-up or were dropped. However, classifying a case does not necessarily mean that nothing is done with it. There are also guidelines within the public prosecutors' offices to the effect that various grounds for classification may not be applied in cases of IPV. Difficulties regarding collection of evidence are also mentioned, as it is not always advantageous to bring a case before court without sufficient evidence. Some facts remain difficult to prove or cannot always be categorised as punishable according to criminal law.

An appropriate response that adequately addresses the complexity of the issue requires creativity for which tools or resources are often not available. Consequently, alternative ways of responding to FV cases are considered, taking into account factors such as previous facts (for this, case-building is important) or the willingness of those involved to seek help or talk with police or prosecutors. A magistrate explains that safety is always taken into account, but also that holding the perpetrator responsible does not necessarily mean that the person must be tried or that other restorative and support measures cannot be taken. Here, however, magistrates are also limited by a shortage of possibilities for alternative measures. For example, there is little capacity in mediation services (or justice houses) for mediation in criminal cases. As a result, the organisations cannot keep up with the number of files that the public prosecutor sends. This is a general shortage in the specialised support for perpetrators, with few places where they can receive guidance and support. Specialised services such as the Centres for Mental Health Care have long waited lists.

Respondents from the police and judiciary field, including magistrates and justice assistants, discuss several obstacles such as the workload, difficulties with parental regulation and doubts about certain measures taken in relation to IPV cases. In the different provinces, magistrates often work in the section 'youth and family', which have a high caseload (in addition to FV, they also handle cases of sexual abuse, parental neglect, ...) that require a quick follow-up and this results in a high work pressure. As far as legal measures are concerned, a justice assistant involved in follow-up of offenders, explains how electronic monitoring (ankle monitors) should not be applied in situations of IPV. These measures are often taken as a substitute for prison sentences of under three years. Some of the respondents see consider this as a form of impunity and the impact of such measures (offenders ending up staying in

the same house as the victim) should be considered, including whether the person in question has been convicted for another criminal offence (when someone is sentenced for the offence of theft, it could be relevant to check if there are antecedents of IPV before placing an ankle monitor).

Although IPV, or rather FV and sexual violence, have become a political priority, at the time of the interviews the respondents pointed out several hurdles that stand in the way of a coherent, unambiguous response. There are regional differences, and the application of, for instance, a zero tolerance policy is not always feasible in practice or not necessarily the best way to go in a case of FV.

### C) Limitations and strengths with regard to multidisciplinary cooperation and local policies

As far as cooperation is concerned, the recent multi-agency approach (in Flanders, it is referred to as the 'chain approach') puts forward a multidisciplinary cooperation between the judiciary, police and social work in complex cases of FV. This approach is a method currently applied to multi-problem cases, where FV occurs alongside financial difficulties, substance abuse, etc. In Antwerp and Limburg, this kind of cooperation arose from a local need for multidisciplinary interventions in specific cases. In these regions, it was mostly started on a small scale; pilot projects were set up, information was drawn from foreign examples and gradually, trust between the various partners involved could be established (Franck & Simons 2017). In both regions, this approach grew organically and bottom-up, driven by the provincial coordinators, with the local administrations also involved in the start-up of this approach. In this way, long-term collaboration could be developed by convincing and engaging the partner intrinsically, which resulted in the emergence of a 'we-culture'. In this processual evolution, the operation often depended on the regular resources of the various organisations (e.g. existing staff that additionally took up the chain approach) or small budgets were provided by means of project subsidies (e.g. European). One respondent argues that the various participating organisations were able to develop an 'intrinsic motivation' about the strength of this practice because they had to invest their own resources. In addition, local cities or municipalities (Hasselt, Antwerp, Mechelen, ...) were able to provide locations and budgets that made it possible to recruit staff and establish FJCs. Their operation has been expanded to such an extent that they can also work on different paths (support, awareness building, ...) whereby different services exist within the FJC (e.g. survivor support groups, representation of GAMS). In Leuven, Vlaams-Brabant, this cooperation also had support from the city of Leuven. In the regions where chain cooperation was imposed top-down, this proved to be a challenge for the parties involved at the time the interviews were conducted. In the West Flanders region, for example, the pilot phase took a year and a half, mainly to convince the various partners, get them on the same wavelength and address concerns regarding professional secrecy and privacy. Many see the cooperation as beneficial to the client. In particular, the long-term perspective must be kept in mind in order to achieve good collaboration. When a relationship of trust can be established, the coordinators of this approach notice that the various partners involved can also turn to each other for other information or questions. In regions where chain cooperation was set up earlier, the police notice that fewer interventions are needed with certain families.

However, when this multidisciplinary approach is successful, the number of applications also grows and resulting in a lack of time to respond to all cases and a shortage of personnel. This could have disastrous effects for potential clients who need immediate support (e.g. getting an offer only to be told that there is a waiting list). Attempts to start awareness-raising actions and preventive work to reach the 'dark number', or roll out the multidisciplinary approach over larger areas, always run into the issue of resources and capacity, such as a lack of personnel, which prevents the expansion of the chain approach. Some FJC and/or chain cooperations had to work with waiting lists at the moment of the interviews, which makes it impossible to intervene at the moment of crisis. When there is a need for more long-term and specialised care for families, the partners in the chain approach need to refer their clients to specialised services e.g. mental health care or specific drug aid services. These services often have their own waiting lists, which also slows down the process within the chain cooperation.

Many cases still remain within the regular services of the various organisations, and cooperation with other organisations does not always run smoothly. In fact, there are a lot of formal and informal cooperative links between the police, the judiciary and social work organisations, such as referral systems, the organisation of training courses and so on. Some of these, like the chain approach, are evaluated positively and others negatively. For instance, public prosecutors, police and OCMW staff explain how the CAW shares very little information about clients and is very protective of their client's privacy, so they do not receive any feedback about the persons they have referred. This differs from region to region but also from worker to worker. A CAW staff member explained that she communicates very openly with certain employees of other institutions (e.g. police), if that would be to the client's advantage. For our respondents at the CAW, the trust of the client is central, which is why they do not share much about the cases they handle. Collaboration is hindered by a lack of professional networks, a lack of knowledge about each other's workings or by a different vision and mission with regard to the problem of violence. In many cases, this concerns the difference between the approach within social work and the approach within the police and justice system.

Where there are more formal partnerships, such as referral systems or chain cooperation, collaboration across sectors is evaluated positively. Much evolution has taken place in the area of cooperation and these steps are still being developed. In our interviews, we heard many hopeful or positive voices with regard to chain cooperation, but at the time of our interviews, the concrete development or clear frameworks to support it were still a work-in-progress. Moreover, this remains a methodology that is mainly applied to multi-problem cases while many cases of IPV still end up in the regular services of organisations.

Quite a number of initiatives can be seen, but a lot of potential still remains in terms of policies and practices and the involvement of different actors and professionals (e.g. community police, general practitioners, ...) at the local level, precisely because at this scale, it is possible to anticipate the local differences and needs of citizens more effectively. In the current developments, such as within the FJC, local authorities often play an important role and our interviews show that the evaluation of local collaborations is often very positive. However, many cities and municipalities still do not have specific initiatives or a role in the FV approach. Consequently, there is still a lot of potential to work on this theme at the local level. According to some respondents, the Integrated Reception (*Geïntegreerd breed onthaal*, GBO) for the

first-line zones can play a role here. The GBO is an agreement and initiative between the OCMW, CAW and the Social Work Department of the health insurance funds (*mutualités/ziekenfonds*). The aim is to provide a single reception point for citizens under the direction of local administrations. The idea is to bring together the expertise of the various organisations in order to obtain more accessible and better social assistance and to reduce the number of known and unknown people seeking help (Goris & Meirhaeghe 2018).

#### 4.1.3.4. General difficulties and the value of intersectionality

Across the different sectors, several general difficulties are mentioned. Our respondents mostly pointed out that their workload is too heavy and that additional resources are lacking to implement the proposed policies (e.g. judicial action plans, assessments, ...). In addition, the problem of waiting lists within their own and other organisations is often discussed, as well as the shortage of specialised and accessible long-term assistance such as therapy for offenders. The shortage of problem-sensitive interpreters/translators is also mentioned.

Respondents also pointed to the specific problems faced by certain groups, especially women with a precarious resident status. The existing network of assistance, protection and support insufficiently meets the needs of these women, or these women do not find support there. A respondent working in the CAW explained how ethnic minority women often do not find their way to their services and when they do, the violence has already reached a severe stage. Various respondents explained such late contact with social services and police as a result of shame or taboo or an incorrect image of the services or social services. But such explanations place the blame on the minorities themselves, while factors such as fear of stigmatisation and discrimination also play a role. Often, the existing services are not sufficiently known because there is no specific outreach to different target groups, in different languages. A justice assistant for example explained how non-native speakers rarely take up their offer of victim support because the letter is sent in Dutch.

A small number of respondents pointed out stereotyped attitudes within their organisation, where professionals spoke inappropriately about LGBTQI+-clients. A staff member of an LGBTQI+ organisation stated that there was little specific outreach to LGBTQI+ people and certainly not to those who spoke a different language.

In our interviews, the struggles of people with disabilities in dealing with IPV were rarely discussed, even though they also have specific needs in relation to IPV. Some respondents indicated that too little attention was given to this target group. One OCMW employee mentioned the difficulty of taking action in situations where persons with mental disabilities were being abused.

The problem mentioned earlier about daily fees in shelters mainly affects victims from socially and economically vulnerable groups. Although victims can appeal to the OCMW or use their financial child support to pay for their stay in the shelter, this is not sufficient and, as a result, clients can accumulate debts through their stay in the shelter. This is also a major problem for victims with a precarious resident status. These victims cannot go to the shelter because they have no income and cannot appeal to the OCMW. Other respondents cite the discrimination that some victims living in the shelters encounter. When these victims look for independent housing or schools for their children, they are confronted with racism and exclusion, according



to several respondents. This complicates their support trajectory, where they have to stay in the shelter longer than necessary or where they ultimately return to their violent partner.

The issue of dependent resident status (family reunification) is regularly raised and still constitutes a major problem for these victims of IPV<sup>61</sup>. Although protection measures exist, they are not always known or feasible for victims. For example, a social worker explains how a client, residing in Belgium in the context of family reunification, had difficulties proving the existence of violence to the responsible services, such as the Immigration Office (Office des étrangers / Vreemdelingenzaken) because the victim had never filed a complaint and there was no police report. Moreover, due to the permanent threat of violence, the client could not work and provide for her own income, whereas this is one of the requirements, in addition to providing evidence, to be able to invoke the protection measures.<sup>62</sup>

Another issue frequently raised is the difficulty in working with interpreters. There is already a shortage of availability and budget to work with interpreters for all sectors. Moreover, the issue of FV requires a certain sensitivity towards violence. According to some respondents, working with interpreters also raises questions among the clients themselves; they wonder whether the interpreters are sufficiently reliable. At the same time, respondents indicate that they often cannot find interpreters and that they then get stuck in the assistance process.

Although more attention is paid to tackling various problems such as financial difficulties and housing problems, the structural causes are not addressed or are facilitated by other policies. For example, the Flemish Government ended the subsidy for social interpreters, even though there was already a shortage. Several respondents also mentioned how cutbacks impact the quality of the support they are able to offer. The linking of conditions to the receipt of aid means that certain groups are left out in the cold.

The theory of intersectionality can help us develop a more complex understanding of the differing impact of violence (Adams & Campbell 2012, Cramer & Plummer 2009, Gill 2013, Lépinard 2014, Römkens 2016, Sokoloff & Dupont 2005). Intersectionality was developed from the observation that certain groups, due to their specific vulnerable position in society, are invisible and therefore often 'forgotten' in policies and practice. IPV soon became an important research subject within this theoretical framework: research showed that the experiences that marginalised groups - such as ethnic minorities or people with a disability - have with police and assistance can differ considerably from those of the majority of victims on whom policies and practice were often focused (Bograd 1999, Crenshaw 1991). Foreign research shows, for example, that the prevalence of IPV is higher among ethnic minorities, not so much because of cultural differences, as is often thought, but because of structural exclusion mechanisms (racism, sexism, ableism, illegal residence, etc.) that these groups face (Sokoloff & Dupont 2005, Thiara & al. 2011). An intersectional perspective therefore encourages a critical reflection on the invisible normativity that shapes the approach to

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<sup>61</sup> A 2012 Human Rights Watch report addressed the various difficulties for victims residing in Belgium in the context of family reunification (Human Rights Watch 2012). The work of Dawoud (2017) also discusses this issue.

<sup>62</sup> The protection measures provided within the migration legislation are complex. The requirements define, for example, 'being able to provide for one's own means' which must be met within a certain period of time. For an extensive analysis of the legislation, protection measures and their unfeasibility, we refer to the work of Dawoud (2017).

violence and encourages rethinking of this approach so that shortcomings can be avoided. Such a perspective supports the development of an approach that is sensitive to the specificities of vulnerable groups. From this perspective, we can look at different factors of differentiation - such as social class, ethnicity, residence status, sexuality, disability – that interact with each other and give rise to specific vulnerabilities. Improving knowledge about these vulnerabilities and the structural barriers that different groups are confronted with, ultimately will help to create better responses.

#### 4.1.3.5. Conclusion

In Flanders, policies and practice around IPV are mostly grouped under the name of family violence. In line with the use of FV as an umbrella term, the systemic view of violence is often mentioned, whereby attention is focused on internal family dynamics. This approach offers advantages but also raises questions, e.g. about the safety of victims. Broader structural links, such as gender inequality, are liable to become invisible as a result. In recent years, research from an intersectional perspective has focused on the diverse needs of groups who occupy specific vulnerable positions in society as a result of intersecting forms of disadvantage and discrimination based on gender, class, ethnicity, residence status and sexuality. Because of these complex identities, such groups often remain 'invisible' in policies. In order to be able to better support these groups and develop effective measures, it is important to recognise the implicit normativity of existing measures and the barriers that exist for certain groups.

Policies on IPV in Flanders have undergone quite an evolution and have occurred within different domains at different levels. Although we have endeavoured to interview actors from different sectors, certain sectors are less involved due to lack of time or response, such as the police and long-term care services such as mental health care. Within the different sectors there are several difficulties connected to policy, such as the lack of subsidies for the daily operation of support agencies (for mental health, well-being, welfare, ...), resulting in waiting lists. Questions are also raised about the zero tolerance policy and the lack of support for perpetrators of violence. The multi-agency approach (chain approach) is generally seen as a positive evolution allowing for better local cooperation in specific cases of FV. An adequate approach, however, also presupposes a broader preventive approach and attention to various structural forms of disadvantage and violence that converge.

## 4.2. THE ANALYSIS OF JUDICIAL FILES<sup>63</sup>

### 4.2.1. Introduction

Through a qualitative discourse analysis, we focused on the dynamics of IPV as they were contained in the judiciary files. A judicial file echoes the discourse of both the professional actors, especially the police officers, public prosecutors and sometimes judges, as well as that of the protagonists (and even their relatives). Of course, the discourse of the protagonists is doubly reconstructed: firstly, the protagonists are conscious of the particular context of justice, constructing their discourse in order to fit the stakes, and secondly most of their discourse has been written down and structured by the actors of the social reaction, more particularly by the police. The police are truly the gateway to the criminal justice system: for the most part the

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<sup>63</sup> Analyses conducted by Ravier I. & Van Praet S.

prosecution's case is based on their observations and understanding of the violent situations. They reconstruct the violent situation between the partners, using the tools available to the police in order to fit the account into the criteria for qualifying an offence. This way the police play a central role in preparing the judicial process. As a consequence, the reconstruction process is not guided by the dynamics of the violence, but rather follows the penal grid. Due to the COL 4/2006, this grid takes a certain interest in the couple and the impact of the violence, but only after selecting the penal offense and identifying the (if possible, material) evidence of its constituent elements.

The judicial files we analysed do not organise the recorded elements of the accounts according to a uniform structure, nor do they all record the same elements. The content of the account also varies substantially. The analysis of judicial files faced certain limits: some information that the literature on IPV deems interesting is absent or only rarely present, information such as the couple's trajectory, the socio-economic context, the anamneses, social or psycho-pathological characteristics of the protagonists, any psychosocial follow-up, the follow-up of children when a file is opened within the juvenile justice system, etc. especially when the public prosecutor does not pursue the case before a judge. Generally speaking, judicial files organise the specific facts or incidents in order to determine a victim and an offender. The files focus on a specific incident and the evidence of this incident, rather than on the offender, the victim and their relationship. The complex and processual character of IPV therefore does not clearly emerge in these files.

After a look at the contexts in which the silence is broken and the ways the police are notified of the facts, we discuss the interpretation of the violence by the protagonists before tackling the penal reaction through the interventions of the police, the public prosecutor and the judges. This journey through the cases has enabled us to identify a series of challenges facing the justice system in dealing with this type of dispute.

#### **4.2.2. Breaking the silence**

There are many different ways of reporting incidents that lead to creating a judicial file within the criminal justice system. The most common way for an IPV situation to enter the judicial stage is by means of a complaint by the victim. A victim can break the silence by addressing a relative, who in turn can at times request police intervention, switching from informal to formal control. Occasional witnesses or even the police can be the original source that opens a case file. In short, the opening of a judiciary file is not always the result of the victim's personal initiative. Some victims refuse or return quickly to the police station to withdraw their complaint, because they decide to avoid entanglement with the justice system, out of fear of reprisals from the partner or even the family, because they want to preserve the father's position with regard to the children, because they feel the situation has improved, or because the complaint worsens the situation and just makes it harder for the victim. It is not uncommon for a victim to be very reserved on the extent of the violence during his or her (first) hearing, but to talk more about certain events outside the hearing. Filing a complaint appears to be a tortuous process. To diverse degrees, a victim can be an active protagonist in the disclosure of a violent situation to the police. Sometimes a victim, even if she initiated the complaint, returns to the police station to demand that the cancel the complaint, declaring that '*peace has*

*returned*, such demands intrigue us greatly. They speak of an ongoing violent dynamic in which the woman does not see a way out and in which a crucial role in raising awareness sometimes seems to be played by the police. However, the withdrawals are not necessarily an indication of attention by the police, who often propose to leave it at that. However, a refusal to file a complaint or the demand to retract a complaint can be a warning signal that is not always heard, especially when the victim seems to be 'settled' in a violent relationship that she does not denounce.

In contrast to these ambivalent and hesitant victims, other cases reflect victims who are very well prepared when coming to the station to file a complaint, bringing material evidence along or repeating their complaint many times, for different incidents.

When the victims report the facts themselves, or even when they accept the report, they often express what they expect of the intervention by the police and/or justice system. Most often, they simply want '*it to stop*', to stop the violence, whether presented as a one-off incident or as part of the dynamics of the relationship. Sometimes no explicit request is recorded in the report, but the victim expresses a deep fear of a possible escalation of the violence or of the threats acted on. Victims express longing to live without fear, but they do not always want to take steps to prosecute the person with whom they share their life, who may be the parent of their children. Contacting the police can be a way of sending a signal to the partner to change their behaviour, to accept treatment or to seek treatment when the victim attributes their partner's violence to an addiction or mental health problem. These expectations of the victims are therefore diverse and are not necessarily addressed solely to the justice system. Indeed, victims do not necessarily expect an intervention from the penal justice system or neither by the police. Moreover, some turn to the police simply to serve as a witness to an unbearable situation or to play their role as guarantors of public peace, able to calm down a situation. However, contacting the police can also be a way to show that '*we won't be abused*', that it is possible to fight back. The request is then not (at all) to intervene: the statement to the police then becomes a symbolic intervention, indicating that the state is listening and acting alongside the victim, a possible 'weapon' to be wielded.

The protagonists also sometimes express a specific expectation 'constructed' according to what can actually be expected from the judicial system. Some victims do want legal proceedings against their (ex-)partner (which does not prejudge the actual legal consequences), with a possible request for a more specific intervention, such as a no contact order.

The person who goes to the police is most often identified as a victim, acting on his or her expectations with regard to the intervention. It can happen that both protagonists file a complaint in turn or that the hearing of an offender is an opportunity to express a request and formulate expectations towards an intervention on their part as well. Custody over the child(ren) and/or putting an end to the marriage or relationship, whether definitive or not, can thus become issues that go beyond the denunciation of the violence suffered, both for the victim and the offender. It is particularly through these cases that the insoluble question of the individuals' potential to instrumentalise the authorities arises, and the discernment of the police

is also put to the test. Moreover, for certain offenders who are trapped in their violence and suffering, the police hearing sometimes opens a breach towards a request for help.

### 4.2.3. Readings of violence

#### 4.2.3.1 The nature of the facts

The elements constituting the primary qualifications of offenses (harassment, threats, assault and battery, etc.) compose the centrepiece in the files. In their report, the police prepare the judicial process. Criminal law focuses on a fact, an incident, that may extend over a longer period of time, and consequently the police are not overly interested in the persons' relationship or the question of domination, nor in contextualising the facts beyond the elements that may lead to aggravating circumstances. It is therefore not surprising to see that the search for the nature of the violence should focus on acts that have a 'translation' into criminal law, such as physical or sexual violence, whereas economic and social violence are more difficult to 'read'.

The nature of the acts of violence reported is therefore very clear. We find '*direct physical violence*' directly affecting the victim and covering acts of varying severity and intensity (slaps, punches, repeated blows, strangulation, attempted defenestration, stabbing, etc.). In two cases, the victim was killed. We also find forms of '*indirect violence*' where the offender attacks objects dear to the victim (theft and damage to his car, home invasion, destruction of objects, etc.). We have fewer cases opened on the basis of a '*complaint of rape*', and it also happens that the victim, in the course of her complaints, mentions sexual violence in the sense of sexual acts to which the women gave in rather than consenting. In some cases, opened following the report of a rape, it can be seen that this reporting often takes place after the facts, which happened several months earlier, have been revealed to family members, who then accompany the victim during the reporting. '*Psychological violence*' takes the form of all kinds of threats, death threats, verbal and written aggressions, as well as harassment by telephone, e-mail and constant visits to the home. Other threats concern the reputation of the victims through dissemination of compromising information or images via social networks, mainly in cases involving people from a less precarious socio-economic and/or socio-cultural level.

#### 4.2.3.2. The consequences

As most of the files do not contain a medical certificate, the consequences of the violence suffered are most often described in terms of the victim's fear or even terror. This fear becomes omnipresent: there is no way to escape it.

#### 4.2.3.3. The context

The very purpose of the judicial file is to be attentive to what happened in order to identify, if necessary, the constituent elements of the qualification. This does not include the context of the protagonists' lives in which the violence took place. From a criminological point of view, however, these data are important in order to give an image of the people the police and the justice system deal with for this type of problem.

The analysis of the files selected show a great diversity in the stage of the relationship, ranging from a recent meeting to couples who have been separated for several years, to divorced couples, to couples who have been together for several decades. It is clear from our data that

the (sheer decision or even intention of) separation can lead to a tenfold increase in violence. In some cases, the context of the separation shows signs of marital terrorism. According to literature the loss of control is unbearable for the offender in the context, it can be seen as offender who 'goes crazy'. In other cases, a certain instrumentalization of justice can be detected through attempts to make the other person bear responsibility for financial and material issues, or even for the custody of the children.

The social and cultural context can reveal great vulnerability in the offender as well as the victim subjected to violence in very marginalised environments. Some stories reflect a context of administrative insecurity, where the marriage has allowed one of the partners to obtain legal residence. Some mention a patriarchal context where the partner legitimised the violence by referring to diminished honour. Sometimes partners justify the violence by the need to put the victim back in her place as a woman. Other cases, especially some of the Dutch-language cases in our selection, involve more affluent, or even very affluent, backgrounds and/or jobs with high socio-cultural capital.

In addition to these different contexts highlighting multiple vulnerabilities, there are aspects of the life histories of both people involved that create an individual vulnerability on a psychological and situational level (Harrati & Vavassori 2017, 7). Little information is found in the files on this facet, even less than the socio-cultural context. This is especially true at the level of the public prosecutor. In the margins of depictions of events, flashes appear that hint at those vulnerabilities through the mention of idleness, problems of mental illness, psychiatric follow-up, autism, suicide attempts, internment, bipolarity or dementia. Abuse of substances (especially alcohol, but also medication and cocaine) and gambling, by the offender and/or the victim, are very regularly mentioned as a factor instigating the incident. They can be considered both as pointing to an individual fragility and as playing a role in exacerbating the violent behaviour, in unpredictable behaviour and in the deterioration of the relationship between the protagonists. Many victims insist on these fragilities of the offender, as well as his jealousy, to explain what happened. In doing so, however, they make their storyline more complex and risk undermining the responsibility of the offender in the interpretation of their narrative by police and justice actors.

#### **4.2.4. The 'supply' side of the criminal justice system**

##### 4.2.4.1. The police

Criminal justice is based on the gradual passing of an incident through several institutions. The first is the police. In Belgium this first institution has a double function: on the one hand there is the function of judicial police, charged with investigating offences by responding to injunctions from the public prosecutor; and on the other hand, there is the function of administrative police, demanding to restore and maintain public order.

Through the different ways in which a report is received, the police - in their judicial role - will sort through their own findings and the elements reported in the discourse of the protagonists, and sometimes of witnesses, in order to fit the story into the 'penal suit' (Lévy 1985). If it seems that the facts reported do not constitute an offence, an information sheet can be drawn up, which may be used later. The file is mainly composed of discursive elements from the protagonists, sometimes from witnesses. Often the police officers confront and complete these

elements in their police report by means of their own observations as the shock, fear or tears they perceive in the victims (or their children). Material evidence is important to the justice system, so police ask the victims to procure medical certificates to attest the injuries, their (probable) origin and the inability to work resulting from the violence. This preference of the justice system for material evidence gives *de facto* a priority to physical violence, distorting the equality intended by the legislator amongst the different forms of violence as recognised by the COL. Technological developments (printing messages, reading mobile phones in order to access text messages, etc.) make it somewhat possible to broaden the spectrum of material evidence gathered in more recent cases. The analysis of the judicial files shows that victims also turn to the police in their role as protectors of public order, notably when they request action. In the files, we find expectations of the classic actions such as admonishing the offender (at the initiative of the police or at the request of the public prosecutor). The proposals for police assistance to the victims appear to be fairly standardised: responsibility training for the offenders, follow-up by a victim support service for the victim, mediation (on a local level, not penal mediation), creating an 'alert' (drawing the attention of police officers to the situation if the victim should report new incidents).

Often the police propose that one of the partners should leave the shared accommodation for a short period – at least one night – so that the situation can calm down. The offender often refuses this proposal with the argument that he has the right to stay or that he does not have a social network that would give him a place to go. If the victim refuses or cannot find a place to crash, the couch becomes the only place to fall back on. The range of concrete actions implemented by the police is diverse; they appear to function in many cases as practical 'guides', proposing that a victim change the telephone number and Facebook profile, contacting the telephone operator to block the number stalking her, to go live elsewhere, to help retrieve belongings from the offender's (or shared) home, but also advice into the more legal side of the case such as taking a lawyer, applying to the justice of the peace court, and even in a more moral approach, like consult a marriage counsellor or a conflict manager. They even intervene in some files as conflict mediators.

#### 4.2.4.2. The Public Prosecutor's Office

The Public Prosecutor is responsible for investigating offences by means of judicial orders to the police. In addition to requests to interview offenders, witnesses and victims, to use mobile phones to trace messages or calls, to arrest or to release offenders, we also see requests to transmit a message such as *'make Mrs. understand that she must separate from Mr.'* The public prosecutor sometimes has to refer to the investigating judge when more restrictive measures seem appropriate to complete the investigation. In the files an arrest warrant for preventive detention is sometimes issued against an offender in the case of serious acts (clearly observed physical violence, repeated threats and harassment, attempted homicide) or when an offender denies. The offender may be released on conditions later on, like scrupulously attending follow-up by a judicial assistant as an alternative measure to pre-trial detention, or following an offender responsibility assuming program, a drug rehabilitation programme or psychological follow-up. The temporary restraining order, introduced as a specific condition in case of IPV in 2012, appears to be used less frequently than informal police relocation arrangements.

In cases of harassment or assault which, in our file sample, were always dismissed, we can find a reminder of the law as a decision of the public prosecutor. Penal mediation is proposed in a few situations - without necessarily being successful: often one of the parties does not show up or refuses the approach, but in the event of an agreement, the prosecutor decides to suspend their action.

Cases can be dismissed for two types of reasons: Technical reasons indicate that the legal framework cannot be applied, such as 'insufficient charges', especially in cases marked by material and emotional poverty and where there is a great deal of powerlessness and weariness on the part of the judicial actors when interpreting the situation. Opportunity reasons mean that the public prosecutor's office considers that prosecution is not appropriate, mainly in relation to the nature of the facts, as it is a relational offence, or the disproportionate consequences between the consequences of the facts and those of triggering the penal machinery. A significant number of cases are also considered 'regularised' when the victim, contacted again a few months after the report, declares that things have returned to normal.

#### 4.2.4.3. The court

Files that have been sent to a judge concern a specific kind of cases: (attempted) homicide, rape (or sexual exploitation) or assault and battery certified by a medical certificate with an inability to work (and mostly with repeated complaints or accompanied by threats or harassment). Repeated complaints of threats and harassment may also lead to prosecution. This decision of the public prosecutor to send a case to the judge usually comes after initial referrals to mediation or therapeutic follow-up.

The plurality of the violence, the recurrence or repetition of the acts, and the history of domestic violence are elements that clearly influence not only the trajectory of the case towards a prosecution, but also the decision making. In these cases, brought before the criminal court, more elements are available that shed light on the context of life, family and relationships. It is above all thanks to the psychological assessments that the complexity of the stories and relationships is revealed, by placing the protagonists in trajectories that are not univocal, often marked by abandonment, family violence, alcoholism and the need for recognition.

Most judgements pronounce a (partial) *probationary suspension* of the sentence *with conditions*. These conditions often appear general and rather standardised, such as submitting to the directives of the probation assistant or finding or continuing to work. Other judgements impose conditions that answer specific aspects of the problematic situation, such as treatment or training for violent offenders and growing awareness of the victims' point of view, treatment for alcohol abuse, living arrangements such as staying with one's mother and not visiting the family home...

The appeal decisions of our selection all confirm the judgements. Imprisonment (between 10 months and 6 years) is pronounced in the cases involving physical violence that caused the most serious consequences such as certain attempted homicides or certain assaults with inability to work. We can access some of the motivations of the sentencing in the judgments as well as in the preparatory notes. Judges aim to fight against the feeling of impunity and to take into account the impact of the violence on the victim and the children, but also at the same time preserve any possible existing socio-professional integration. The offender's state



of mind also appears to have a major influence on the decision: denial or minimisation by the offender are used to justify a more severe sentence, as are alcohol abuse or the presence of children during the violence. The arguments used for leniency are clearly the ability of the defendant to amend, the absence of a criminal record and the offender's (existing) socio-professional integration.

When the defendant is finally sentenced to prison, the question of what will happen to the convicted person most often remains open. In some older files we see that the offender has returned to his victim, motivated by a lack of an alternative or because the partner hopes he may have changed.

#### **4.2.5. Discussion: the challenges of IPV for the penal justice system**

Criminal justice has been a much-needed link in public policies to combat partner violence, but it is still organised around the requisite for evidence and the offender/victim duality inherent in criminal law. Here we present in a thematic order (not chronological) the major challenges that came up in this analysis.

##### 4.2.5.1. The victim's hesitation to identify themselves as such

Once the silence has been broken, not all victims (immediately) recognise themselves as victims: not every victim considers they are dominated in their relationship. Understanding the nature of the relationship is the first step in the process of ending a relationship, coming before the perceiving and identifying the violence (Dziewa & Glowacz 2021, 5). Moreover, identifying oneself as a victim can be seen as degrading or even humiliating. Indeed, the 'good victim' in the eyes of the justice system presents herself as completely controlled, passive, afraid, who is spoken for by professionals and seeking protection by the justice system (Jakšić & Ragaru 2019, 232). In one of the judiciary files analysed, we find an example of a victim, probably married for administrative expediency, who files a complaint and develops a strategy for getting out of the relationship of control. Gradually as she becomes more active, she is considered a 'bad' victim by the justice system. The strength of her reaction, the support of psychosocial resources (from the battered women's' shelter, the public social welfare centre, her lawyer, etc.) is interpreted as signs of liberation from the hold. This is not considered as a beneficial outcome within the justice system but as a form of 'manipulation' that limits the possible protective role of justice towards the victim. These signs of a positive evolution for the victim become extenuating circumstances for the violence of the offender and indications of a form of responsibility in the violent dynamic. This sheds light on the paradox for the victim: on the one hand she claims to be recognised as such and on the other hand she does not manage to fully appropriate this category – which is probably for the best for her, we would add.

The question arises about the proposed pathway after being recognised as a victim: how to rebuild oneself? But it is not the role of the criminal justice to deal with this fundamental follow-up.

##### 4.2.5.2. The penal grid: ready-made and ill-adapted for IPV

The organisation of criminal justice around an *offender/victim duality* is problematic in dealing with the complexity of violent interactions. It calls for an offender (to be punished) and a victim

(to be protected). and if the protagonists do not play their 'role', the justice system is a mismatch... However, this clear repartition of roles on which the judicial process is built does not always appear that clear in reports of IPV. This type of file is the manifestation of a particular crisis situation where the context underlying the incident reported is often very hard to unravel, but essential in identifying the dynamics of the reported violence.

Violence between partners can be different in nature, there is no typical profile of offenders and/or victims of domestic violence but rather situational and relational configurations specific to the offender/victim couple (Harrati & Vavassori 2017, 6). The justice system has to decipher these configurations in order to ensure its mission to punish the offenders and defend the victims. This brings us to another challenge, identifying the distinction between violence and conflict. In some judicial files it is complicated to identify who is dominated, especially in situations of 'cross-complaints' (Ouellet et al. 2017, 319) where police officers speak of *'interchangeable roles between victims and offenders and denounce the inadequacy of a black-and-white reading of reality'*. In those settings the criminal justice system is in an awkward predicament and ultimately takes no action. Although the judicial actors would like to consider the 'dynamics of the relation' more and work more on the (domination in the) 'couple', the judicial configuration is not organised for this type of approach.

#### 4.2.5.3. The victim's ambivalence

There are many dynamics underlying the act of bringing a situation to the attention of the judicial system. As we discussed, disclosure does not always imply an unequivocal desire by the victim to get out of the violent relation or even to denounce their partner as an offender. Some victims simply want to 'tell their story'. Filing a complaint, the first step in the judicial process, is certainly not the solution to all the difficulties encountered by victims of partner violence, nor is it the only step. It is necessary to distinguish breaking of silence in a trajectory of violence and demanding legal sanctions through the same action, i.e. contacting the police. We can see that the way victims appropriate the complaint is diverse and for many of them contacting the police does not necessarily mean entering the criminal justice system in a clear and definitive manner. In many files we observed a more ambiguous attitude through multiple trips back and forth, between calling for help and reporting to the police on the one hand and then returning to a violent partner. Through diversity in the description of the types of couples, the length of the relationships, the contexts of life and the emergence of violence, it is perceptible that it is much harder for some victims stuck in a situation of administrative and economic precariousness to call upon the authorities, but the difficulty for the police and judicial actors to formulate a response to these situations is equally perceptible.

Engaging with criminal justice is frightening and it may motivate the protagonists to suggest that everything is back to normal. The reasons for this discourse, which often reassures the judicial actors, are complex and multiple: fear of legal proceedings against the partner, fear that the child(ren) may be withdrawn, fear of reprisals or worsening of the violence, fear of the family's reaction, attachment to the partner, hope for a change of behaviour, hope of succeeding in 'curing' the partner .... Summoning the retributive model, the main characteristic of the criminal justice system, seems a high-stakes game: the victims' expectations are not necessarily a process of (potentially) penalising the violent partner, they mainly just want 'it to

stop' (Mélan 2017, 14), to be protected. They probably need help first and foremost, but reporting does not necessarily mean getting that help (Puech 2019, 4) - or at least not immediately.

This ambivalence on the part of victims towards the judicial process is also expressed towards the partner. Many authors have described the narcissistic fault line of female victims, who may be victims of denigration by their own mother and where 'the man represents both a failing object to be repaired and an object used (in mirror image) to repair the narcissistic fault line of the woman/mother' (Derivois & al. 2015, 5 - our translation). This reading in terms of personal flaws and repair is often found in the expert reports, and even in the contextualizations proposed by certain witnesses. This ambivalence on the part of the victims is marked by contradictory statements that leave the judicial actors perplexed. They often have a paradoxical relationship with their partner, embroiled in a cycle of violence (Beghin & Laouar 2020, 24) of which they are not necessarily aware, wanting to 'end it all and make amends' (Derivois & al. 2015, 3 - our translation). This ambivalent posture is also present in the explanation offered by the victim of the partners' behaviour such as alcohol abuse, jealousy or mental health problems. There are all expressions of suffering seen as 'excuses' for the violent incidents and diminishing the responsibility of the offenders.

#### 4.2.5.4. The question of evidence in a judicial context

Building a case admissible in criminal proceedings requires the gathering of evidence. The most intangible, material evidence, being a medical certificate attesting inability to work. The valorisation of material evidence gives a *de facto* priority to physical violence, even if technological developments make it possible to broaden the spectrum of evidence gathered. The difficulty of gathering evidence about incidents in a secluded, private, setting poses a significant challenge to the police and judicial handling. And, the files, especially files where a judge is seized, do tell us mainly about physical violence. Physical traces of assault and battery or (attempted) homicide lead more often to prosecution, whereas other qualifications are more easily dismissed. Studies on life trajectories show the importance of the diversity and accumulation of violence suffered by women, psychological, physical, economic and sexual violence. Most women have experienced at least three types of violence, with broad variations in terms of the severity or intensity of the events (Patard et al. 2020, 124). It would seem that the different forms of violence take place successively in individual trajectories (Ouellet 2018, 175). The justice system deals with this accumulation of 'everyday' violence in different forms, if reported, incident by incident, each one separately presenting itself as relatively 'benign' and unsubstantiated.

#### 4.5.2.5. Vulnerable social context

##### A) Victim with multiple vulnerabilities

The files show us victims marked by multiple vulnerabilities on the psychological, physical, administrative, cultural and family levels. These vulnerabilities constitute obstacles to making their situation visible and this contributes to the status quo of the violent dynamics. The lack of follow-up for mental health problems, administrative issues for foreign women, language problems, cultural vulnerability due to gender 'norms' when women are considered to be the man's 'property' ...

Secondary victimization lurks around the corner, potentially causing a delay in reporting the violence and leaving the violent relationship. The fear of not being believed, the lack of support from the entourage or even pressure from the family in some cultures not to '*sully the family honour*'... all these reactions can lead to over-victimization and lock the victim into silence in order to avoid the circle of rejection.

And finally, a last dimension of the vulnerability of victims concerns the economic stakes of a denunciation and legal proceedings: they often do not have the means to live separately from their violent partner (if he is incarcerated, leaves them or if they wish to leave).

#### B) Offender with a shattered identity

Few offenders are in phase with the interpretation of the violence given by the victims (or even the witnesses or police officers); they minimize, insist on shared responsibility for the reported incidents. In addition to these expected reactions, we have noticed that several male offenders present a series of social elements that undermine their identity or role as a man through the prism of male norms in the general context of our patriarchal societies. There is talk of loss or absence of work, economic problems, children's independence, mental illness, integration problems or discrimination. For some, this confrontation challenges the representation they have of their place in family life. These fragilities are most often combined with alcohol abuse. Many offenders clearly name their suffering by talking about a deep mutual dissatisfaction in the relationship, the feeling of being dominated by a woman who has a job, a difficulty in assuming their family responsibilities, a feeling humiliated by society and a deep malaise, crises of jealousy, a life of idleness and boredom against a background of great material and emotional poverty. It is as if these different configurations of frustration, humiliation, rejection, etc. could only be resolved by violence. In these life circumstances, which show the 'shattered identity' of many offenders, a desire by the victim to separate is experienced as an unbearable attack on one's 'honour' and represents a further collapse of identity.

While most studies show that violent partners are 'often good workmates or charming neighbours', and that men who use violence as an operational mode in all spheres of their lives are a minority (Roubin 2019, 21), the population discussed in court cases is said to be predominantly made up of this minority. Their psychosocial profiles, when they are known, are rather heavy: mental health problems, maltreatment experienced in childhood, judicial history, social marginality.

#### 4.5.2.6. Conflict or violence between partners

Throughout the judicial file analyses the question of identifying and distinguishing between violence and conflict emerge as a key issue. The risks of misperceiving the problem in terms of intimate terrorism or situational violence (Lapierre and Côté, 2014, 75) are well documented, yet it is so hard to distinguish between these two types of situations when one must rely solely on what the protagonists report during police interrogations, without knowing the history of the relationship. The police and judicial professionals in charge are convinced that this is an essential point but mention their lack of tools to identify the difference between conflict and violence. In the files, we note that the reported situations are (too) quickly considered as appeased when the police report a 'regularised situation' after a brief new contact with the victim. It would seem that these judicial actors do not often perceive intimate terrorism. Little

attention is paid to small phrases uttered by a victim during an interrogation (and acted in the police report) which could indicate non-respect for the other's needs from the offender's point of view on the one hand and, on the other, excessive consideration of the other's needs from the victim's point of view. It is interesting to discover, however, that some offenders, recognise their problem with violence. Some of them even state that they would prefer the justice system to intervene even if the victim withdraws her complaint.

The consideration of statements of appeasement without further investigation raises questions with regard to the literature on domestic violence, exposing the difficulty for victims to sustain their complaint over time while the pressure from the offender remains very strong. An indication of a coercion could be the withdrawal of the complaint by a victim who prefers not to aggravate the situation by pursuing this very costly process. Moreover, we know that in these situations of control, filing a complaint and deciding to leave the violent partner may well make the situation even more tense and violent (Romito 2011, Mélan 2019). But if, for us as researchers, certain sentences, often very revealing as to the processes of domination, alert us when we read certain official reports, the police and the public prosecutor, poorly equipped and having to react in an emergency, can often only ratify the victim's will to pursue or not pursue her violent partner.

In the sentencing, the elements marking the seriousness of the facts are often counterbalanced by arguments relating to the offender's state of mind, cooperation (the presence of the defendant at the hearing, acknowledgement of the acts, expression of regret, etc.), the absence of a criminal record and the desire not to hinder or preserve social and professional integration. In these judgements, seeking to 'protect' the offenders' social and professional integration, the judges try to combine an awareness of the seriousness of the acts with the values of Belgian society, especially in the case of couples of mixed origins. But here again, there is no trace of analysis or consideration of the 'reading of the violence' in terms of conflict or violence. Mention is made of the totally disrespectful and inadmissible attitude of the defendant towards his (ex-)partner, without raising certain alerts that could lead one to believe that the violence has been going on for many years, and that one could be faced with a form of 'hold'. The failure to recognise this represents a real danger for justice, which risks failing one of its goals: the protection of victims who run the ultimate risk of being killed.

The distinction between conflict and violence is therefore extremely hard to establish if it is truly a question of control, especially as the subjects are not aware of the process in which they are possibly caught. The public prosecutor would absolutely need information on the context in order to understand the relational dynamics beyond the incident reported. However, as we have seen, these elements of context are not well explored in the files. Reading of the files is a form of a posteriori examination, with certain elements appearing obvious ex post, but which could not have been obvious to the police officers and, a fortiori, to the judicial officers, at least at the time of the first incident(s) being reported. Not only is it quite difficult to assess dangerousness, but the perception is also polluted by fact that the system is encumbered by all the conflict situations where the police are summoned to the scene for lack of other interlocutors, or for reasons other than legal proceedings, particularly in a form of instrumentalising these proceedings.

#### 4.2.6. Conclusion

The line of demarcation introduced by the criminal law favours a linear logic aimed at protecting the victims and condemning the offenders without leaving sufficient room to think about the circular and dynamic modality of domestic violence, understand the entanglement of the links that often unite the offender and the victim in a form of 'suffering' intersubjectivity (Harrati & Vavassori 2017, 11) or to take into account the globality of the situation, the relational dynamics and the interchangeability of roles. To the criminal justice system, understanding the dynamics of IPV and enabling the protagonists to get out of the cycle is not really relevant. The organisation of justice echoes the effect of the inherent bifurcation between offenders and victims. In the course of our research, it became apparent that the teams working with offenders were completely independent of those working with victims. Partner violence, however, is an interactive process, a dynamic phenomenon that is not fixed in time, which has been highlighted by both the cycle of violence model and the relational domination process model (Beghin & Laouar 2020, 27-29). And confining the definition of violence into one of an offender/victim relationship makes it difficult to have a more dynamic vision in terms of the process of domination within the couple.

The failure to take the relation between the victim and the offender into account in the criminal justice system, by bifurcating the victim and the offender, has consequences for both. On the one hand, the judicial response is not oriented towards 'helping' the victims. It certainly contributes to reinforcing the separation between the offender and the victim, through a set of repressive actions directed towards the offender, while the victim is left with her circumstances, even if an offer of 'services' is made. The victim is left 'free', to give any direction to the relationship with her partner, free in the aftermath of the disclosure of the violence, free to get help or not (Delage et al., 2012, 110), whereas she will mostly need help and support in dealing with the violence and these decisions. On the other hand, the judicial response concentrates its action on the offender, with its emphasis on amending the defendant, fighting impunity, making them aware of the impact of the violence and the need to respect the psychological and mental integrity of others<sup>64</sup>. No doubt it often misses the lived experience of these defendants, particularly when they feel they have little control over their lives, overtaken by their precarious life context, often exacerbated by alcohol.

This differentiated approach could be understood as a form of abandonment - of both parties. The offender feels abandoned in the sense that the judicial response focuses on the past act, however serious, without focusing on intervening with the offender to prevent such behaviour in the future. The victim is left facing her problems, without guidance regarding, the psychosocial support available in order to regain power over her life. The appeal to justice could ultimately intensify a symbolic position perpetuating assignment to the role of victim (Mélan 2017, 14). This invites us to consider the need for a more 'therapeutic' approach for IPV, to gradually free someone from a position of the offender who is acting out and/or the victim who suffers (Harrati & Vavassori 2017, 11). This is not proposed by the justice system, which concentrates on judging the facts. The (current) judicial response is unable to look beyond this duality of offender/victim in order to grasp the full complexity of domestic violence.

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<sup>64</sup> As the arguments in the judgements show.

This would require an intervention with both members of the couple, without prejudging a criminal sanction.

And finally, if identifying coercive control in the judicial files is already not an easy task, the police and judicial actors undoubtedly do not have the frame of reference needed to spot it. The justice system alone is certainly not capable of dealing with this social problem. It is not equipped to grasp the context or understand what happens when an incident is reported; it is mainly interested in the 'fact(s)'. These are certainly important, but the problem is much broader and would require a networked approach and dialogue in order to offer much needed assistance to victims and offenders.

#### 4.3. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS WITH VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS<sup>65</sup>

This chapter is specifically dedicated to the analysis of the trajectories of victims and perpetrators of violence between intimate partners (IPV) based on face-to-face interviews conducted in the territory of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB) and Flanders. Its objectives are: (1) to analyse of the dynamics underlying violence between partners with regard to the processes underpinning the beginning / maintenance of the violence inflicted and/or suffered, as well examining exit and desistance processes; and (2) to analyse the impact of public policies based on the experiences and perceptions of both those who have undergone interventions. One hundred and seven subjects were interviewed as experience experts. They reported their history of violence with their specificities in terms of dynamics of violence, duration of the couple relationship(s), social and economic context. In spite of the great heterogeneity of the experiences and the constants of the violence as well as the diversity of the social contexts and the profiles, the analysis of the accounts revealed psychic and subjective processes associated with the dynamics of exit.]

##### 4.3.1. Analysis of victim's trajectory and history

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 88 victims of IPV in the territory of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and Flanders (2019–2020).

<b>Victims (N=88)</b>
<b>Females (N=78)</b>
<b>Age (years):</b> [18–29] = 22; [30–49] = 34; [>50] = 21 ; DM* = 1
<b>Duration of the relationship (years):</b> [1–5] = 29; [6–10] = 18 [11–15] = 13; [>15] = 17 ; DM = 1
<b>Time of interview:</b> Crisis = 12 ; Retrospection = 66
<b>Males (N=10)</b>
<b>Age (years):</b> [18–29] = 1; [30–49] = 7; [>50] = 2
<b>Duration of the relationship (years) :</b> [1–5] = 4; [6–10] = 2; [10–15] = 1; [>15] = 2; DM = 1
<b>Time of interview:</b> Crisis = 1; Retrospection = 9

\* MD = Missing Data

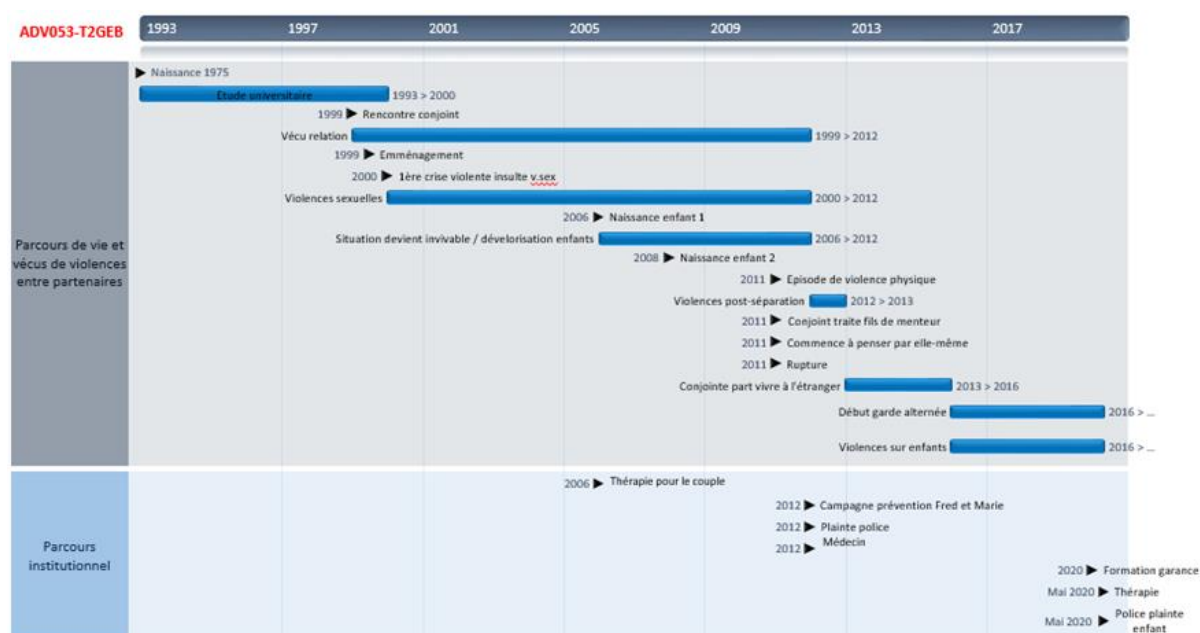
##### 4.3.1.1. Multiple experiences of violence

The violence experienced by respondents varied across the sample. Some victims explained how the abuse they suffered in their childhood, as well as the psychological and sexual abuse

<sup>65</sup> Analyses conducted by Dziewa A. & Glowacz F.

they suffered in their first relationships, lead them to use violence and tolerate certain types of violence in more recent relationships. The trajectories of violence all the victims encountered were characterized by the presence of several types of concomitant violence, or "polyviolence", psychological, physical and verbal. Psychological violence, the most frequently mentioned form of violence in the accounts – without being named as such – includes maneuvers aimed at denying the other person, neglecting them, discriminating against or discrediting them through strategies of control, domination or surveillance. Physical violence was the second most common type mentioned by subjects, then verbal violence – insults and disparaging remarks – was the third most common form of violence. These three types of violence were the most common in the victims' accounts, but interviewees also mentioned situations of economic violence, sexual violence and isolation. The interviews reflected a continuum of violence, that is, it occurred more than once over a long period of time with gradual differences in perceived severity, coercion and force. The subjects' accounts also illustrated a process of withdrawal among the victims that can be explained, on the one hand, by the dynamics within the couple and of violence – restriction of contacts and isolation enforced by the perpetrator, leading to a withdrawal into the couple – and, on the other hand, by the shame felt by the victim of what they experience in front of their friends and family. Isolation can result from subtle mechanisms which manifest in constant criticism from those around them or jealousy. Violence took place during the relationship but could also continue after separation, among these cases we found instances of violence affecting parenthood and instrumentalizing the child, i.e. the mobilization of children against parents. Some interviewees referred to various forms of violence that damaged their parental integrity, where children became the partner's weapons. Administrative and economic violence – control over money, prohibition from working, financial dependence – emerged in several interviews. Another, more indirect, form of violence was characterized by the way a partner used institutions against the victim. About one in five victims said they themselves had used violence within their relationship.

Figure 2. Example of a victim's trajectory





Among the victims ten were men. For these male victims, psychological violence was the most common form of violence cited, followed by physical and then verbal violence. Male victims also expressed feelings of isolation, parental and post-separation violence. Sexual violence was referred to but only in a minority of Francophone interviews. Two of the Dutch-speaking male victims described particular incidents of sexual violence in which their female partner forced them to carry out sexual acts. An intersectional perspective shows how forms of violence can have different meanings and impacts; for example, racist comments or a failure to respond to racism were viewed as a form of neglect or violence by some of our respondents. Other respondents also mentioned the invisibility of violence, such as being forced to sign administrative papers written in a language that they did not understand, thereby forcing them to implicitly trust their partner in this process.

#### 4.3.1.2. Exits from violence: a dynamic and complex process

Based on the subjects' interviews, an analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed the different phases of the exit from violence process (Dziewa & Glowacz 2021). Individual analyses, which were not focused on societal factors, resulted in a model (Fig. 3) that is mainly focused on the clinical aspects of exiting violence between partners. Each stage of this process involves personal and/or interpersonal stages of change in terms of perception, recognition and integration. This model demonstrates that, beyond the major contextual and structural constraints, the representations that victims have of themselves, their partner and the violence suffered will have a significant impact on the exit process.

Our analyses show that the process of leaving a violent relationship begins when the victim perceives a **change in the dynamic within the couple** (Stage 1). The dynamic that takes hold in the couple is seen as a conflictual situation, the cause of which is mainly attributed to factors that are external to the couple (unemployment, family patterns). At this point, victims develop strategies to reduce their discomfort (internal tension) generated by this change in relational dynamics. The persistence of tensions in the couple can lead the victim to another stage characterized by the **perception of violence** (Stage 2) without it being recognized as IPV or a process of domination. In the next step, the victims engage in questioning, either their **own responsibility** (Stage 3a) in establishing the violent dynamic, or the **responsibility of the partner** (Stage 3b). These processes of responsibility attribution can follow one another or coexist simultaneously and last for years with a blockage at this stage. Moving to the next step will be facilitated by questioning the partner's responsibility, leading to a moment when the victim considers that **a change is essential** (Stage 4). At this stage, victims of IPV no longer accept the situation as it is and will develop new strategies. Some will leave and others will "maneuver" to end the violence while attempting to save the relationship. To implement **the change** (Stage 5), victims must request or be offered assistance. This is a decisive moment in finding help.

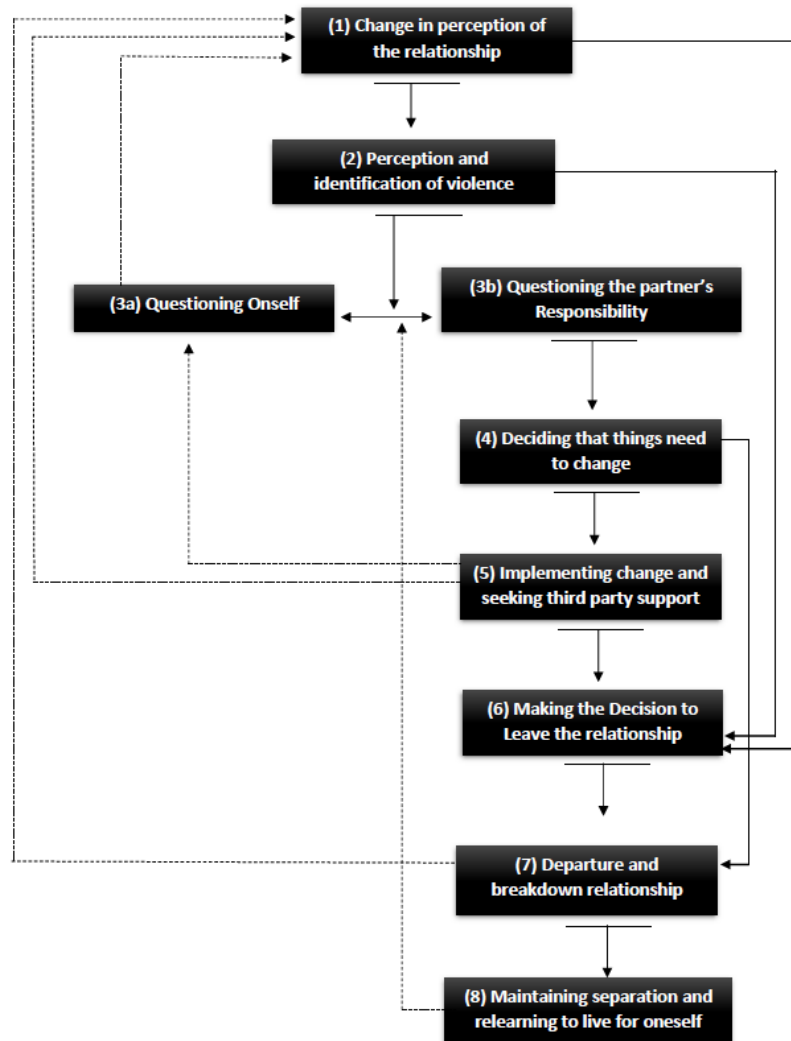


Figure 3. Diagram of the process of exiting violence as a victim of IPV

Support from stakeholders, or those close to them, encourages victims in their efforts, while conversely, a lack of support, judgmental attitudes or a lack of knowledge can slow down the exit process. Victims will try to regain control of the situation by seeking psychological support, by setting clear limits within the couple, or, to a lesser extent, through acts of rebellion. If the strategies put in place by the victims do not allow for a reduction of or even an end, definitive or not, to the violence, they may **consider leaving** the relationship (Stage 6). The presence of children is an important element in the decision to leave, especially when they are perceived as potential victims. They can be an obstacle for the victim when they do not want to risk losing custody or deprive them of a family. Before **leaving** (Stage 7), victims prepare for the future by contacting various sources of aid – friends, family, police and shelters – to obtain assistance, shelter, safety and support. Their departure depends on these opportunities. More often than not, the police are called first for help and, although they do not guarantee a permanent departure, they can promote the recognition of IPV. After the departure, there is **the maintenance of the exit from violence** (Stage 8), which constitutes a major challenge for victims and professionals. Support groups, leisure activities or hobbies permit the

discharge of negative emotions, develop skills and increase feelings of self-efficacy and belonging.

#### 4.3.1.3. Institutional trajectories of victims

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews and timelines made it possible to identify the resources mobilized by the victims during the exit process. These resources are **informal** – family circle, friends – and **formal**. In their accounts, the victims mainly speak about confrontations with the police, legal proceedings and psycho-medico-social assistance services. The interviewees mentioned several reasons why they did not seek support or help during the relationship, such as fear of disbelief or judgment, shame, fear of the partner or low self-esteem. These reasons also depended on the dynamics of violence and the difficulty of proving violence, especially if it was psychological or sexual. Structural factors also played a role, such as ignorance of the social assistance system in Belgium, language barriers and financial difficulties.

**Informal resources.** Throughout the exit process, victims turn primarily to their close entourage, family, friends, neighbors and colleagues, who appear to be the **primary support agents** thanks to their willingness to listen, provide assistance or make themselves available. The entourage serves to warn the victim, expresses doubts or concern for them and can, in this way, support the exit process. We must nevertheless remain attentive to the fact that, in the early stages, these expressions of concern and warnings may be experienced by the victims as forms of pressure, coercion or criticism and, as a result, make them feel incapable of acting. Still, at some point in the process, there will be signals on which they can rely to initiate an end to the violence. Furthermore, our analyses show that family, community and cultural values, such as a disapproval of separation and the minimization of violence, can hinder the process of exiting violence. On the other hand, values that are associated with the defense of women's rights and freedoms as well as equality can help the victim become aware of their experience of violence. More generally, an attitude of non-judgment supports and comforts the victim in their choices and alleviates feelings of shame which constitute a barrier to seeking help and to disclosing experiences of IPV. It emerged that the partner's family occupied an ambiguous and sometimes “oppressive” position in the accounts of the victims. Indeed, a number of victims explained that they turned to the family of the perpetrator in the hope that they could influence the behavior of the perpetrator, but several found the support of the in-laws of little use, even aggravating the difficulties within the relationship. In addition to the support of those around them or in their absence, the internet appeared to be a widely used form of support that could assist in the identification of the violence experienced and in the search for help, via testimonials, addresses and the contact numbers of aid services.

**Formal resources.** Overall, the expectation of proactivity on the part of legal and medico psychosocial (MPS) workers was a central and recurring element in the victims' interviews. For victims, it was difficult to apply for judicial, social and psychological help (making contact, resorting to the police and the courts) because of their psychological state, their isolation but also the lack of information on services and existing institutions available to them. This lack of visibility limits the prospects for victims who are considering ways to get away from the violence but may not know what steps to take to achieve in order to achieve this end.

Furthermore, a lack of information, judgmental attitudes or a lack of knowledge on the part of those responsible for intervening in cases of IPV can hamper victims who are in the process of seeking help and attempting extricate themselves from a violent relationship.

**Police services and legal procedures. FWB:** The victims expected the police to be a relay on the way out of a violent relationship by providing material (shelter, information on IPV and MPS aid services) and moral support. In other words, they are seeking protection and security. An analysis of the victims' trajectories from our interviews indicates that engagement with the justice system produced, for most of the victims of our study, feelings of frustration, anger and injustice towards a system perceived as passive, judgmental and ill-informed about the dynamics of violence. On the other hand, if a social worker is perceived as accessible, attentive and taking into account the person's psychological state, the victims feel supported in the exit process. It was clear from the interviews with the victims that understanding the cyclical aspect of violence in which they had found themselves was of key importance. Indeed, some engaged in the process of requesting help outside of any break-up plan or in cycles of separation and return to the partner. **Flanders:** Some victims indicated that the police services specializing in victim support were the most useful. Others said it depended on the stakeholder they met, as some felt judged by them while others felt understood. Some interviewees noted the lack of consideration for their safety and insufficient follow-up, which was due to a lack of evidence according to them. The most negative experiences involved dealing with family courts and lawyers, mainly in divorce proceedings. In this case, the victims were confronted with disbelief from the judges and a lack of understanding where the custody of children was concerned.

**Medico-psychosocial assistance service. FWB:** Doctors and psychologists are among the first resources mobilized by victims, mainly with the aim of overcoming the state of tension experienced at the start of the exit process. These front-line professionals constitute a fundamental lever for victims as they are best equipped to recognize the dynamics of violence. Social and institutional isolation hinders recourse to first and second line MPS networks. An improvement in the accessibility of such aids, which ensure confidentiality and discretion in relation to the disclosure of violence, is a need that was expressed by a number of the study's participants. It also emerged that professional expectations and interventions, such as accusing the spouse or pushing the victim to leave the relationship before they ready can, paradoxically, slow down or even deter the victim. These elements demonstrate the importance of interventions that respect the victim's needs and pace. In other words, support for victims requires individualized interventions that recognize violence and/or victimization and take into account the dynamics that promote the development of feelings of assertiveness and autonomy. **Flanders:** Several victims had undergone individual therapy sessions in private settings, and this was considered useful in ensuring understanding for their situation. Several respondents also visited reception and care centers for victims in the CAWs (Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk, i.e. Center General Welfare). Some considered the support in this institution as short and superficial, and questioned the lack of experience of the professionals working there. More specialized and in-depth support was provided by individual therapists, who the victims often found on their own. Some respondents mentioned the 1712 helpline as a positive support system for having a first conversation, but they questioned the "hours of

operation". Some victims contested that they had to go to a CAW with the spouse because they could not speak freely for fear of retaliation. One victim explained that she was taken into care through the chain approach. She was very positive about the support she received after her departure and it enabled her to resolve many issues, such as retrieving her child from foster care.

In conclusion, the victims' accounts of violence gave access to their experiences of care in the Belgian system and to their needs in terms of leaving violence, which will be included in the recommendations.

#### 4.3.2. Analysis of perpetrator trajectories and backgrounds

The researchers initially planned to meet with approximately 30 perpetrators. However, despite all the strategies deployed to facilitate participation (recruitment in courts, mandated specialized assistance services, prisons, etc.), only 19 people responded to our call.

<b>Perpetrators (N=19)</b>
<b>Males (N=19)</b>
<b>Age (years):</b> [18–29] = 2; [30–49] = 12; [>50] = 5
<b>Duration of the relationship (years):</b> [1–5] = 8; [6–10] = 7; [11–15] = 1; [>15] = 1; DM = 2
<b>Moment of the interview:</b> Crisis = 5; Retrospection = 14

##### 4.3.2.1. Two dynamics of violence

Our analyses of the subjects' interviews brought to light two types of violent dynamics that are rooted in a history of parental violence and psychological or physical abuse. In the first dynamic (T1), which was the most frequent in the sample and in which the Dutch-speaking perpetrator was included, violence appears as a means of maintaining relations of domination in the perpetrator's environment and over the victim. Anchored in life stories marked by violence, this dynamic is characterized by strategies for strengthening masculinity and the search for control, over the partner in particular. When the perpetrators feel the relationship is undermining their dominance, they use violence to maintain or restore it. The second dynamic (T2) is characterized by a life history and early relationships leading to fusional relationships with the partner. The violence exerted on the partner(s) appears to be an attempt to compensate for and overcome these experiences of inferiority and dependence on the other; for these perpetrators, acts of violence are a means of seeking autonomy.

##### 4.3.2.2. Desistance in the context of IPV: an undefined process.

A method of analysis similar to that conducted with victims was implemented for interviews with perpetrators who were met at different stages of their violence trajectory. The analysis resulted in the development of a progressive model (Fig. 4) that traces the cessation of violence and desistance.

The participants' trajectories were rooted in **early and family histories** (Stage 1). In type 1 dynamics, violence between partners appeared in contexts of abuse, multiple acts of violence and a rejection of authority. In type 2 dynamics, the subjects sought a "structure" that would allow them to become autonomous. When the reality of the relationship did not correspond,

or no longer corresponded, to **the idealized vision** (Stage 2), violence occurred. Subjects in T1 associated **the violent act** (Stage 3) with a need for control or domination, while subjects in T2 focused their discourses on experiences of anxiety, panic and powerlessness.

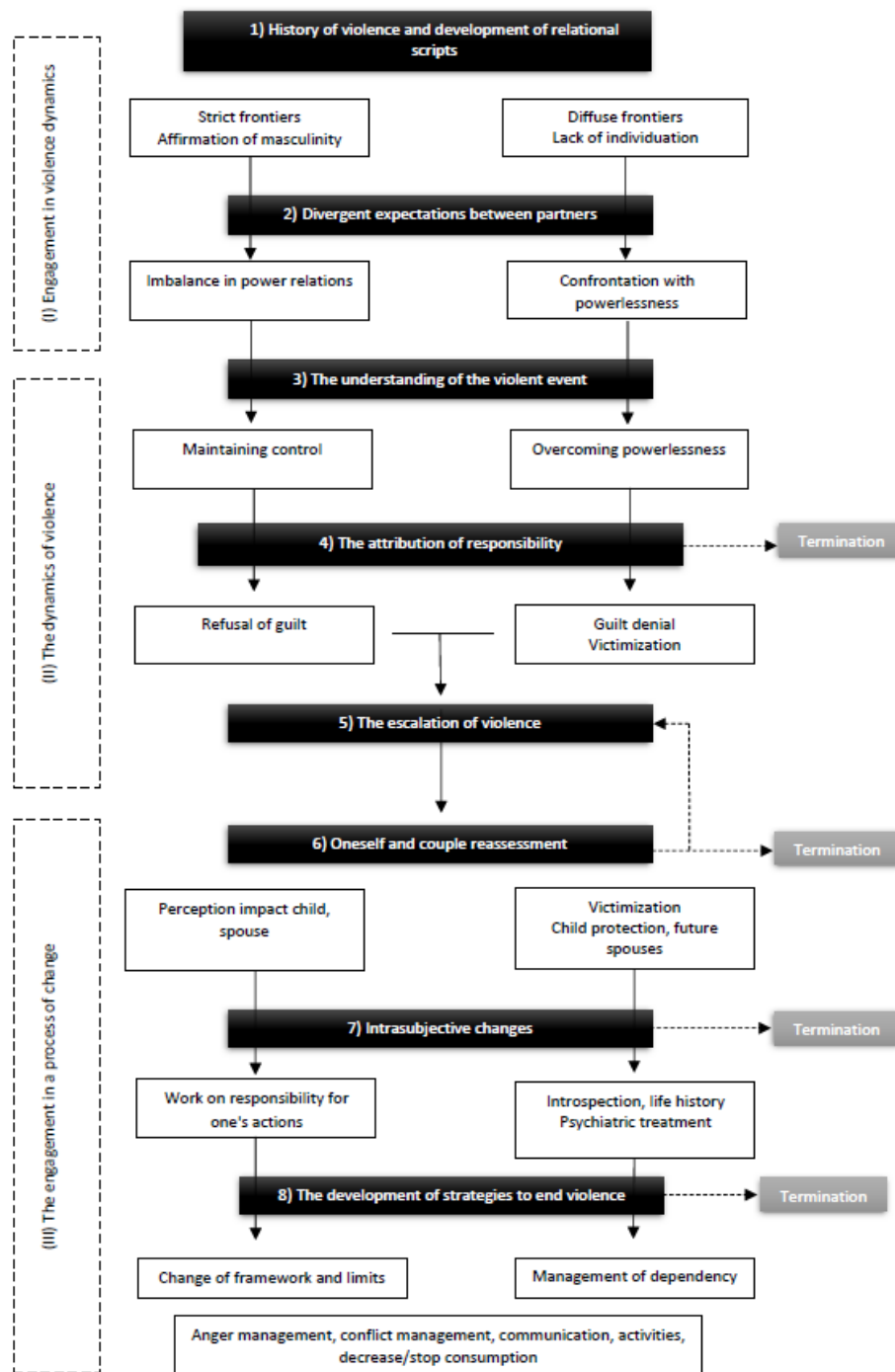


Figure 4. Model of change processes for IPV perpetrators

**The responsibility for the violent dynamic** (Stage 4) was most often attributed to the partner. In T1 dynamics, disempowerment is similar to a refusal to be associated with the identity of "violent man" and, in type 2, to the perpetrator's deep identification with the status of victim. Furthermore, the attribution of responsibility for the violence to the victim or to

situational elements, such as alcohol consumption, was a risk factor for the **escalation of violence** (Stage 5). The repetition, intensity and impact of the violence, or the departure of the partner, may make it impossible for the subject to deny/normalize the violence. This leads to a **re-evaluation of the situation** by the perpetrator (Stage 6). In T1 dynamics, this re-evaluation can take place following a separation – break-up or incarceration – or an ultimatum imposed by the partner. In T2, the reassessment does not alter the perpetrator's casting of themselves as the victims. In the subjects, a questioning of the perpetrator concerning his functioning supports **individual changes** (Stage 7), particularly in terms of responsibility and identity. Through formal and informal exchanges and social support, the perpetrators putted in place different **strategies to end the violence** (Stage 8), which are globally similar in both types of dynamics, such as the management of drug and/or alcohol use, anger and impulsivity. In both cases, relational and community support factors are fundamental.

#### 4.3.2.3. Institutional trajectories of perpetrators

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews and the timelines highlighted the resources and institutional paths involved in the interviewees' exit processes. These resources can be informal and are mainly represented by the close family circle, in other words, the partner and the children. Turning to the wider family is considered unwise because it may imply a form of pressure to take sides, which may end up contributing to and/or accentuating conflicts. Formal resources are police, judicial and counselling services, which are mandated in most situations.

**Informal resources.** For the perpetrators we met, the resources they turned to were mainly informal, namely the family and, more particularly, the partner and children. The role of the victim is central because the strategies of resistance and help-seeking implemented by the partners (help-seeking, active opposition, leaving) can lead the perpetrator to re-evaluate, or not, the dynamics of the couple and their attitudes. It is also worthwhile noting that the presence of a child can favor the process. Some perpetrators question their role as parents, the image they project and their responsibility towards their child.

#### **Formal Resources.**

**Police services and legal procedures (FWB):** Encounters with the police were not good experiences for most perpetrators as officers often demonstrated a Manichean view of violence, stigmatizing perpetrators and victims. The perpetrators perceived themselves as mistreated in these interventions and evoked feelings of injustice due to the attitudes and decisions of actors in the judicial system. The participants also encountered alternative measures (Praxis, therapeutic follow-up or penal mediation). The multiplication of these measures and mandated officers and/or social workers was often experienced as too restrictive. The perpetrators also regretted the lack of information, the excessive length of time and the opacity of the judicial procedures, which gave them the impression that the judicial system was uninterested in their experiences. Stigmatizing confrontations with these services risked leading to the disengagement and disempowerment of the perpetrators.

**Psychosocial support services (FWB):** The perpetrators emphasized the benefits of verbalization, particularly during group sessions and individual follow-ups, which promoted awareness that was conducive to bringing the violence to an end and leaving it behind. Nevertheless, perpetrators perceived a lack of involvement and availability on the part of

professionals. The majority of the men we met had gone through the Praxis association, either voluntarily or because it was mandated. For some, the Praxis training course was a way to work on preserving the relationship with their partner and, for others, it was a place to reflect. During these Praxis follow-ups, the interviewees emphasized the importance of learning to recognize the different types of violence and the impact of this violence on the victims, which allowed the perpetrator to question himself. During these training sessions, work on the notion of responsibility led them to develop strategies to stop the violence. However, in some cases, confrontation with the social workers could be a hindrance, especially when the subjects felt pigeonholed or judged. Perpetrators also mentioned the lack of individual space during the treatment process and the lack of long-term follow-up.

**Chain approach (Flanders):** The most significant impact of the chain approach is the concrete and combined handling of multiple problems. This has contributed to an ongoing awareness of the perpetrator's responsibility.

In conclusion, recruiting perpetrators proved to be more difficult, which reflects notably a fear of stigmatization and a distancing from institutions. The perpetrators' accounts of violence pointed out the obstacles, brakes and dysfunctions in the management of IPV, as well as the lack of psychosocial follow-up in terms of the duration of the accompaniment, and of a multidimensional approach, which hinders the desistance process.

#### **4.3.3. Conclusions from the analysis of the trajectories of victims and perpetrators**

Based on the accounts of the trajectories of violence and the exit from violence of perpetrators and victims, this part of the research aimed to identify the dynamics, and the processes of desistance, as well as the recommendations for intervention in the area of violence between partners. One hundred and seven subjects (88 victims and 19 perpetrators) were interviewed as life experts. They reported their history of violence with their specificities in terms of dynamics of violence, duration of the couple relationship(s), social and economic context. The 107 accounts of violence reveal a great heterogeneity of experiences and patterns of violence, whatever the background of the victims and perpetrators. Although exit processes from violence are supported by a combination of cognitive, interactional, contextual, and social factors, analysis of the narratives revealed psychological and subjective processes associated with exit dynamics.

For victims, subjective changes in perceptions of the relationship, the partner and the self can lead to an awareness of the relationship as problematic and a decision to leave. The process involves multiple levels of alternating perceptions of risk, attribution of responsibility, and reappraisals of self and the relationship. Moreover, ending the violence does not necessarily imply leaving or breaking up. Leaving is seen as a part of the exit process but not as an end in itself. Leaving a relationship or ending violence in a relationship involves a set of actions taken in response to these different subjective and intersubjective phenomena.

For the perpetrators, who were more difficult to recruit, the participants' stories revealed a diversity of trajectories, relational and social contexts. For these, the analyses revealed two types of dynamics of violence that influence the desistance process among perpetrators of partner violence. In the "type 1" dynamic, perpetrators feel that the relationship has undermined their dominant position and their violent responses serve to maintain control. For



them, the process of desistance requires that they internally redirect the attribution of responsibility for the actions they have committed. For "type 2" couple dynamics, couple life confronts the individual with the inability to achieve autonomy and violence manifests itself as a search for individuation. Their process of desistance requires a retro-introspective work centered on their relationship with the other. Beyond legal sanctions, the treatment of perpetrators must be able to support desistance processes by adjusting intervention strategies to the dynamics of violence and to the trajectories of exit from violence in order to promote the rehabilitation of perpetrators of intimate partner violence.

Taking into account the stage of the process in which the victim and the perpetrator are at appears to be central to any care system. The development of clinical intervention must be able to take into account the level of recognition by the victims of the situation in which they find themselves. For the perpetrators, involvement in different levels of reading and understanding of the dynamics of violence is a particular lever for desistance. Recontextualizing the violence in the dynamics of the couple, by identifying the interactions between the perpetrators and the victims, allows the perpetrators to commit themselves more to a process of change.

These characteristics should be integrated into the various psycho-socio-legal interventions. Based on the experience of violence of the subjects who participated in the study and their analysis of it, several recommendations can be made. It appears necessary to increase the visibility of support services, but also to promote a better integration of psychosocial dimensions, particularly in the judicial process, through the mobilization of psychologists and/or social workers in order to offer proactive and adequate support to victims and perpetrators. For the perpetrators in particular, if penal interventions are fundamental to confirm the unacceptable aspect of violence between partners, the feeling of injustice and anger put forward in the speeches reminds us of the importance of rehabilitation work. Post-separation and long-term follow-ups are needed.

Interventions must encompass the multiple experiences of domestic violence with the primary goal of developing individualized approaches in line with the subject's experience. In this sense, ecological models can be applied to medical-psychosocial interventions. The interactions of individual characteristics in the dynamics of the couple reaffirm the importance of deepening the systemic nature of violence and exits from violence, especially for the management of violence. The ecological perspective on partner violence is that of an interaction between multiple, interconnected factors. Approaching violence from a systemic perspective then involves taking into account the individual elements and the social environment (social norms and resources) that affect individuals and their relationships.

#### **4.3.4. Recommendations based on the analysis of the trajectories of victims and perpetrators**

Based on the analysis of the trajectories of victims and perpetrators, as well as their needs and expectations, recommendations based on several axes can be formulated.

#### 4.3.4.1. Care of victims of IPV

(1) *Strengthen victim support services, foster proactivity.* It is necessary to increase the visibility of local, easily accessible, discreet and anonymous services, actions oriented towards potential victims (primary and secondary prevention), such as the development of local relay points (pharmacies, doctors, local stores) and the systematization of precautionary social visits to homes that have been subject to police intervention (police assistance services for victims). The research results show that improved integration of psychosocial dimensions in the judicial process, by means of psychologists and/or social workers within the police services, is required in order to offer victims proactive and adequate support during the judicial process.

(2) *Improve professional training (good practice guide, promotion of knowledge on IPV dynamics and supports).* Training in listening to people experiencing domestic violence is recommended for front-line judicial actors (police) and psychosocial workers in order to help them develop non-judgmental and understanding attitudes. In order to do this, it is necessary to proceed with systematic training, starting with basic training (school curricula) that will be developed in ongoing training courses.

(3) *Update, increase and disseminate information on partner violence & on the institutions available to deal with partner violence.* Despite existing prevention campaigns, victims and perpetrators emphasize the lack of information on the steps to take before, during and after an experience of violence. Improved knowledge of individual rights, as well as of the legal and medico-psychosocial services available to them, plays a specific role in the process of exiting violence. In addition to preventive information on IPV, the development of tools (adapted information, education on IPV and individual rights, frontline and proximity services) for countering IPV is necessary.

(4) *Improve access to legal procedures.* It is necessary to make the legal process more accessible by, for example, increasing the amount of information available that can be understood by laypeople, or by systematically providing support to those implicated in legal proceedings. It is also necessary to actively involve victims in legal proceedings, to give them a voice and to allow them access to their file.

(5) *Provide victims with tailored, timely intervention respecting their rhythm and psychological state.* Interventions must be able to encompass the multiple experiences of violence between partners and develop individualized approaches.

(6) *Develop structures for emergency follow-up and long-term assistance for victims and their families.* Increasing the number of places available in shelters, providing access to automatic medium-term support for police assistance to victims and setting up medical-psychological emergency cells in each district for victims and their families are essential elements.

(7) *Strengthen post-separation follow-up.* Post-separation and long-term follow-up of victims is necessary. Financial assistance (especially for legal proceedings and housing assistance) as well as access to health and psychological care are elements that require special attention.

(8) *Consideration and care for children in judicial and psychosocial interventions.* It is essential to inform psychosocial and judicial actors (criminal prosecution, youth prosecution, family

court, youth court) about the impact of violence on children and the processes that involve the instrumentalization of children (taking into consideration the presence of minors in the home during police intervention, parental support, psychological care of children, minimization of the risks of intergenerational repetition of violence).

#### 4.3.4.2. Regarding the management of perpetrators of IPV

*(1) Awareness of vulnerabilities and barriers to perpetrator management.* A criminal justice response is fundamental for reinforcing the unacceptability and reprehensibility of IPV. Nevertheless, our analyses underline the sense of injustice and anger that these practices generate in the perpetrator population. Rehabilitation work must emphasize responsibility, motivation, and opportunities for change.

*(2) Strengthen interventions that address multiple issues.* Strengthen interventions that address the multiple problematics faced by perpetrators of violence. Strengthen communication and collaboration among multidisciplinary teams in order to achieve comprehensive care of perpetrators of partner violence.

*(3) Strengthen and expand early, post-sanction, and long-term care for perpetrators of partner violence.* Considering perpetrators as "suffering" and/or "in need of help" for long-term psychosocial care is fundamental. It is necessary to implement psychological and social care as early as possible. That is to say, for perpetrators of IPV, social support and a logic of care (similar to that proposed for victims) allows them to benefit early on from socio-judicial care at a treatment center (possibility to resort to injunction and/or care offer) in the short, medium and long term.

*(4) Consideration of the parent/child bond and strengthening of parenthood.* It appears necessary to maintain and support the parent-child relationship, particularly through meetings and/or supervised contact (for example, meeting spaces, visits or written correspondence during incarceration).

#### 4.3.4.3. General recommendations

*(1) Enhance community support (discussion groups, peer support, peer counselling) for the care of victims and perpetrators.* Relational and community support factors are fundamental.

*(2) Develop civic education integrating the topics of individual rights and limits (men's and women's rights, promotion of assertiveness, etc.) and relationships (notion of consent, non-violent communication, etc.).* The education of children about notions of equality between men and women, sexual and affective lives – particularly concerning the notion of consent – and, more broadly, respect for others and non-violent communication is fundamental. Gender-based violence and gender stereotypes affect the way victims perceive and define their experiences and their ability to assert themselves. Social norms have a powerful influence on the development of IPV. Focusing some of our attention on the unequal dynamics that govern male/female relationships from an early age is important for the development of IPV prevention and intervention policies that involve both potential victims and those around them.

*(3) Develop research integrating intersectional perspectives.* It is essential to support participatory and emancipatory research that focuses on specific target groups and minorities (sexual, ethnic and others).

#### 4.4. ANALYSIS OF STATISTICAL DATA<sup>66</sup>

Generally speaking, two categories of statistical data are likely to provide information on the issue of intimate partner violence (IPV). The first is based on surveys, which aim to provide prevalence indicators by asking a representative sample of the population about their experience of being a victim of IPV. The second consists of statistics produced by the institutions in charge of the cases of IPV that are referred to them.

Unlike a number of countries that have recent data from repeated surveys over time, Belgium can only validly refer at national level to the survey conducted in 2009 at the request of the IEWM (Pieters & al. 2010). All types of violence together, 12.5% of the respondents, i.e. 14.9% of women and 10.5% of men, declared that they had been victims of IPV during the last 12 months. In case of physical violence, these percentages are reduced to 1.3% overall, but women are 2.4 times more affected (1.9% of women and 0.8% of men). The more recent study carried out on the basis of the 2013 health survey, also ordered by the IEWM, does not provide usable conclusions in terms of prevalence, given the very low response rate to the question on IPV (Drieskens & Demarest 2015). However, Belgium is currently participating in the survey developed at European level by Eurostat and prevalence data based on a large sample are announced for the end of 2022<sup>67</sup>.

Since the mid-2000s, under the impulse of the National Action Plans (NAP), registration of IPV has been systematised at the level of the police and, even more so, the public prosecutors' offices, producing two separate sets of statistics. These data, and in particular those relating to all suspects reported to Belgian public prosecutors' offices in 2010 for IPV, have been the subject of in-depth research (Vanneste 2016, 2017) which, in the present programme, is completed by a sociodemographic approach.

##### **4.4.1. Introduction**

The results in this section will be presented in four steps. In order to set the context, we will begin with a brief presentation of the evolution of reports on IPV suspects over the last 15 years, based on police and correctional prosecution statistics (4.4.2.). The core of this part of the research lies in an analysis of a cohort of almost 40,000 suspects referred to the public prosecutor's office for IPV in 2010, whose judicial and socio-demographic profile is first described (4.4.3.). The crossing of judicial and socio-demographic data allowed for an unprecedented analysis of the impact of social positioning on the reporting of individuals to the public prosecutor's office for IPV (4.4.4) and then the incidence of this social positioning on the judicial responses to these situations (4.4.5).

##### **4.4.2. Evolution in reporting of IPV to the justice system over the last 15 years**

Before examining the available statistical series, it is crucial to point out that these figures, coming from institutional sources, can in no way give a picture of the extent and trends of intimate partner violence committed<sup>68</sup>, but rather they reflect the evolution of their reporting to

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<sup>66</sup> Analyses conducted by Sanderson J-P. & Vanneste C.

<sup>67</sup> The survey is carried out in Belgium thanks to the cooperation of the statistical institutes of the different regions, the National Institute of Statistics and the IEFH.

<sup>68</sup> This could be better approached in the future through repeated long-term victimization surveys that could be usefully compared with police and judicial series.

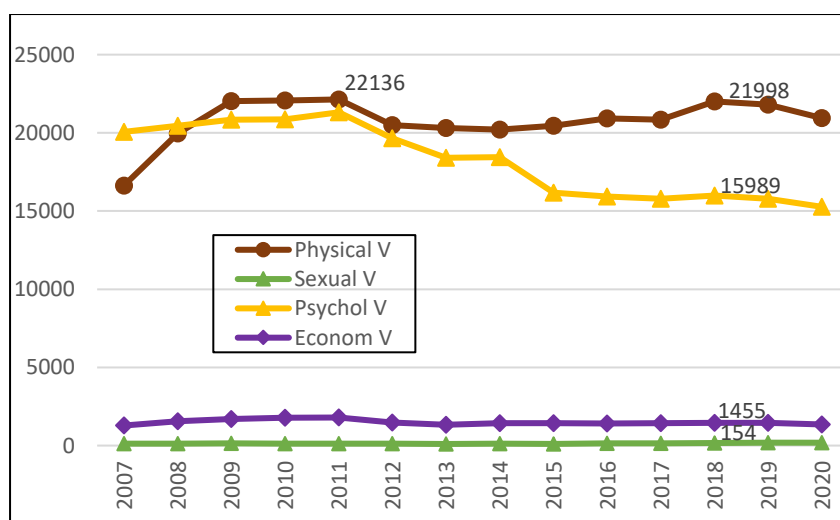
the police and the justice system, via complaints or denunciations. The Belgian victimization survey (Pieters et al. 2010) confirms that only a small proportion of respondents who say they are victims of IPV report it to the police (12%)<sup>69</sup>. The propensity to lodge a complaint, and its evolution over time, is affected by a complex set of factors such as: social receptivity, police receptivity or/and victims' perceptions of the adequacy of the justice system to address their problem.

It was possible to reconstruct two types of series that do not cover the same step of the procedure, nor the same population of suspects, and they also use different categories and different counting rules.

The **police data** record all reports on suspects, whether they are adults or minors. The registration of IPV<sup>70</sup> distinguishes 4 categories: physical, psychological, sexual and economic<sup>71</sup>. As the same incident may have been recorded in several categories, this makes it impossible to calculate a total.

Figure 5 shows that, overall, physical violence constitutes the largest proportion of reports of IPV, followed by psychological violence. Economic and especially sexual violence represent a very small proportion. Even though data is available at the police level from 2000 onwards, the increase in the first few years reflects the introduction of the registration system and the bias associated with taking the date of the incident as the reference date<sup>72</sup>. We then observe a relative stability in physical violence with a peak in 2011 and 2018. Reports of psychological violence show a downward trend, after a peak in 2011.

Figure 5. IPV reports based on police statistics (2007-2020)



<sup>69</sup> This proportion varies according to the type of violence: from 4.9% for insults, 8.8% for sexual abuse, 13.3% for intimidation, to 19.8% for slapping or physical assault or 34.7% for threats with weapons. (Pieters & al. 2010, p.55).

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.stat.policefederaale.be/statistiquescriminalite/> See statistics on 'criminal figures'.

<sup>71</sup> Physical: assault and battery, murder, food poisoning, etc. Psychological: threats, denial of access to children, harassment, etc. Sexual: rape, indecent assault, etc. Economic: failure to pay alimony, destruction, fraud, etc.

<sup>72</sup> A complaint filed about an event dating from one or more previous years is counted at the date of the event, which gives a false impression of growth during the first years of registration.

The **data from the correctional prosecutor's office**<sup>73</sup> count the cases referred to it by the police<sup>74</sup>. These only concern suspects who are of age, minors being referred to the youth prosecution service. IPV is registered via a code specifying the context of 'violence in the couple' in which an incident occurs, the nature of which is also specified via a 'prevention code'. It is therefore possible<sup>75</sup> to have a total of the IPV reported cases and to specify the (main) prevention categories concerned. In Figure 6 we have thus distinguished between cases (1) involving assault and battery, which are the most frequent, (2) those falling into the categories of violations of personal freedoms (harassment, violations of privacy etc.) and public order (threats etc.), (3) those falling into the family sphere and which most often do not constitute an offence as such ('family dispute'), and finally (4) sexual abuse and (5) homicide or attempted homicide, which are much more rare.

Figure 6. IPV cases reported to correctional prosecutors (2007-2020)

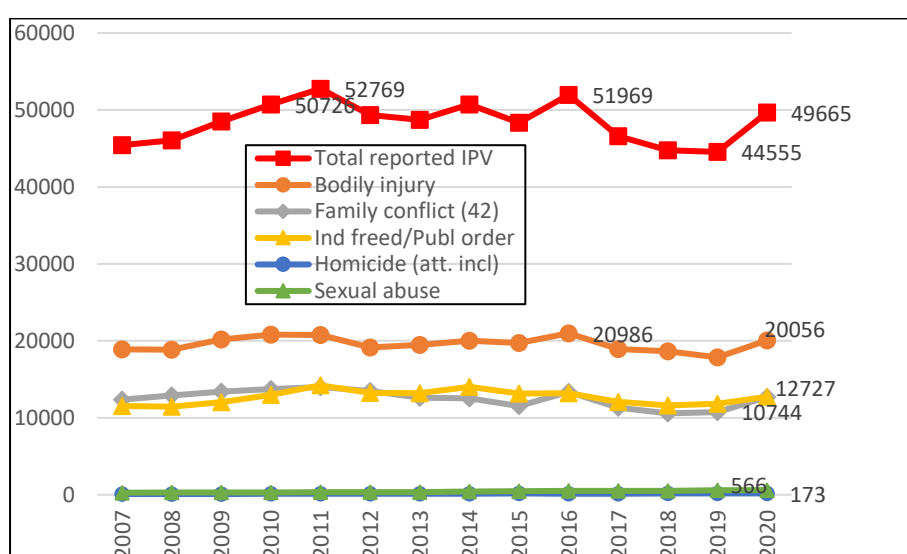


Figure 6 shows a relative stability of reported cases since the introduction of a registration system, with 2011 and 2016 being the peak years. The first years show an increase which may be an effect of the implementation of registration. The years 2017 to 2019 show a decrease followed in 2020 by a return to values close to - but lower than - those of 2011 or 2016.

#### 4.4.3. The profile of suspects for IPV reported in 2010

##### 4.4.3.1. Judicial profile of the cohort

The profile of the cohort (n= 39.438) is characterised by a large part of suspects who were reported on the basis of a 'family dispute' without the fact constituting an offence (15%) or/and had the case dismissed either through absence of an offence or because of insufficient charges (21%). This reduced to 70% the proportion of suspects for whom an offence is

<sup>73</sup> Thanks to the College of Prosecutors General who provided us with these data, and in particular to G. Lamboray, statistical analyst.

<sup>74</sup> More rarely submitted directly by the civil parties or referred by other sections.

<sup>75</sup> Based on notes prepared by analysts at the College of Public Prosecutors in response to requests for data on domestic violence (not published) <https://www.om-mp.be/stat/corr/>

considered to have been established. Among the cohort, 71% were reported for a first IPV in 2010, 50% were reported for a single IPV offence, and 70% for two or fewer IPV offences. Furthermore, 71% of the cohort have been or were also reported for types of offences other than IPV. Regarding the type of IPV, physical violence is present in 62% of cases (including the cohort's 0.6% of homicides or attempted homicides), violations of privacy in 20% of cases, threats in 20% and sexual abuse in 1.4% of cases. 76% of the IPV suspects were men, 83% were registered as Belgians by the public prosecutor's office. 94% were between 18 and 55 years old, and 65% between 26 and 45 years old. (Vanneste 2016, 2017)

#### 4.4.3.2. Socio-demographic profile of the cohort

Analysis based on cross-referencing with census data (n=34,584) indicates that 85% of IPV suspects are Belgian, while the Belgian population represents 90% of the population residing in Belgium<sup>76</sup>. Concerning the type of household, 55% involve children (from married couples, cohabitants, single-parent families or collective households) and 37% do not (necessarily) involve children (married couple or cohabitants without children, isolated). For 8% of the suspects, the type of household is not specified.

*Table V. Main socio-demographic characteristics in the two populations (IPV suspects and general population in Belgium)*

Variables	% IPV suspects	% population in Belgium
Gender		
Woman	24%	49%
Man	76%	51%
Belgian Nationality		
Yes	85%	90%
Children in household		
Yes	55%	51%
Not necessarily	37%	49%
Unknown	8%	0%
Age group		
Less than 18 years	0%	20%
18-24 years	10%	9%
25-29 years	13%	6%
30-34 years	15%	7%
35-39 years	17%	7%
40-44 years	17%	7%
45-49 years	13%	8%
50-54 years	7%	7%
55-59 years	4%	6%
60 or more	4%	23%
Type of municipality		
City Centre	43%	35%
Agglomeration	20%	24%
Suburbs	8%	11%
Distant suburbs (commuter zone)	18%	19%
Commune outside of urban area	9%	11%

<sup>76</sup> The information from the census and the information recorded at the level of the public prosecutor's office do not correspond completely: of those registered as Belgian by the public prosecutor's office, 91% are identified as such by the census and of those identified as Belgian by the census, 84% are registered as such by the public prosecutor's office. For more detailed commentary on these figures see Sanderson & Vanneste, in Vanneste C., Lemonne A., Ravier I. (éds) (2022) in press June 2022.

As previous analyses show (Vanneste 2016, 2017), the population of IPV suspects is predominantly male (76%). In terms of age distribution, the majority are between 25 and 49 years old. While this age group represents 35% of the population in Belgium as a whole, it accounts for 75% of the cohort. Before the age of 25 and between the ages of 50 and 59, the relative weight of these age groups among suspects is close to or even equivalent to their weight in the overall population. Over 60 years of age, the share in the cohort of IPV suspects falls to 4%, far from the 23% that this group represents in the overall population.

A third variable was examined: the type of municipality of residence. We used the typology of urban areas developed by Van der Haegen & Pattyn (1979, modified by Van der Haegen & al. (1996) and by Vanderstraeten & Van Hecke (2019). This typology identifies large cities (or regional cities) with significant influence on their hinterland. Four types of municipalities were identified: the central cities (large cities) and then the peri-urban areas around them defined by concentric circles: the agglomerations around these central cities, which are distinct from them while presenting a certain continuity of habitat; the suburbs, residential communes whose population is strongly linked to the central city; the zones of alternating migration (distant peri-urban), communes whose link with the central city remains strong while being more tenuous than that of the communes of the suburbs; and lastly, communes outside the urban regions, communes that are not very much influenced by the large cities. This typology makes it possible to identify a form of urban hierarchy. What emerges mainly from our analyses is the over-representation of central cities among the IPV suspects, which in no way indicates a more violent side of these areas but may simply reflect a greater identification of situations due in particular to the characteristics of the habitat. The table V analyses the social positioning in more detail.

#### **4.4.4. Analysis of social positioning of the cohort of IPV suspects reported in 2010**

##### **4.4.4.1. Over-representation of the most disadvantaged and under-representation of the most advantaged**

Social positioning can be examined on the basis of variables relating to the level of education, situation in the labour market and characteristics of the housing, examined separately. The proportions observed in the defendant cohort and in the total Belgian population are compared in table VI. Proceeding in this manner, we can see that the differences are not that marked overall, even if both the level of education and the proportion of owners appear to be lower among the IPV suspects, while the proportion of unemployed is higher<sup>77</sup>.

Consequently, as is the case for other topics, it seems more relevant to mobilise a synthetic indicator of living conditions that makes it possible to identify situations of cumulative disadvantage. This composite indicator of 'socio-economic positioning' was developed in previous research (Eggerickx & al. 2018, 2020), constructed from the characteristics of educational level, labour market situation and housing conditions (occupation status and quality of housing). For each of these characteristics, each person receives a score. The sum of the scores per dimension allows each individual to be placed on a socio-economic continuum. The individual scores are then grouped into quartiles so that in the total population

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<sup>77</sup> The share of pensioners and employed IPV suspects is biased due to the concentration of this population in the working ages.



residing in Belgium, each group from the most advantaged to the most disadvantaged, corresponds to 25% of this population. Table VII compares the proportions of each quartile among IPV suspects and the general reference population.

Table VI. Principal socio-economic characteristics in the two populations (IPV suspects and general population in Belgium)

Variables	% IPV suspects	% population in Belgium
Level of education		
Primary school	12%	17%
Secondary school	65%	56%
Higher education	23%	27%
Situation in the labour market		
In employment	66%	51%
Pensioned	3%	23%
Unemployed	10%	5%
Other	21%	22%
Average housing size	2,36	2,55
Owners of the home	54%	71%
	N= 34.584	

This synthetic indicator shows, first of all, that all categories of the population, whatever their social position, can be affected by a referral to the criminal prosecutor's office for IPV. However, it also reveals significant differences. The most deprived group, which accumulates disadvantages, represents 31% of the IPV suspects and 25% of the general population. Inversely, the advantaged group represents 16% of the IPV suspects against 24% in the general population. The ratio between the proportions observed in the defendant population and the general population indicates an over-representation of the most disadvantaged group (126) and an under-representation (68) of the most advantaged.

Table VII. Distribution of social groups in the two populations

Social groups	% IPV suspects (1)	% population in Belgium (2)	Ratio (1/2)
Disadvantaged group (Q1)	31,2%	24,8%	125,8
Low intermediate group (Q2)	28,0%	25,2%	111,0
High intermediate group (Q3)	24,5%	26,1%	93,9
Advantaged group (Q4)	16,3%	23,9%	68,3
	N= 34.584		

#### 4.4.4.2. Spatial analysis of over- and under-representation

The next step was to examine the spatialization of these over- and under-representations, according to the Belgian federated entities and judicial districts. To do this, a ratio between the proportion of a social group in the database of suspects and the proportion of the same group in the general reference population was calculated, by judicial district and according to the following formula:

$$R_{GSX} = \frac{p_{GSX}^{PP}}{p_{GSX}^{PT}}$$

Where:  $R_{GSX}$  is the ratio of the proportion of a social group in the database of suspects compared to the proportion of the same group in the general population,  $p_{gsx}$  is the proportion

of a social group,  $PP$  is the population of suspects,  $PT$  is the total population and  $GSX$  is the social group  $x$ , this for each judicial district separately.

The calculation of a ratio in comparison with the distribution of groups in each district taken separately is justified by the different socio-economic situations of the districts, those in the north of the country (Flanders) being generally in a better situation than those in the south (Wallonia) and the Brussels-Capital Region. When this ratio calculated for each district with is compared with that obtained for Belgium as a whole, it is possible to determine the level of over- or under-representation of a social group among IPV suspects, taking into account the specific socio-economic situation in that district<sup>78</sup>. Figure X shows a mapping of this index of over- and under-representation for each of the groups, with a general reference standard of 100. A social group with a score of, for example, between 50 and 70 in a district is up to twice as under-represented in the population of IPV suspects in that district, compared to its representation in the general population of the same district. Conversely, a group with a score between 145 and 164 is up to 1.64 times over-represented<sup>79</sup>. The analysis of the spatial distribution of this ratio leads to two types of findings.

First of all, there is a *gradation in the intensity* of the phenomenon *according to social group*. As you move up the social ladder, over-representation gives way to under-representation. Of the four maps, the map concerning the most disadvantaged social group is in redder shades, reflecting the greater overall over-representation of this group among IPV suspects<sup>80</sup>. In contrast, the map for the more advantaged group shows an over-representation everywhere. In other words, what was observed for Belgium as a whole, i.e. the over-representation of the disadvantaged population and the under-representation of the advantaged population among suspects, is found at the level of the districts, regardless of the socio-economic context of these districts.

Beyond this overall finding, there is *spatial variability in the over- and under-representation* for each social group. For the most disadvantaged social group, we can see an opposition between Flanders-Brussels/Wallonia, with the over-representation of this group in Flanders (except for Leuven) and Brussels being lower than the Belgian average. In contrast, the Walloon judicial districts are above this average (except for Mons and Charleroi). For the other social groups, the maps more closely reflect the national average, with a smaller under-representation of the advantaged group in some mainly Flemish districts.

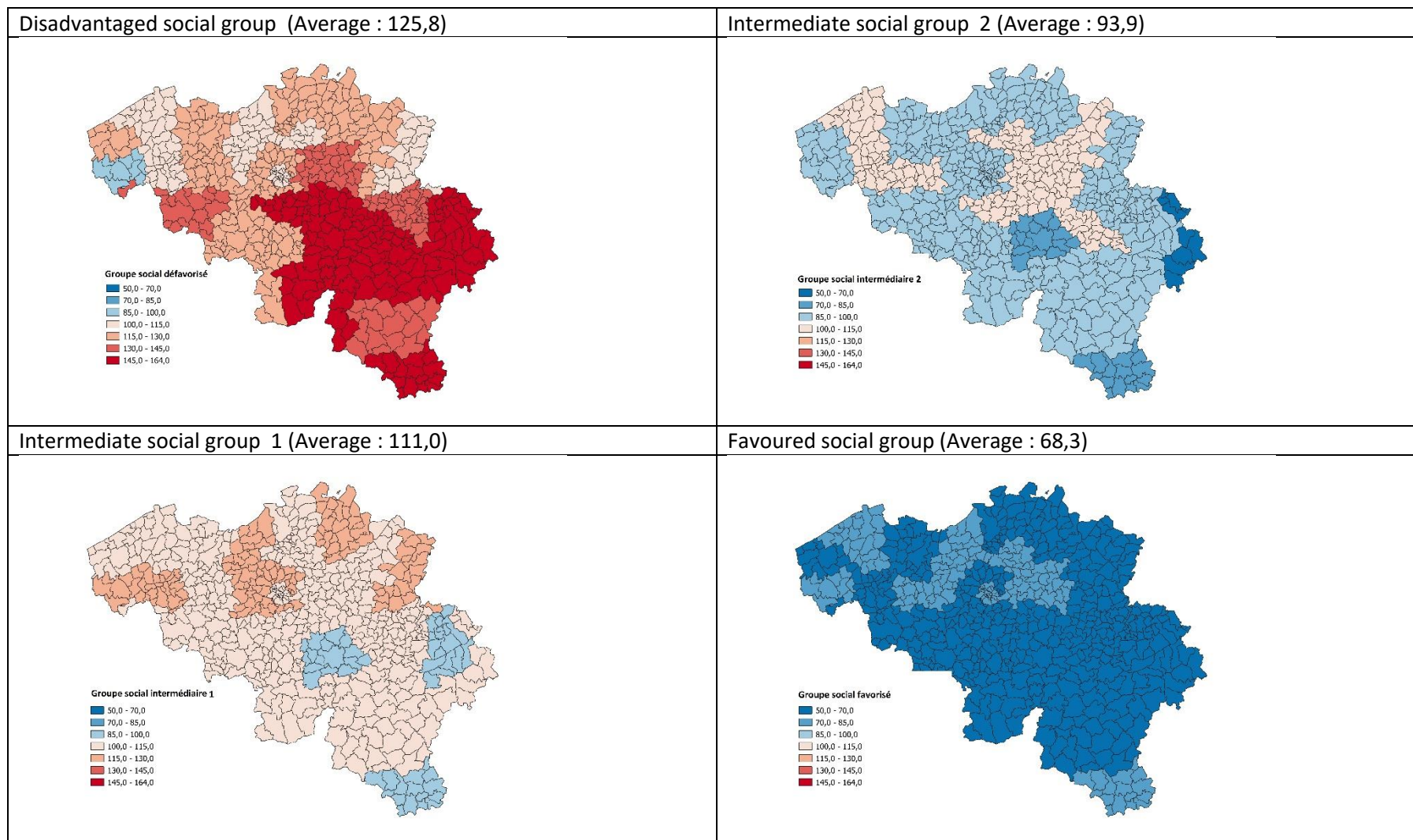
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<sup>78</sup> The specific socio-economic context is thus neutralised.

<sup>79</sup> On the maps, values below 100 (under-representation) are coloured blue, those above (over-representation) are coloured red. The strength of the under- or over-representation is indicated by the intensity of the colours.

<sup>80</sup> Except for the judicial district of Ieper.

Figure 6. Ratio of the proportion of IPV suspects from each social group compared to the proportion of the same social group in the reference population, by judicial district (2011)



#### 4.4.4.3. Logistic regression: incidence of sociodemographic variables on an individual appearing in the database of IPV suspects

To complete these analyses, a logistic regression was performed integrating all the socio-demographic variables (from the census). This aims on the one hand to evaluate whether a model constructed from these variables could contribute in any way to predicting the probability of an individual appearing in the database of IPV suspects and thus to drawing up a typical profile. On the other hand, it makes it possible to examine which variables, 'all other things being equal', have an impact on the probability of appearing in this group.

Regarding the first objective, the result is rather negative: whatever the attempt, the variance explained by the models is systematically lower than 10%. Even when the model is constructed from the most discriminating variable – gender - the variance explained is 6.4%. The predictive value of such a model is therefore very low as the probability of not appearing in this group is much higher than that of appearing in it. Randomness is therefore very important - at least on the basis of these variables - in the fact of being involved as a defendant for domestic violence, because this is such a rare statistical event.

Tableau VIII. Binary logistic regression results: incidence of sociodemographic variables on an individual appearing in the database of IPV suspects

Variables	Modalities	Odd Ratio	Significance level
Gender	Women (Ref.)	2,512	0,000
Age groups	18-24 (Ref)		0,000
	25	2,047	0,000
	35	2,429	0,000
	45	1,248	0,000
	55+	0,206	0,000
Social groups	1st quartile (Ref.)		0,000
	2nd quartile	0,701	0,000
	3rd quartile	0,574	0,000
	4th quartile	0,451	0,000
	Unknown	0,662	0,000
Type of municipalities	City Centre (Ref.)		0,000
	Urban area	0,850	0,000
	Suburban area	0,753	0,000
	Distant peri-urban (commuter zone)	0,963	0,000
	Small towns outside region	0,879	0,000
	Rural outside region	0,783	0,000
Children in household	yes/no Ref.	1,207	0,000
Belgian nationality	yes(Ref)/no	1,265	0,000
Constant		0,002	0,000
R2 Cox & Snell = 0,003	R2 Nagelkerke = 0,102		

With regard to the second objective (Table X), despite the low predictive power, an examination of the highest Odd Ratios allows us to identify the most discriminating variables. Holding all variables constant, a man is 2.5 times more likely to appear in the IPV defendant database than a woman (OR = 2.512). The probability of appearing in the database is also more than twice as high for 25–44-year-olds (OR = 2.047 to 2.429) than for 18-24 year olds (OR = 1), and conversely very low for those aged 55 and over (OR = 0.206). *Gender*<sup>81</sup> and

<sup>81</sup> As gender is the most discriminating factor, a logistic regression was performed considering male and female IPV suspects separately, in order to develop a gender approach. The results indicate no real significant difference:

*age category* are the two most discriminating variables. Next comes *social positioning*: the most disadvantaged group (OR = 1) is twice as likely to be among the IPV suspects as the most advantaged group (OR = 0.451), the incidence being progressive according to the level of social position. Lower incidences are then observed for nationality, with being a foreigner increasing the probability of being in the database by 26% (OR = 1.265). Even weaker is the impact of having children in the household, which increases the probability of appearing there by 21%. Finally, living in the city centre increases the probability of being among this group of IPV suspects to an even less extent.

#### 4.4.4.4. Interpretation of results and conclusions

As noted at the start of this chapter, the statistical source studied, that of suspected perpetrators reported to the public prosecutor's office for IPV, cannot in any way be interpreted as a simple mirror of the violence 'committed'. In fact, it is just as much a reflection of the factors that favour the referral of these acts to the justice system, without it being possible to distinguish between these two aspects of reality. The over-representation of the most disadvantaged social group among IPV suspects may be due to the accumulation of social vulnerabilities (education, housing, status on the labour market) that contribute to a violent act towards the partner. But it may also be linked to factors that make these acts more visible and/or favour recourse to judicial intervention. The effects (shouting, etc.) of violence are more likely to be heard or seen in adjacent modest flats than in four-fronted house environments. The police may also be more present in poorer neighbourhoods, or the attention of social services stronger towards more precarious families. The fact that the defendant is already known to the justice system for other types of offences may favour the identification of IPV. The difficulty or impossibility (financial, social) for the victim and/or the perpetrator to find a solution through separate accommodation or any other alternative solution - or to access psychosocial support, may also influence the filing of a complaint. On the contrary, a privileged social position accumulates advantages that can protect against both violence and its reporting to the justice system.

The spatial variability of the over-representation of the disadvantaged group and under-representation of the advantaged group among IPV suspects is no easier to interpret. The spatial analysis shows a different degree of over-representation of the 'disadvantaged' group depending on the Region: it is more significant and marked in Wallonia than in Flanders and Brussels. The result for the Brussels judicial district, which is very close to that of Flanders, is questionable in view of the disadvantaged socio-economic situation of many municipalities in the Brussels region. This finding deserves a more in-depth analysis. However, two hypotheses can be formulated concerning the differences between Flanders and Wallonia, which could have cumulative effects.

- (1) The first hypothesis is structural: since Flanders is the most prosperous Region, it also has more resources to allocate to social assistance for both victims and perpetrators, thus helping to prevent situations being referred to the justice system in a statistically significant number of cases where social deprivation is an essential element of the problem.

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a very similar effect of social positioning is observed whether the alleged perpetrator is a man or a woman (see Sanderson & Vanneste, in Vanneste C., Lemonne A., Ravier I. (éds) (2022) in press June 2022.)

(2) The second hypothesis is more political and/or ideological: Flanders has developed a broader systemic vision of IPV - conceived as intra family violence - paying greater attention to the interactions that produce violence in the family system. This more holistic approach has led to the adoption of an upstream social mechanism oriented towards both 'victims' and 'perpetrators' through the action of the CAW (Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk) and the FJCs (Family Justice Centre)<sup>82</sup>. This approach is less present in Wallonia where, starting from a stronger feminist vision, IPV is perceived more often as an expression of gender domination. Unlike in Flanders, the upstream support measures are aimed at victims (SAPV) but the network does not provide for a structural relay<sup>83</sup> to any support or assistance service for perpetrators (or the couple). This approach could therefore statistically contribute to a more frequent referral of precarious perpetrators to the police, in the absence of early social assistance (see results in 4.1.3. and 4.6.)

The last analysis (logistic regression), integrating the social positioning indicator among the set of socio-demographic variables available, shows that, after the gender and age category, this is the factor with the strongest impact on the probability of being referred to the justice system for IPV. These results tend to show that investment in more appropriate social policies would be likely to avoid too massive and/or undifferentiated mobilisation of the justice system in situations of IPV. Knowing the perverse effects that a systematic judicial intervention can have for the victims and for the perpetrators (Finn 2013, Hoyle & Sanders 2000, Robinson 2015) as well as the overloading of the justice system that hampers the good realisation of its missions (see also 4.1.2.3 and 4.1.2.5) taking into account the social component appears to be essential in terms of public policies.

#### **4.4.5. Analysis of the judicial decisions taken in cases against this 2010 cohort of IPV suspects according to social positioning**

##### 4.4.5.1. Introduction

Knowing that the disadvantaged social group is over-represented among the IPV perpetrators referred to the public prosecutor's office, we then analysed the potential impact of this social positioning on judicial decisions. The question is relevant in view of a long tradition of criminological research that intends to be vigilant with regard to an ideal of equality in the exercise of justice (Herpin 1977, Aubusson 1985, Gautron & Retière 2013). It is also relevant to evaluate the extent to which, at the stage of decisions taken by magistrates, a social assistance offer is or would be useful to avoid the criticized effects of certain types of decisions (Hoyle & Sanders 2000, Finn 2013, Ricordeau 2019) and then to adopt a more appropriate response. As shown by the qualitative parts of this research programme, the possibility of ensuring that an IPV perpetrator can voluntarily leave or be removed from the common home so as to preserve the victim's safety is a significant criterion in the judicial decision (see for example 4.2). The personal resources - financial or social - available to the perpetrators, or those that can be made available to them (temporarily) are therefore likely to favour a solution

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<sup>82</sup> See in 4.1.3.3.: CAWs and FJCs are structured to intervene with both victims and perpetrators, including upstream of the police, for example to refer to the public social welfare centres (CPAS) for social and financial assistance.

<sup>83</sup> Although local initiatives may exist at the police level

other than pre-trial detention or referral to the court for a sentence, decisions that may prove inefficient or even counter-productive in terms of recidivism, and whose effects on the victims are also subject to criticism.

This analysis of judicial decisions only included suspects for whom an offence was considered to have been established by the public prosecutor's office, i.e. nearly 70% of the initial cohort. The data made it possible to distinguish, among all the decisions recorded in the system, those that most significantly influenced the judicial trajectory. For the purposes of this final report, we retain the major distinction between the situations of suspects to whom the public prosecutor's office did not take any formal action (approximately 70%) and those who experienced a judicial reaction (30%)<sup>84</sup>. Among this second category, we distinguish those who at some point in this process were the subject of one of the following decisions: (1) an offer to comply with conditions (Art 216ter CIC)<sup>85</sup> - qualified before the law of 18 March 2018<sup>86</sup> as a 'penal mediation procedure' (approximately 7%), (2) an arrest warrant (almost 3%) or (3) a court conviction (almost 11%)<sup>87</sup>.

#### 4.4.5.2. The impact of social positioning on judicial decisions (cross-tabulations)

In a first step, the impact of social positioning was examined by means of cross-tabulations, verified by a classical chi-square procedure.

##### A) Impact on the existence of a judicial reaction

The results show (Table IX) that the more disadvantaged the social group of the suspect, the more frequent the judicial reaction. The differences observed are significant ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.000$ ), indicating a certain impact of the defendant's social position on the decision to take legal action, but the effect of the observed association is nevertheless very weak (Cramer's  $V = 0.052$ ).

*Table IX Impact of social positioning on the existence of a judicial reaction*

Social groups	Judicial reaction				Total	
	Yes		No			
Q1	2449	33%	4965	67%	7414	100%
Q2	1823	28%	4584	72%	6407	100%
Q3	1545	29%	3864	71%	5409	100%
Q4	941	27%	2562	73%	3503	100%
Total	6758	30%	15975	70%	22733	100%

Pearson  $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.000$   $V$  de Cramer = 0.052

<sup>84</sup> It is not excluded that more informal actions were taken which have not been recorded and registered in the system. This category includes cases that were dropped.

<sup>85</sup> Consisting either of training, therapeutic follow-up, mediation for compensation or another form of reparation, or community service, which may be combined. The record does not allow us to differentiate between these different modalities, but the cross-referencing exercise with the 'Justice Houses' database undertaken in the initial research (Vanneste 2016) indicates that offers of training are largely favoured in the case of IPV, followed by treatment orders. Community service offers are almost absent

<sup>86</sup> Amending the 1994 Act introducing Article 216ter of the Criminal Procedure Code.

<sup>87</sup> For more details see Vanneste (2016, 2017).

Among the suspects who were subject to a judicial reaction - and for whom information on social positioning was available, we then examined the impact of social positioning on three types of decisions with a particularly significant judicial impact.

#### B) Impact on pre-trial detention, conviction and 'penal mediation'

The figures in Table X indicate that the decision to use pre-trial detention is proportionally more frequent against the most disadvantaged social group. The analysis confirms that the observed differences are statistically significant ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.000$ ), but that this correlation is only of very weak effect.

The examination of convictions leads to the same type of observation: the proportion of convictions is higher for the most disadvantaged defendants, and conversely lower for the population with a higher status (Table X). Once again, the finding of differences according to social group is significant, but only very weakly so.

In contrast to the first two types of decisions, which are more repressive in nature, the modalities of the so-called 'penal mediation' procedure are less often offered to the most disadvantaged group. However, the differences that can be observed are only very slight.

*Table X. Impact of social positioning on pre-trial detention, conviction and 'penal mediation'*

Social groups	Pre-trial detention		Conviction		Penal mediation		Total
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Q1	292 (12%)	2157 (88%)	962 (39%)	1487 (61%)	537 (22%)	1912 (78%)	2449 (100%)
Q2	159 (9%)	1664 (91%)	638 (33%)	1185 (65%)	477 (26%)	1346 (74%)	1823 (100%)
Q3	122 (8%)	1423 (92%)	477 (31%)	1068 (69%)	404 (26%)	1141 (74%)	1545 (100%)
Q4	84 (9%)	857 (91%)	315 (33%)	626 (67%)	242 (26%)	699 (74%)	941 (100%)
Total	657 (10%)	6101 (90%)	2392 (35%)	4366 (65%)	1660 (23%)	5098 (75%)	6758 (100%)
	Pearson $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.000$ V de Cramer = 0.057		Pearson $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.000$ V de Cramer = 0.068		Pearson $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.002$ V de Cramer = 0.046		

#### 4.4.5.3. Logistic regression: incidence of sociodemographic and judicial variables on the existence of a judicial response

To complete these first analyses, a logistic regression was conducted integrating the social positioning index among the sociodemographic variables retained (with the exception of age and type of environment) and the judicial variables already studied in this way in the initial research (Vanneste 2016, 2017). This type of exercise was undertaken to see to what extent 'all other things being equal' each variable has an impact on the likelihood of a judicial response. Overall, the model is found to have low explanatory power (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.138$ ).

Table XI clearly shows that, overall, the most discriminating variables in the decision to take legal action or not are the criminal variables relating to the type of offence, the IPV criminal history or the existence of other types of offences. Holding the other variables constant, judicial responses are 1.5 times more likely in the case of physical violence ( $\text{OR}=1.5$ ), 0.6 times less probable when the violence is only psychological ( $\text{OR}=0.6$ ), 13 times more in case of homicide



(OR=13.2) or attempted homicide, and 3 times more in case of sexual abuse (OR=3.2). They are also 1.8 times more likely when the suspect has been or was also reported for types of offences other than IPV (OR=1.8) and 2 times more when the suspect had already been reported for IPV before 2010 (OR=2).

*Table XI. Logistic regression results : incidence of sociodemographic and criminal variables on the existence of a judicial response*

Variables	Modalities	Odd Ratio	Significance level
Gender	Women (Ref.)/Men	1,847	0,000
Age groups (Judicial data)	18-25 (Ref.)		0,000
	25 à 35	0,688	0,000
	36 à 45	0,749	0,000
	46 à 55	0,839	0,035
	55+	0,866	0,104
Children in household	No (Ref.)/Yes	0,970	0,377
Social groups	1er quartile (Ref.)		0,002
	2e quartile	0,840	0,001
	3e quartile	0,968	0,547
	4e quartile	0,917	0,120
Belgian (Judicial data)	No (Ref.)/Yes	0,838	0,000
Belgian (Census data)	No (Ref.)/Yes	0,919	0,112
Physical violence	No (Ref.)/Yes	1,499	0,000
Psych. viol. only	No (Ref.)/Yes	0,606	0,000
Sexual abuse	No (Ref.)/Yes	3,191	0,000
Homicide or attempt	No (Ref.)/Yes	13,148	0,000
Offences other than IPV	No (Ref.)/Yes	1,778	0,000
1 <sup>st</sup> reported IPV in 2010	No (Ref.)/Yes	2,036	0,000
Constant		0,060	0,000
R2 Cox & Snell = 0,098		R2 Nagelkerke = 0,138	

Among the socio-demographic variables, the gender variable is the only one to compete with the weight of the incidence of the criminal variables<sup>88</sup>. If the suspect is a man, the probability of a judicial reaction is 1.8 times higher, all other things being equal (OR= 1.85). Whether or not there are children in the household has no significant impact (significance level = 0.38). Age categories have an incidence, but it is not very significant (and of borderline significance above the age of 55). Judicial reaction is most likely for 18–25-year-olds. The probability then falls by more than 30% and then rises again for the categories over 36. In comparison, Belgian nationality has an even weaker impact - and only significant if we rely on the records of the public prosecutor's office: the probability of a reaction is 0.84 times lower for a Belgian suspect. Within this set of results, social position also has a significant discriminatory effect, but very moderately so. The probability of a judicial reaction is slightly lower for the population not belonging to the most disadvantaged group, but the difference does not exceed 16% (OR=0.84 for Q2) and the gradation according to social status is not very consistent (OR Q3= 0.97 and Q4=0.92). It therefore seems that it is the combination of other criminal variables and gender that reinforces the influence of social position on the occurrence of a judicial response.

<sup>88</sup> The analysis conducted separately on the female and male population of IPV defendants shows a significant difference in the selection of variables showing a clearly significant discriminatory effect. No valid conclusion can be drawn by considering only women. Their five times smaller number also statistically reduces the probability of identifying discriminating variables (see Sanderson & Vanneste, in Vanneste C., Lemonne A., Ravier I. (éds) (2022) in press June 2022).

#### 4.4.5.4. Interpretation of results and conclusions

In summary, these analyses indicate a weak preference for more strictly penal responses against the most precarious social group. This preference thus reinforces the greater referral to a penal option of more disadvantaged groups, without however accentuating it strongly. It is rather in the phase of reporting to the justice system - to the police - upstream of the magistrates' action, that social position has an impact, resulting in a significantly greater referral of disadvantaged categories. Once they have been taken into the hands of the justice system, the penal choice is certainly more confirmed with regard to these categories, but the differences that can be observed in the way magistrates treat different social groups do not allow us to conclude that the judicial treatment is truly unequal - or more discriminatory - depending on the socio-economic status of the suspects. The figures nevertheless draw attention to the fact that social attributes, or rather the lack of them, may play a role in the way the magistrate deals with the case, by excluding these defendants from orientations involving collaboration with the PMS sector, which are nonetheless more promising in terms of preventing recidivism (Vanneste 2021).

The logistic regression that integrates social positioning among a set of socio-demographic and criminal variables in an attempt to propose a model explaining the occurrence or non-occurrence of a judicial response to IPV cases referred to the public prosecutor's office confirms the first observations. In line with previous analyses of this cohort, gender has a decisive impact on the treatment of the IPV suspects, which is more favourable to women (Vanneste 2019). The same applies to those relating to criminal career (Vanneste 2016, 2017) (Vanneste 2016, 2017). However, while criminal markers are generally the most discriminating factors in magistrates' decision-making - based on this type of analysis - it should not be forgotten, as highlighted by a French study of the same type<sup>89</sup> highlighting comparable results, that magistrates do not weigh each profile attribute separately, reminding us of the limits of a mathematical approach to magistrates' logic of action (Gautron & Retière 2013). Their decisions are the result of complex interactions, and in order to understand the uses that decision-makers make of their 'criteria box', the results of this research must be crossed with those of the qualitative approach reported in the other parts of this report.

#### 4.4.3. Conclusions

The research confirmed the over-representation of the most disadvantaged group among the suspects referred to the criminal prosecutor's office for IPV and conversely the under-representation of the most privileged people, with a gradation in the intensity of the phenomenon. After gender and age category, social position is the factor that has the strongest impact on the probability of being sent to the justice system for IPV, showing the interest of greater investment in more appropriate social policies that would reduce the strong tendency to bring IPV to justice. At the same time, a spatial variability of these results is observed according to the Regions, suggesting some hypotheses in terms of public policies. Once the prosecutor takes up these cases, even though gender and criminal markers clearly remain the most discriminating factors, the analyses indicate a weak preference for more repressive responses towards the most disadvantaged social group, reinforcing the

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<sup>89</sup> This study, however, is more general in scope, not specific to IPV cases.

phenomenon of over-representation of this group as previously observed. These results point to the fact that social deprivation can play a role in the way the magistrate deals with the case, which also leaves room at this stage for a reinforced social approach that would be able to avoid more repressive orientations as well as its perverse effects.

#### 4.5. ANALYSIS OF HOMICIDE (FEMICIDE) IN IPV CONTEXT<sup>90</sup>

##### 4.4.1. 162 victims of domestic homicide in 2013 in Belgium?

In 2016, a figure on homicide victims during the year 2013 sparked widespread press coverage and public emotion. According to a police statistic, in 2013 there were 162 homicide victims. The figure was reported by the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men (IEWM). It was circulated on the Internet in an abbreviated form: Domestic violence claimed 162 lives in 2013. '**162 deaths**: this is the number of people in Belgium who did not survive the blows administered by their spouse in 2013. To pay tribute to them and raise public awareness, a happening was organized: 162 people collapsed in a human domino in front of the Brussels Stock Exchange.<sup>91</sup>

This figure comes from a dispatch from the Belga agency. It was pronounced before the Committee on Community Competence of the Belgian Senate on Monday, 26 January 2015 during the hearings on the Beijing Process<sup>92</sup>. Domestic violence claimed the lives of 162 people in 2013, Marijke Weewauters, an advisor to the IEWM, told the Senate Community Skills Committee on Monday.<sup>93</sup> The Senate Record summarised the speech of the IEWM representative in the following terms: last year, 162 died as a result of partner violence. This figure is higher than in Spain or Italy. However, it does not take into account suicides and attempted suicides due to partner violence. But what does this figure of 162 spousal homicides really cover? The report does not mention the origin, nor the year concerned by this figure (2013?). However, for the year 2013, the police figures show 205 proven homicides, of which 99 women and 106 men were the victims<sup>94</sup>. Proportionally, Belgium seems to have a higher number of cases than France (146 victims) or Spain (64 victims)<sup>95</sup> which seems suspicious, given the size of the respective populations.

<sup>90</sup> Analyses conducted by Rousseaux X., Sanderson J-P., Plavsic A. & Eggerickx T.

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.moustique.be/actu/2015/11/25/violences-conjugales-les-chiffres-belges-159928>. Le Vif-L'Express, 26 janvier 2015, Audition de Madame Marijke Weewauters... 26 janvier 2015 p.

<sup>92</sup> "Vorig jaar waren er honderd tweeënzestig dodelijke slachtoffers van partnergeweld. Dit cijfer ligt hoger dan Spanje of Italië. Dit cijfer houdt dan nog geen rekening met de zelfmoorden of pogingen daartoe ingevolge het geweld van de partner" Belgian Senate. Session 2014-2015, 5 March 2015. Information report on the follow-up to the implementation of the Platform for Action of the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women (Beijing). Hearings

<sup>93</sup> Victims usually only decide to take the problem into their own hands after 35 incidents, Weewauters explained, and only 3.3% of them are willing to report their case to the police. Most of the time, they will only turn to the police after a life-threatening incident and when their children are also in danger. In 4 out of 5 cases, children are exposed to this violence and in 3 out of 5 cases they are also victims. It is estimated that 45% of children will later become victims of violence by their partner or perpetrator. <https://www.levif.be/actualite/belgique/la-violence-conjugale-a-coute-la-vie-a-162-personnes-en-2013/> [consulted 1 November 2021]

<sup>94</sup> In 2013, 20.1% of the 1013 homicide qualifications (murder or premeditated murder) would have actually resulted in the death of a victim (204 or 205). The figure of 162 homicide charges out of 1013 would give a rate of 16% of attempted or completed homicide in the context of intimate partner violence.

<sup>95</sup> For France 121 women and 25 men, Le Monde, 7 May 2014. For Spain, 54 women and fewer than 10 men were killed in the context of intimate partner violence, Palacios (2021).

The number of 162 is probably wrong, and has been reported several times, even distorted, since according to some sources it refers not to 162 people, but to 162 women. Although women represent the majority of the victims, the number does not mention that they are exclusively female victims. One hypothesis is that there has been a confusion between the number of attempted murders and premeditated murder and the number of murders and premeditated murder that actually took place. Indeed, there are about a thousand attempted murders and premeditated murder in Belgium each year, but only about twenty percent of them lead to a death (Plavsic & Sanderson, 2020). This hypothesis does not stand up to analysis. The (ex)partner context of homicides would involve 80 percent of homicides committed in 2013, whereas it is usually estimated at 15 percent of cases.

This confusion has been maintained for a long time at the Belgian level, as well as at the international level, because of the distinction, often omitted, between the qualification of completed homicide and attempted homicide. This easy confusion is only really cleared up by police statistics, which unfortunately do not distinguish between the gross figures but refer to the varying percentages of homicides committed<sup>96</sup>. As this count is based on the initial preventions (criminal charges), it is understandable that the figure can change, in case of the deaths of a victim of attempted homicide (or in case of reclassification as assault and battery during the proceedings).

In any case, this preliminary reflection on the figures of homicide committed between (ex-) intimate partners highlights that, alongside the discourses on the importance of violence against women and the actions undertaken on the social care of victims and perpetrators (Glowacz & Vanneste 2017, Jaillet & Vanneste 2017), there is a serious lack of scientific knowledge on the magnitude of the phenomenon itself.

In Belgium, quantitative data regarding homicides are particularly scarce because it is difficult to propose an accurate and reliable count of the number of cases of partner homicide (Plavsic & Sanderson 2020). This finding is not unique to Belgium. Raffin (2012) noted that there were very few French studies on homicide in general and on spousal homicide in particular in the French-speaking world.

Conveyed essentially by feminist and family associations, the debate on violence between partners nevertheless includes some figures that circulate on websites and social networks. The objective of this research is to answer this question, to better understand the realities behind this figure by comparing it with official data. However, before answering this question, we will start by placing these figures in the more global context of homicides in Belgium by tracing their temporal evolution. The purpose of this first part is to put this estimate into a broader context.

#### **4.4.2. Homicide deaths: a long history**

Various authors have shown that homicide mortality has declined since the 19th century. Between 1880 and 1950, rates fell by about half in northern Europe and later in southern countries, stabilizing at their lowest rate around 1950. Then, until the early 1990s, homicide rates rose again, as did the number of assault and violent robbery recorded (Aubusson de

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<sup>96</sup> <https://www.stat.policefederale.be/statistiquescriminalite/>

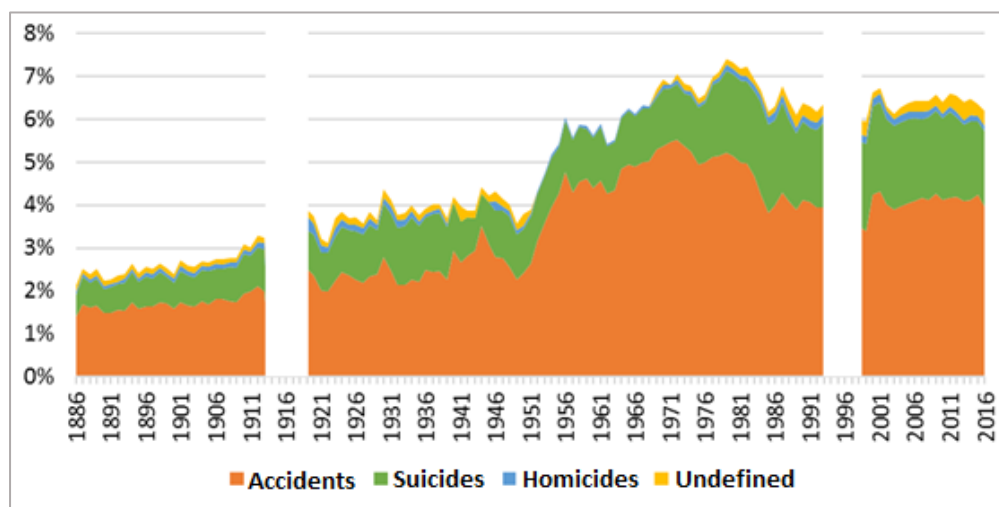
Cavarlay 2008, Mucchielli 2008, Rousseaux & al. 2008). Over the entire period (19th-21st centuries), this evolution can be explained by four factors in particular: the decrease in bloody male rivalry conflicts, the shift of lethal violence from the public to the family sphere, the abandonment of interpersonal violence by the elites, and the evolution of legislation (the latter tending to repress violence more and more) (Eisner 2003, Mucchielli 2008).

In Belgium, this evolution is also reflected in the statistical apparatus that collects information on homicide mortality in particular, which is one of the subcategories of deaths by violent death. Overall, violent mortality includes homicide, suicide (which constitutes intentional violent mortality) and accidental mortality (unintentional violent mortality), to which must be added an indeterminate set of acts considered as violent mortality. Within this set, homicide mortality represents a very small but relatively constant share of violent mortality (Van Cleemput & Plavsic 2020). The great difficulty with homicide data is the disparity of sources and their management. Working on data from France since 1970, Mucchielli (2008) observes that, depending on the source, the difference can vary from 1 to 4 between the mortality data produced by INSERM and the police data, even if the overall temporal trend remains the same.

For the present study, three types of sources were mobilized: death statistics collected by the Belgian Statistical Office from the municipalities that kept cause-of-death registers (1886-1976); death statistics published in the Public Health Yearbooks (1954-1993); and Death Bulletins (1998-2016). These data come in different formats: microfilms and digitized archives for the first; documents published on paper for the second; and anonymized individual databases for the third. The exploitation of these data involved a significant amount of data collection and harmonization work (Van Cleemput & Plavsic 2020).

Figure 7 presents the evolution of the number of deaths by violent death, distinguishing the different subcategories. Since 1886, there has been an increase in violent deaths, mainly due to a significant increase in the number of fatal accidents and, to a lesser extent, in the number of suicides. The share of homicides in this total remains very low throughout the period.

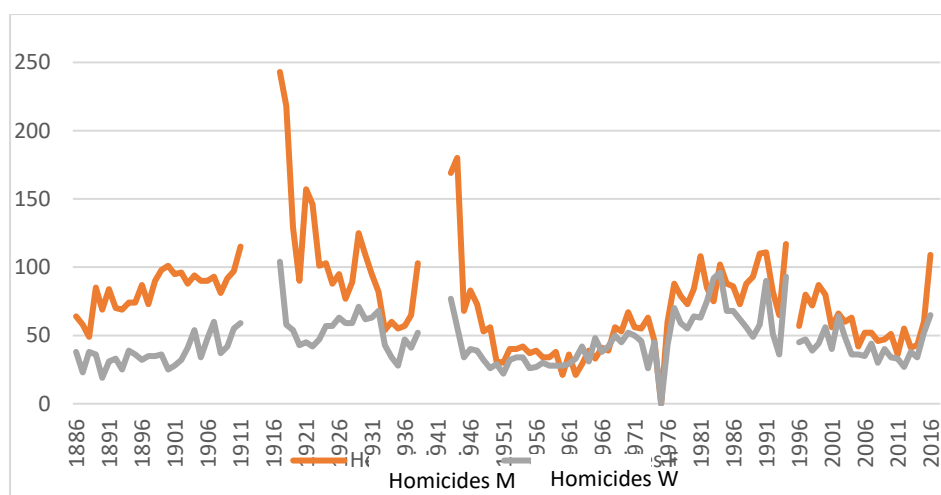
*Figure 7 Evolution of the relative weight of violent mortality (without figures from the two world wars) in the total number of deaths in Belgium (1886-2016)*



Source : Van Cleemput and Plavsic, 2020

Figure 7 shows the change in the number of homicide deaths from 1886 to 2018. The raw change in the number of violent deaths remains relatively stable, given the population growth from 1886 to 2018. If we neutralize the data for the Second World War (1940-1944), marked by a spectacular increase in homicides in the troubled political and social context of the end of the occupation, we observe four periods: the first, from 1886 to 1914, is marked by an increase (almost doubling of the number of male homicides); the second, from 1920 to 1960, shows a decrease; the third, from the 1960s to the 1990s, is characterized by a further increase, and finally, the fourth phase, which begins in the early 2000s, is marked by a decline in homicides.

Figure 8. Homicide deaths, excluding World War II figures, 1886-2016



Source : Van Cleemput et Plavsic, 2020

Table XII. Gender distribution of homicide deaths in Belgium

Gender	1886-1913	1919-1940	1941-1944	1945-1996	1997-2018
Man	2305	2341	2260	3369	1255
Woman	1029	1197	610	2447	888
Total	3334	3538	2870	5849	2143
%Woman	31%	34%	21%	42%	41%

Source : Van Cleemput et Plavsic, 2020

The other finding that emerges from these data is the narrowing gap between the number of male and female victims of violence (Table XII). This decrease is the product of both the decrease in violent mortality experienced by men, induced by the reduction in homicides in the public sphere (Eisner 2003), and the fact that intrafamily homicides primarily affect women (Cavalin 2016). As violent mortality suffered by women has remained relatively stable since the 19th century, it is legitimate to assume that the weight of partner violence has become greater in figures on violent mortality. Since 1945, the annual average of female victims has been 45.7, while for men it is 63 deaths per year (Table XIII). This average hides a significant variability, ranging from 22 to 93 women, in 1996, the year in which the Dutroux affair broke

out with the discovery of the bodies of young girls who had been abducted<sup>97</sup>. It should be noted that this figure does not identify the context of the violence. However, it can be assumed that 80% of homicides of women occur in an emotional or family context<sup>98</sup>.

Table XIII. Average annual homicide deaths in Belgium

Cause of death by homicide	Mean 1886-1913	Mean 1919-1940	Mean 1940- 1944	Mean 1945-1996	Mean 1998-2018
Man	82	106	565	65	60
Woman	37	54	153	47	42
Total	119	161	718	112	102

Source : Van Cleemput and Plavsic, 2020

In any case, these results show that the number of 162 victims cited for 2013 does not correspond exclusively to marital homicides, nor to feminicides. The interest of this figure was to raise a question between society and the authorities on the statistical reality of the phenomenon. How many women were victims of fatal violence per year? And how many of them in the context of a relationship between partners or ex-partners? And how many of them by a male perpetrator?

#### 4.4.3. An exploratory study on IPH (Intimate Partner Homicide)

Following the public debate generated by initiatives such as *Stop Feminicide*, the aim was to cross-reference the data from the Feminicide Blog with complementary data from the Ministry of Justice's MaCH (or TPI-REA) database<sup>99</sup>. Following a specific request to the College of Public Prosecutors, the analysts of the Public Prosecutor's Office provided us with additional data<sup>100</sup>, based on the list of victims in the *Stop feminicide* blog. These data enabled us to identify more precisely the circumstances of the homicides and the relationships between victims and perpetrators, and also to identify a number of unclear cases. The data highlighted the need to monitor the relational context of a murder or premeditated murder. The database of the College of Procurators General indeed provides for a context code 7 (violence in couple), but its use varies widely among investigators and local practices. The data for the years 2017 to 2020 were verified and cross-referenced on the basis of a reflexive analysis by analysts from the public prosecutor's office and project researchers (see protocol appendix).

In particular, the cross-referencing process identified age errors (confusing year of birth with age) that could be corrected through cross-checking with the press. The extraction was done on the basis of preventions: on the one hand those explicitly related to the context code 7 "violence in couple"; on the other hand, completed according to prevention codes of murder and premeditated murder. The database is being improved in some judicial districts, and its use is still quite limited. The majority of the charges were for murder (50) or premeditated

<sup>97</sup> This variability may be linked to registration problems (see below), or to the low number and occurrence of events leading to collective violent deaths (attacks, mass killings, etc.)

<sup>98</sup> All investigations in Europe point in this direction. Over the period 2017-2020, data from public prosecutors' offices confirms that 8 to 9 out of 10 homicides committed against women occurred in the context of emotional relationships.

<sup>99</sup> Previously TPI-REA database. <https://www.om-mp.be/stat/corr/start/f/home.html>

<sup>100</sup> Thanks to the College of Prosecutors General who provided us with these data, and in particular to G. Lamboray, statistical analyst.

murder (52)<sup>101</sup>. In addition, four premeditated murder or murder attempts turned out to be murders<sup>102</sup>. In addition, the number of cases of death resulting from a crime, a misdemeanour or a suicide, and more ambiguous preventions (illness on the public thoroughfare, disappearances, intentional assault and battery, arson). Lastly, five cases of death other than those resulting from a crime, misdemeanour or suicide, actually concerned homicides committed by Belgian citizens on Belgian victims abroad.

*Table XIV. Homicide victims (femicide and/or partner homicide (IPH)) by Femicide blog and Department of Justice database*

	Homicide Victims		
	Blog Femicide	MaCH-Femicide	MaCH IPH
2017	43	39	41
2018	38	36	40
2019	25	27	29
2020	24	28	28
	<b>130</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>138</b>

The femicide blog a priori mentions female victims of homicide. Applying the same filter to the data from the public prosecutor's office, we observe a very similar order of magnitude. On the other hand, sorting on IPH and not on femicide, gives a result including male victims in an emotional or family context (Table X). The figures show that the reality of partner homicides is around 30 deaths per year, or 15 to 20% of homicides actually committed.

In terms of victims, there were 130 women and 8 men over the four years of observation. Overall, the discrepancy between the Femicide blog's data on victims and the data from the public prosecutor's office on homicide incidents is quite small. However, these discrepancies mask another reality, both databases fail to include some cases identified by the other. In 2018, three cases of femicide identified by the Femicide Blog did not appear in the MaCH database and one case identified in the MaCH database was not included by the Blog. Here again, the differences are marginal, but they highlight the difficulty of identifying femicide situations based on contextual elements that are sometimes imprecise.

These data allow for initial analyses that should be expanded upon. We focused on two elements: the age difference between spouses and the place where the events occurred. The objective of these first analyses is simply to better describe the situation on the basis of the factual elements available to us. The literature on age gaps between spouses highlights that a gap still remains at present, with men being slightly older than their wives (when it comes to traditional couples) (Mignot 2010). In Belgium, the average age gap for people who married in 2020 is 2.3 years in favour of the man<sup>103</sup>. Knowing that partner violence is about dominance, one might assume that an older partner could more easily gain the upper hand over the

<sup>101</sup>Some preventions are accompanied by other challenges. Premeditated murder is voluntary homicide with premeditation and murder is voluntary homicide without necessarily premeditation (Rousseau, Vesentini 2008)

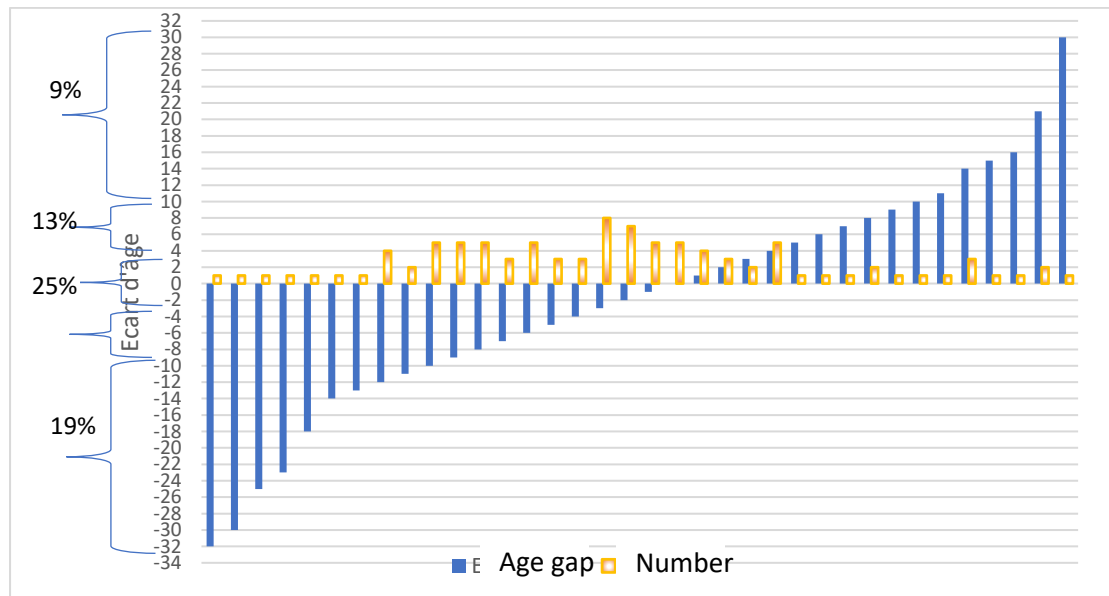
<sup>102</sup> The use of the press made it possible to identify these attempts. Once again, it shows the difficulty of objectifying the offence, insofar as the TPI/REA or MaCH database does not mention the subsequent reclassification (at least in the table provided to us by the analysts from the public prosecutor's office).

<sup>103</sup> <https://statbel.fgov.be/fr/themes/population/partenariat/mariages> consulted on 5 January 2022.



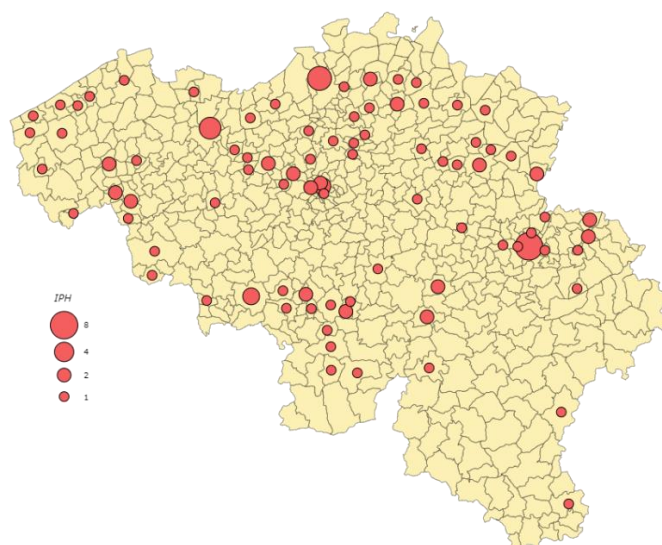
younger one. In the context of partner homicides, for the period 2017-2020, the average gap is 2.43 years in favour of the perpetrator which corresponds to the average gap between spouses. Figure 9 shows the age differences between perpetrators and victims. On the graph, the differences between victim and perpetrator have been plotted; a negative difference means that the perpetrator is older than the victim and a positive difference means that the perpetrator is younger than the victim. On the same graph, the corresponding number of cases was plotted. In 25% of the IPH cases, the age gap is close to 0 between - 2 and 2 years. In 52% of the cases, the perpetrator is more than two years older than the victim.

Figure 9. Age gap between perpetrators and victims of IPH (2017-2020)



Source : Femicide blog and MaCH Department of Justice database

Figure 10. Location of IPH according to the municipality where the incident occurred (2017-2020)



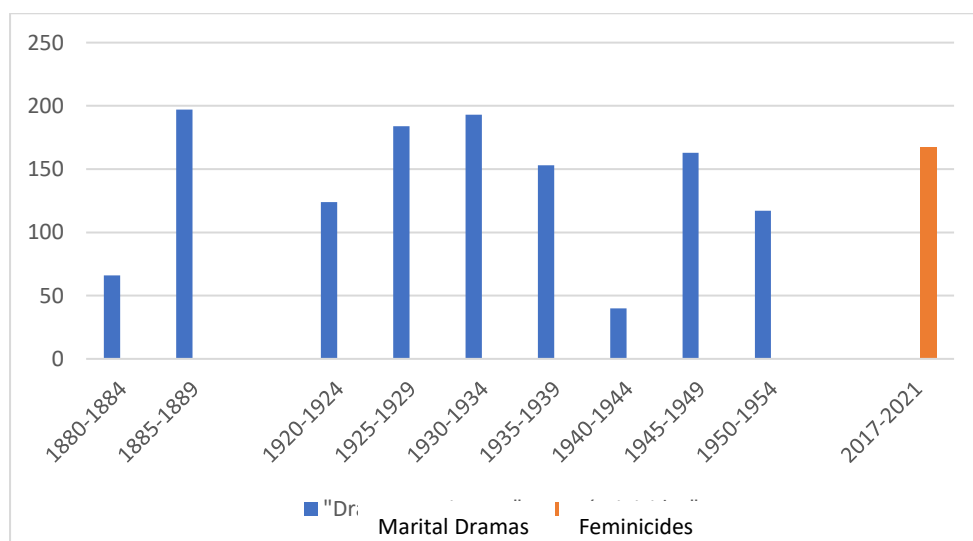
Source : Femicide blog and MaCH Department of Justice database

The map (figure 10) shows the number of IPH per commune. The values are shown in absolute numbers, given the low statistical number of cases. The location of the IPH according to the municipality where the events occurred does not show a particular spatial pattern. Certainly, some large cities (Ghent, Antwerp, Liege, Brussels) appear, but this is simply an effect of size; more cases are recorded there because the population is larger than in other municipalities.

#### 4.4.3. The press and marital dramas: a long-term phenomenon, discovered at low tide...

To extend the analysis, the Belgian press was searched for IPH in previous years. The count is based on the corpus of the Belgian periodical press, made available by the Royal Library of Belgium<sup>104</sup>. The consultation of several periodicals was necessary, as well as the precise identification of the nature of the homicide, generally indicated under the generic title of marital drama. This (still incomplete) census<sup>105</sup> highlights several phenomena. The five-yearly figure has been around 150 IPHs, or about 30 per year, for over a century. Apart from a sharp drop (in information) during the wars, it seems to remain relatively stable. However, when compared to population growth over the period, the media coverage would indicate a quantitative decrease in IPH in Belgium. It is important to relate these figures to the various figures on homicides recorded in Belgium during the same period, via judicial, police or cause of death statistics.

Figure 11 Estimated five-yearly number of IPH in Belgium, 1880-2021 (based on a collection from the daily press). (Source: Belgica Press, Stop Féminicides)



#### 4.4.5. Conclusions

In Belgium, of the incidents of IPV known to the police or public prosecutors (about 45 to 50.000 per year) (see 4.4.2), between 20 and 30 (per year) result in the death of one of the protagonists, in 9 cases out of 10, a woman. Although homicides account for less than one in

<sup>104</sup> KBR, Belgica Press

<sup>105</sup> The data must be completed for 1890 to 1919 and for 1953 to 1970. Access to the press remains manual for the period 1971-2015.

a thousand reported cases of IPV, these homicides reflect a gender inequality, which is well reflected in the term feminicide.

The research has shown that the proportion of homicides in which the victims are women, when viewed in the context of the 150 to 200 homicides per year, represents a social problem that is all the more significant because it is most often committed in a context that is a priori protected from violence, the domestic or family context. Between 1886 and 2018, the proportion of female victims (among all homicide victims) rose from 31% to 41%, while at the same time decreasing in numbers in a context of demographic growth. This lends credence to the observation that the decline in homicide is more pronounced for men than for women.

In view of the lack of systematic data collection on the facts, circumstances and history of intimate partner violence, and publicly available information on the economic, social and cultural context of the fatal relationship, in order to measure the statistical trends of the phenomenon, the researchers had to cross-reference different data sources (figures from the public prosecutor's office database, death bulletins, police figures, and reports in the daily press). This technique did not make it possible to find the original figures and their context of production.

This exploratory approach has highlighted some preliminary findings.

- At present, death certificates (which record causes of death) do not allow for identification and study of IPH, nor does it even allow the number of all homicides with to be determined with certainty.
- Since 1886, the data allow an estimate of the number of female homicide victims to be between 20 and 40% of all recorded homicides. These percentages need to be refined by period to take into account demographic changes and the relative decline in homicide rates in Belgium. These feminicides are likely 80% related to violence between intimate partners.
- Between 2017 and 2020, the comparison of data reported by the press (*Stop féminicide* blog) with data from the database of public prosecutors' offices confirms the significant correlation between feminicide and IPH, while noting the existence of male victims of IPH, and of feminicides not linked to an IPH.
- An initial exploration of socio-demographic data highlights the age difference between partners as a factor in IPH. On the other hand, the geographical distribution of IPH highlights specificities (Belgian coast, large cities), although it does not allow us to identify trends due to the small number of cases.

Other factors, given in the international literature, could only be mentioned due to the lack of precise studies on the Belgian situation. For example, the high proportion of homicides committed with a knife or a hand, the presence of children involved, the proportion of current and previous relationships, forms of psychological or economic violence or indications of intimate terrorism).

Finally, the relationship between IPH and other IPV should be refined. While the legal notion of attempt seems to confuse rather than clarify the seriousness of the situation, the number of reports preceding a homicide and the identification of prior police, social and judicial reactions

are not documented, due to the lack of systematic archiving of judicial files and a specific data collection protocol for homicides and other violence (Dawson 2007).

#### 4.6. THE RESULTS OF VALIDATION SURVEY<sup>106</sup>

##### 4.5.1. Introduction

The information gathered is both rich and diversified. Some 219 actors in the field participated in the Delphi survey (219 participants in the first round and 133 participants in the second round of questionnaires), for the most part formulating rich, well-argued responses illustrated through numerous examples of practice (approximately 600 pages of responses). This enthusiasm for taking part in the survey shows the topicality of the subject and also the investment of a large number of actors, from the different sectors, in the problem of IPV in Belgium. Although certain positions are shared among the stakeholders, there are nevertheless some areas of tension between certain actors, based on controversies in terms of political objectives or the means to be mobilised. These are presented first as problem framing issues and particularly in the light of recent developments of policy instruments. A third section presents a review of propositions for further policy analysis developments.

##### 4.5.2. Framing of the problem

###### 4.5.2.1. The difficulty in framing

Johnson's model (1995, 2006, 2008, 2014, 2017) is the dominant reference model for most practitioners, who generally differentiate between two forms of IPV. The first form is intimate terrorism, which is part of a cyclical dynamic in which the aggressor uses a range of strategies to control and terrorise the partner. The perpetrators of this violence are mostly men. The second form is situational couple violence which can be chronic and severe. In this case, the intention is not to control and dominate the other person.

The first round of the Delphi survey highlighted the difficulty in framing the problem. This is a cross-cutting aspect that is reflected in the sometimes-contradictory practices of actors, and the differences are particularly marked between Flanders and Wallonia.

- In Flanders, the problem seems to be interpreted more in terms of a shared frame of reference between the various actors mobilizing intra-family violence with a 'systemic' approach involving all partners. This systemic approach took shape following the major reforms experienced by the social sector over the last thirty years: the creation of the CAWs financed by the Flemish community and the local authorities, and more recently, the evolution towards the chain approach (*ketenaanpak*) and the *Family Justice Centres* (FJC). This last evolution is the result of pilot developments in Antwerp; it received positive evaluations by many survey respondents: even if difficulties are still present (waiting lists, insufficient budget, vulnerable public, follow-up of perpetrators, long-term follow-up) this new approach has facilitated the sharing of common identification tools between actors from the social fields (CAW) and the police/ justice departments.
- In Wallonia, in addition to their main role of providing assistance, many specialised associations play an 'advocacy' role by fuelling the public debate on issues relating to

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<sup>106</sup> Analyses conducted by Thiry A. & Fallon C.

IPV. A tension is emerging between, on the one hand, the associations working in a feminist approach (and which occupy a leading position in this field, particularly with the support of Belgium's commitments in the Istanbul Convention) and the associations that do not defend this approach. There are two opposing frames of reference in the field: one that analyses the problem of IPV as a structural phenomenon, from the point of view of a relationship of gender domination (Process of Conjugal Domination) - we speak of violence against women - and one that is constructed in opposition to this discourse, closer to the framing of the problem in Flanders as 'family or situational violence'.

While the dynamics of the sector are very different in the two communities, the interventions are part of the same federal framework in terms of 'police-public prosecution': this common framework is translated into three very different environments in terms of social intervention, which makes the comparative analyses between the regions particularly delicate but also rich in learning possibilities.

#### 4.5.2.2. Identifying the problem

Qualification of the facts and the mode of intervention are closely linked. According to several respondents to the Delphi survey, situational violence can be dealt with in a systemic (or family) approach, whereas cases marked by a process of domination require individual treatment of the partners. It is therefore necessary to quickly distinguish the type of situation reported by the partners. This distinction requires a multidimensional rather than a linear reading of the situation.

Several respondents from the justice/police sector highlighted the lack of training within their departments for non-specialist workers (magistrates or police officers) who are often the first to intervene. Indeed, it is at the police level that a first sorting is already made. The police professional - whose training in the field of IPV is generally quite limited - must write a report, specifying for example the code 'violence in the couple' or possibly choosing the option 'family dispute' afterwards, which is a sub-category that is not treated in the same way by the public prosecutor. The major obstacle to declaring the act as an act of violence, recognising the victim as a complainant and drawing up a citation for the prosecutor's office is related to the level of 'proof': the victim must bring evidence to qualify her/his own situation and have a citation drawn up to identify the perpetrator of a possible criminal act. The vast majority of survey respondents - in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels - are in favour of setting up specialised, multidisciplinary and mixed teams already at the police level.

- The Dutch-speaking respondents (in particular the persons associated with the 'Ketenaanpak') state that they are mainly confronted with situations of situational violence which they deal with in a systemic approach (at family level) and they treat the rarer cases of intimate terrorism in a specific way: is this a framing bias, as their 'radar' does not highlight cases of intimate terrorism?
- The French-speaking respondents report being confronted mainly with situations of intimate terrorism. The question may therefore be asked whether the use of a different tool, in particular the PDC (Conjugal Domination Process model), on the French side

explains the fact that intimate terrorism is much more often identified as present in the situations encountered?

#### 4.5.2.3. Logic of intervention

According to most of the respondents to the survey, in cases of intimate terrorism, the priority is to protect the victims, while cases of situational violence are dealt with in a systemic way at the couple level. However, not all the respondents agree on this point: the situation of violence itself must be the object of a rapid intervention through individual empowerment work before considering a systemic approach. Some respondents from CAWs, highlight the fact that their service provision is inadequate in dealing with cases of intimate terrorism. When personal (and child) safety is at stake, they turn to specialist services such as safe houses that offer secure accommodation.

In Belgium, during criminal proceedings, victim protection measures are of three types: temporary residence ban in case of domestic violence (2012 law); provisional detention of the aggressor for assault and battery; prohibition for the aggressor, in the context of conditional release and for a maximum of three months, to come into contact with the victim and to frequent certain places (2003 law). Many respondents point out that these are rarely implemented for various reasons and particularly due to a lack of resources for long term support. In Ghent, a harassment alarm system in the context of violence between ex-partners (Ministerial Circular 2019) has been developed as a pilot project. Many respondents emphasised the value of having different measures and being able to combine them if necessary to be effective. 'What makes the difference is when emergency measures - which make sense - can be combined with other 'substantive' measures that will intervene over a different period. Unfortunately, these measures are almost non-existent given the needs. There is no link between the different types of measure, women fall through the cracks of the protection net' (association). Many respondents call for the implementation of support measures for victims that are not limited in time but provide medium and long-term assistance.

#### 4.5.2.4. Risk assessment

A new risk assessment tool has been developed at the federal level for magistrates and the police (COL 15/2020): it provides a checklist to help the police and the prosecution service to better identify the most at-risk situations. The tool enables both the police and the public prosecutor's office to be attentive to elements of the context in order to avoid recidivism or an escalation of violence. This tool can facilitate consultation of cases between stakeholders. According to many respondents, it improves the follow-up of cases but does not solve the structural lack of resources and training, particularly on the police side.

- In the French-speaking part of the country, several associations feel that it would be useful to share the same tool with the police in order to facilitate collaboration and use the same language. Psycho-medico-social actors are starting to share this tool and are adapting it to their own practices for better appropriation. A specific version for the use of associations is being developed with the support of the resource centre of the Walloon region
- Another risk assessment tool (RTI PG ([www.risicotaxatie.be](http://www.risicotaxatie.be)) has been available in Flanders for several years and is used to support the multidisciplinary study of cases in a

chain approach ('ketenaanpak') and to ensure coherence between operational actors throughout the interventions. The COL15/2020 tool is considered as complementary.

#### 4.5.2.5. The 'blind spots' of policy

##### A) Vulnerable population

When faced with intimate partner violence, some victims, mainly women, often the most vulnerable, find themselves in areas that could be described as unprotected by public policy: they have difficulty accessing or do not use the protection system. The most frequent examples as mentioned by the respondents are cases of women victims of IPV who have arrived in Belgium as part of a family reunification, without an autonomous residence permit or with a residence permit that could be withdrawn if they leave their partner. These women are often isolated and have no close contact outside the nuclear family. In terms of financial resources, they have no money/no bank account in their own name. Furthermore, they are not aware of their rights and existing services. The problem of not knowing (or not knowing well) the language of the region concerned further increases the obstacles in accessing support services. These victims face many barriers, at the intersection of gender, culture and immigration, economic and social insecurity. Faced with this multi-precariousness, the current means are inadequate.

##### B) Children's issues

In the first round of the survey, many respondents mentioned the importance of considering children in IPV interventions. In the second round, this dimension was further explored:

*'Children are the forgotten ones in these situations, they are not taken into account until they are themselves victims of physical violence. But what about the psychological aspect, which is completely ignored! The child welfare services are themselves overwhelmed and can only rarely intervene in emergency situations'* (association).

The notion of a child witnessing IPV is part of the definition of child abuse. Children are not sufficiently taken into account in situations of violence, even though they are often used by the parents. Especially when they are 'only' witnesses to the violence (and not direct victims), little is really done. Several respondents stressed the importance of setting up parenting support systems for both parents and encouraging the creation of neutral meeting places equipped to deal with this type of problem.

- The institutional structure, mainly on the French-speaking side, makes it difficult to provide coherent care: the problem of child victims is a task of the ONE's SOS teams, but the resources are lacking. In addition, each judicial district has an 'abuse' commission that meets regularly (coordinated by ONE) and enables the networking of the various actors involved (SAJ, SOS enfants, hospital paediatric centres, public prosecutor's office, police, etc.). The intervention logic of youth support services (2004 decree) - priority to psycho-medical care and diversion - differs from the logic governing intervention in the context of IPV. Many respondents reported problems in their collaboration with youth services.
- On the Dutch side, the link between children's homes and the FJCs/chain approach is not clearly established. *'De nodige verbinding moet gemaakt worden tussen de ketenaanpak/Family Justice Centres en de Huizen van het Kind'*. Several respondents

emphasised the importance of placing the interests of children to the forefront. In Flanders, many respondents refer to the 'kindereflexe' that practitioner dealing with IPV should have.

Furthermore, family courts do not take IPV sufficiently into account when deciding on child custody. *'Family judges continue to find it hard to take IPV into account in their decisions on parental authority and child custody. The father's rights are factored in and often take precedence over the father's dangerousness and/or violence towards the mother'* (association). Thanks to the analysis of the victims' life stories, we were able to make similar observations: in some cases, despite the existence of a report from the social welfare services concerning the victim's follow-up and/or a doctor's report, the family court questions the existence of IPV or does not take it into account in its judgment. Furthermore, several respondents in the first round highlighted the problem of distinguishing between high conflict divorces and IPV. The principle of shared custody between the two parents remains the reference point, whereas this principle is questioned by many respondents in the second round. On this issue, a specificity of the Antwerp judicial district can be observed: in Antwerp, family judges systematically ask the public prosecutor's office for advice when it comes to IPV.

### **4.5.3. The three main framing developments**

#### **4.5.3.1. Evolution 1: The Zero Tolerance principle and the reality principle**

The principle of 'Zero Tolerance', which refers to the trend towards criminalising IPV translated at the level of the public prosecutor's office and the police (2006), applies to the whole country. This is a two-tiered injunction: in the police phase the rule is to refer all situations of IPV complaints to the public prosecutor's office, even if the behaviour in question does not clearly constitute an offence. At the level of the prosecution service, then, the instruction is to limit the outright dismissal of cases. Even if this principle is still a reference in terms of police/justice intervention, it is not really applied in the field and is highly dependent on the judicial districts and police zones.

The public opinion on this principle is expressed in a strong request to the justice: 'justice must provide an answer'. However, the justice system, using a penal interpretation to construct an offence from an event, finds it hard during proceedings to identify elements of proof to target the offence, the perpetrator and the victim. Indeed, the complainants' statements are often ambiguous: there is a crisis and violence, but no doubt there are still feelings between the partners, and it is not easy for the victims themselves to decode their experiences. Through these complex discourses, the justice system may fail to analyse striking evidence because it does not have the tools to decode the signs.

- The search for evidence at all costs to initiate proceedings may lead to a re-characterisation of the criminal act. For example, the requirement for a medical certificate as concrete proof supporting evidence and the need to act, whether to protect the victim or to incriminate the act committed. In this way, physical violence is taken into account more than psychological or economic forms of violence. Yet, circulars from public prosecutors and aid associations stress the importance of taking all types of violence into account to enable victims to be recognised as such in all dimensions and begin the reconstruction work.



- The public prosecutor's office seeks to identify high-risk situations, for example, situations of control that could lead to murder. In recent months, it has developed a tool for this purpose (COL 15/2020). At the same time, the mechanisms for constructing evidence that emphasise the physical dimension of violence can be a distraction to the police who may be less attentive to the repeated psychological pressures that characterise the phenomenon of control.
- Expectations of the justice system (and the police) are out of all proportion to the needs for services. Legal procedures are strictly constrained, and their processes are not very responsive to individual cases. In the short term, victims who take the risk to come to police areas do not receive adequate protection and advice.
- Longer-term protection needs (beyond short-term emergency intervention) do not fall within the remit of the police, and the police do not generally consider themselves responsible for providing a link to other actors capable of providing care (in terms of reception or guidance).

#### 4.5.3.2. Evolution 2: A multidimensional problem requiring multidisciplinary management

Justice cannot solve the problem on its own, there needs to be **collaboration between different partners**. In particular, some respondents called for more collaboration between justice and specialised associations. How can this be organised?

- In Flanders, the regional authority has obliged associations to join together in specialised centres for welfare and family problems (CAW). In the specific field of IPV, the province, the city and the public prosecutor's office of Antwerp have developed a pilot cooperation project involving the authorities (police-public prosecutor's office) and support organisations: professionals work in a coordinated way on specific cases (chain approach or 'ketenaanpak'): these are the cases the judiciary services propose to deal with through a multidisciplinary approach. The chain approach has been used since 2007 in all judicial districts in the north of the country. The partners have learned to use a common language and to organise appropriate information-sharing procedures that respect the constraints of professional secrecy. Four *Family Justice Centres* have been set up in Flanders (three in the province of Antwerp and one in the province of Limburg) with the aim of decompartmentalising practices in dealing with the problem of domestic (and family) violence in order to address it as a whole. Most of the Dutch-speaking respondents were also very much in favour of the chain approach and open to the FJCs, although two criticisms did emerge: a lack of resources and the problem of access to services concentrated in one place and therefore less available to the complainants.
- Since the law of 6 July 2017, a new article 458ter of the Criminal Code authorises 'case concertations' organised between the public prosecutor's office, the police and social workers to protect the physical or moral integrity of a person. COL 04/2018 specifies the guidelines for intervention by the Public Prosecutor's Office in the framework of this consultation, which allows for interdisciplinary cooperation between the various stakeholders in cases of IPV, under the supervision of the Public Prosecutor.
  - Most of the French-speaking respondents are in favour of consultation between specialised associations, the public prosecutor's office and the police, especially to deal with complex cases of IPV. But they prefer to organise it starting from the

specialised associations rather than at the initiative of the justice system, as is done in Flanders: *'In the FWB, we favour an approach starting from the associative sector specialised in domestic violence, in a multidisciplinary approach. The project is to create a centre per judicial district. Projects are underway in Namur, Liege, La Louvière and Herstal. Many cases of domestic violence that have not been brought to court should be dealt with in this type of chain approach, whereas other situations that have been brought to court do not necessarily require it. In FWB, therefore, the steering will not start from the point of view of justice. Case consultation, however, will be one of the tools used when relevant'* (FWB).

#### 4.5.3.3. Evolution 2bis: The special case of the CPVS

Multidisciplinary centres for the treatment of sexual violence (CPVS) welcome victims in Brussels, Ghent and Liege: located in hospitals, they offer medical and forensic treatment and psychological follow-up. The victim can also file a complaint with a police team specialised in sexual violence. The CPVS were assessed positively by the majority of respondents: this system makes it possible to avoid situations of secondary victimization; it also provides 24-hour access to a specialised and multidisciplinary team. However, some critics point out that the CPVS are too dispersed throughout the country, whereas it is recommended that the reference centres be close to the victims. Furthermore, the generalisation of the CPVS could encourage a 'medical' entry point (through a focus on physical violence and therefore on the health aspects of the problem) whereas it is good practice to encourage multidisciplinary follow-up: *'The risk of expertise being concentrated in the 'care landscape' because of the expertise and transversal nature of the work, is due to the fact that there are no 'care providers' on the first line. An approach whereby physical violence receives more attention than other forms of violence. An approach where work is done with the victim at the expense of family or couple oriented counselling'*

#### 4.5.3.4. Evolution 3: Strengthening the protective role of justice - a reactive approach

Strengthening of the protective role from the judiciary side is reflected in two recently modified measures - the Temporary Residence Interdiction (as redefined in March 2020), and the generalisation of the practice of revisiting (see below). Justice now seems to give priority to protecting victims, acting more as a referral body and relaying to social workers or specialised services: many respondents stressed the importance of relaying to psychosocial follow-up and working in collaboration (justice - psychosocial services) particularly for longer term support after the moments of crisis.

##### A) The TRI (ITR) measure

With regard to the Temporary Residence Interdiction (TRI) measure, the amendments made in March 2020 have strengthened the role of the judicial centres and the possibilities for intervention by the family court. Most of the survey respondents are in favour of the TRI measure, but at present it is mainly used only by the judicial districts of Limburg and Antwerp. A number of obstacles to its implementation are highlighted in the other districts:

- Enforcement of the measure adds a significant administrative burden for the police and prosecution services, and respondents agree on the need for a rapid reaction in the event of non-compliance.

- Most respondents agree that the follow-up by the Houses of Justice is a good thing, but justice assistants do not have the time to handle all cases and their role needs to be clarified.
- There is support for combining the TRI with the harassment alarm (or harassment application) in order to strengthen the protection of victims who remain in the home in the context of an TRI.
- In Flanders, Family Justice Centres facilitate the follow-up of TRI by setting up specialised Temporary Residence Interdiction teams to provide care for families and limit waiting lists.

#### B) The practice of revisiting

The COL 20/2020 of the College of Public Prosecutors aims to generalise the practice of 'revisits' by the police services to victims of partner violence organised during the period of the coronavirus health crisis. The aim is to maintain contact with the victim beyond the Coronavirus crisis period, or even to offer psychosocial follow-up within specialised services. In Flanders, this moment is used to offer psychosocial follow-up in the CAWs (although people are free to choose whether or not to follow it). This is a way of '*keeping a line of communication open*' (association). However, many respondents point to the lack of resources in the police areas to carry out this measure.

#### C) Follow-up and management of perpetrators

*'Accompanying a perpetrator means above all protecting past and future victims'* (association). Many respondents emphasised the importance of monitoring the person considered to be the perpetrator of the violence, yet at present there is a lack of supporting structures for perpetrators (medium- and long-term assistance). According to the respondents, a distinction should be made between the follow-up of the perpetrator and the first-line assistance to perpetrators, which is not provided on the French-speaking side (unlike the CAW in Flanders). With regard to the follow-up of perpetrators, many respondents stress the importance of being able to combine the two types of follow-up: both discussion groups and individualised follow-up. Several respondents from associations emphasised the lack of linkage between these two types of follow-up for perpetrators: *'In Belgium, there is a lack of linkage between group accountability work and individual follow-up with a more therapeutic aim. The services approved for one are not approved for the other, which leads to compartmentalisation'*. (Association) On the Dutch-speaking side, the offer of follow-up for perpetrators is very fragmented depending on the location and it functions on a project basis (in some places there are few possibilities while in other places projects are available). Most of the projects were originally developed by the CAWs in collaboration with the MGCs (mental health centres).

#### 4.5.4. Encouraging the development of a learning logic in a reflective approach

With the exception of the case-based approach ('ketenaanpak'), which encourages multidisciplinary collaboration to share frames of reference and build a network of trust and expertise, and which thereby transforms practices, the mechanisms put in place in recent years (TRI, revisiting, etc.), which we have presented above, have developed with a mainly reactive approach, without giving due consideration to the main criticisms against the historical frame of current policies the policy - the zero tolerance policy: 'there is no tolerance zero' but the concept is not being called into question. It would make sense to encourage and develop

a reflective, thus learning, approach to the problem and to practices. However, three dimensions needed for such a policy are currently under-invested: (1) learning from cases of intimate partner homicide to improve the management of the most serious cases, as is done in other countries (Canada, England, etc.), (2) conducting a genuine policy on prevention - primary, secondary and tertiary, (3) integrating the concept of intersectionality into the reading of the problem, at all levels.

- (1) Learning from cases of intimate partner homicide in order to improve the management of the most serious cases: for the past ten years, Canada has had 'Domestic Violence Death Review Committees' in place to study domestic homicides in depth (once the legal proceedings have been completed). These multidisciplinary committees bring together actors from different services and sectors: justice, police, social workers, child protection, etc. The aim is to set up (inter-sectoral) consultation mobilizing most critical concrete cases in a multidisciplinary approach that breaks with the traditional definition of the functions and roles of each institution. Based on the analysis of investigation files and interviews with relatives of homicide victims, the report identifies the systemic issues related to such deaths, as well as the risk and protective factors. Recommendations include prevention of violent behaviour; training for doctors; better training of workers in risk factors and complaint history; and intake and support for immigrant families. Such an approach through 'in-depth studies' of family homicide cases would be desirable in Belgium according to most of the survey respondents and would enable the various services (police, justice, social services, etc.) to reflect together on the blind spots in practices and procedures. This would be an interesting source of learning to improve the quality of intervention mechanisms.
- (2) Based on the WHO report on the prevention of intimate partner violence (2012) mobilizing a public health perspective, prevention strategies should be considered with due attention to three categories of public action (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002): **primary prevention**, which aims to prevent violence from occurring; **secondary prevention**, which focuses on the most immediate responses to violence; and **tertiary prevention**, which is concerned with long-term care after violence.
  - The public health approach emphasises **primary prevention**, which seeks to reduce the number of new cases of intimate partner violence by addressing the factors that make it likely to occur in the first place, and by focusing on younger age groups. The aim is not to implement awareness campaigns but to develop a real public health approach (holistic approach). Childhood abuse - in particular physical, sexual and emotional abuse by parents and guardians - increases the likelihood of IPV in adolescence and early adulthood. In Wallonia and Brussels, these competences in the field of primary prevention are mainly the responsibility of ONE and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. In Flanders, the competence for primary prevention lies with organisations such as Sensoa, Kind&Gezin, the CAWs and some services of the Flemish government's Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family. There are many experimental approaches, but the projects are scattered, and the means are insufficient: *'No, the efforts in primary prevention are neither well-coordinated, nor efficient, nor do they have sufficient means. Currently, there is no budget line in Belgium specifically dedicated to the primary prevention*

*of violence (neither of IPV nor of violence against women). As a result, the actors proposing it do so on the basis of optional subsidies that are precarious' (association)*

- As far as **secondary prevention** is concerned, the social network can have an impact on the evolution of marital dynamics and couple violence. Beyond the couple's direct entourage, the secondary social network - institutional, community and private resources - as well as frontline professionals could play a supportive role in dealing with violence (WHO, 2012). Improving the skills of frontline workers in relation to IPV is therefore a valuable resource in reducing the risks faced by victims. Currently, no mandatory courses on IPV are included in basic training for first line professionals in the psycho-social, medical, legal and educational fields. Many respondents stressed the importance of training and equipping all frontline professionals.
- Many respondents underlined the fact that there is a lack of access to care or long-term follow-up after violence (**tertiary prevention**) in Wallonia while the existing services are not accessible because of long waiting lists in Flanders. It is not only a question of psychosocial support, but also of access to housing (and taking into account the difficulty of leaving protected accommodation), while responding to the different problems of victims.

(3) The issue of inequalities in the services supporting victims (and perpetrators) was denounced by many respondents in the online survey. The examples most frequently presented are cases of female victims of IPV who arrived in Belgium as part of family reunification, and/or those who do not speak the language of the region; elderly women; male victims in homosexual relations, etc. As proposed by the American jurist Kimberlé Crenshaw (2005), the concept of intersectionality should be mobilised as a tool for analysing the problem at all levels in order to highlight the different relationships of domination that are still present in our society and which pose structural obstacles that keep certain victims, often women, from benefiting from existing aid. Vulnerable groups, often excluded from the system, are excluded because the policy instruments are not designed for them. Relationships of domination are also fostered by a weaker command of the language of intervention, by a fragile status in terms of residence permit, by a situation of disability, etc. Police and judicial officials, who adopt a 'neutral' approach to applicants, often overlook these relations of domination, or even reinforce them by imposing their own model of interpretation based on their personal experiences and professional status on the reading grid.

In order to address this blind spot, policymakers and supporting services should take seriously the caveat highlighted by Crenshaw (2005) when she proposes to take an intersectionality-based approach *'for a better understanding of the various interactions of race and gender in the context of violence against women of colour. I use this concept to outline, at a general level, how racism and patriarchy influence each other. I also use it to describe the situation of women of colour, who are placed in both overlapping systems of subordination(...). The desire to politicize violence against women will largely leave out the experiences of non-whites as long as we continue to turn a blind eye to the ramifications of racial stratification among women.'*

#### 4.5.5. Conclusion

A central element of analysis concerns the difficulty of framing the problem. The distinction in the field between cases of intimate terrorism and situational couple violence (Johnson 2009, 2011) is far from obvious, as it is based on contextual elements and is part of the historical development of the relationship: its assessment requires an analysis of the partner's intentionality and the unfolding of the cycle of violence, i.e. reconstructing the different stages of the relationship rather than just analysing the last act. At the time of writing, the relevance of this categorisation is being questioned.

- On the one hand, the analysis of life stories (point 4.3.) has highlighted the fact that life courses are not linear. On the contrary, there seem to be episodes of both intimate terrorism and situational violence within the same relationship. This is an important element of analysis through which it is appropriate to 'rethink' the framing of the problem. It is necessary to question the 'binarity' of the reflection, as violent relationships are characterised by different types of violence present at different times in the relationship (relationship of domination, bidirectional and situational violence, etc.).
- On the other hand, since the COL 15/2020, the actors in the field seem to be moving towards sharing a risk analysis grid, the use of this tool being more and more widespread in the psycho-medico-social sector as well. The aim is no longer to distinguish between situational violence and intimate terrorism, but to identify the most at-risk situations (by integrating contextual as well as historical dimensions of the relationship's life course) in order to ensure the safety of the victims and the implementation of psycho-medico-social follow-up as quickly as possible.

What those respondents working in the field emphasised is the need to strengthen psycho-social support from the victim's first step: the contact with the police. It is a matter of accompanying them through a difficult personal process, even a stage that may increase their exposure to violence. Yet, the police, despite their increased capacity to receive victims, do not have the time or the required skills to provide such support. The role of the police remains one of emergency management: to provide care for the perpetrator/victim of a violent act during a crisis, and to build up a file for the public prosecutor's office in the event of a criminal act. However, long-term follow-up is the responsibility of either the public prosecutor's office or psycho-social victim support associations. Two possibilities are mentioned by those working in the field: either to strengthen the police's victim support services (but this assistance will always be provided in a short-term, crisis management context) or to ensure closer cooperation between the police and associations working in the field, which can help the victim and the perpetrator either for long-term psychological support or to organise emergency protection. Medium- and long-term care for perpetrators in parallel with care for victims is an aspect that is currently missing from the policy.

The criticism addressed to the 'Zero Tolerance' principle mobilised by the judicial sector must be taken seriously: the justice system cannot solve the problem alone. When dealing with complex cases, there needs to be collaboration between different partners. In particular, some respondents called for more collaboration between the justice system and specialised

associations. This is a multidimensional problem that requires multidisciplinary management. How can it be organised?

The approach developed in Flanders ('ketenaarpak' and FJC), where the dominant logic of the CAWs is more that of service to users rather than fighting social inequalities, tends to diminish the power of initiative or even that of advocacy or contestation by the associations grouped there in. Some mention a form of 'depoliticization of social work': the objective is no longer to change society but to manage the 'individual well-being of families'. The gender equality dimension is muted, in a 'gender neutral' approach to their interventions. This gender-neutral approach is also defended by actors from the justice and police sectors. The Council of Europe's GREVIO report (2020) called on the federal authorities to *'adopt a conceptual framework of reference shared by all public authorities and the guidelines for intervention that follow from it, based on the Istanbul Convention and recognising the systemic link between violence against women and a historical organisation of society based on the domination and discrimination of women by men, which still disproportionately disadvantages women today'*. There is no doubt that more training in gender issues is needed for the judiciary and the police (from the basic training course). This dimension is currently absent from their training. Furthermore, the issue of inequalities in the support system for victims and perpetrators was also denounced by many respondents.

Faced with IPV, some victims find it hard to access or use the protection system: these victims are at the intersection of gender, culture and immigration, economic and social insecurity and face complex structural barriers. The concept of intersectionality should be mobilised as a tool for analysing the problem, in order to highlight the relationships of domination that are still quite present in our society and constitute structural obstacles that do not enable certain victims, often women, to benefit from existing aid. Vulnerable groups, often excluded from the system, are excluded because the policy instruments are not designed for them.

Another under-investigated dimension concerns the primary prevention of violence. This is central and should be carried out within a public health approach, addressing the factors that make the first manifestation of violence likely and focusing on younger age groups. At present, many respondents denounce the operation of small ad hoc projects without structural funding for primary prevention. In addition to primary prevention, secondary and tertiary prevention are also important. In these different areas, fundamental work remains to be done by developing a shared long-term vision and a coordinated approach among the different authorities that are presently developing policy instruments in a haphazard way: cooperation is not encouraged by the current fragmentation of prevention policy.

Children are at the heart of the problem of family violence, and for many respondents they are a major problem in dealing with IPV. During the relationship, child victims are often witnesses of the aggression between the parents, in some cases they are direct victims of violence. Sometimes children are instrumentalised by the parents (as a means to reach the other). *'Numerous studies show that the impact of domestic violence on children is extremely significant, leading to trauma, a strong sense of insecurity and developmental disorders, which strongly encourages delinquency and the reproduction of violence as an adult, particularly towards one's spouse, children or third parties »*. (Senat 2020) Many respondents highlighted

areas for reflection and 'blind spots' in IPV policy in relation to children's issues, due to the absence of collaboration between services in charge of children protection and those dealing with IPV. Several respondents stressed the importance of systematically providing parenting support for both parents.

#### 4.7. RECOMMANDATIONS

Based on the results of the research, 14 recommendations are made, some of which are broken down into sub-recommendations.

##### **R1. Extend and complexify the concept of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)**

The models currently used appear insufficient for recognising and responding adequately to the multiplicity of IPV situations and the diversity of trajectories, contexts and dynamics of violence. It is therefore necessary to a) extend the "intimate terrorism/situational violence" framework to include a reading of "dyadic" dynamics and b) adopt an intersectional approach that takes into account the intersection of gender inequalities with other inequalities related to socio-economic status, foreigner status, disability, culture, etc. Several theoretical reference frameworks must therefore be mobilised in a complementary way and operationalised, distinguishing the structural level from the individual level, to meet the need for specific and adequate intervention tools. Particular attention must also be paid to the processes of exit and desistance.

*Models and tools such as the Cycle of Violence, the Conjugal Domination Process (CDP) or Johnson's typology are very useful in the field but also appear insufficient to meet the needs of interventions in the face of the multiplicity and diversity of situations. The distinctions between 'conflict' and 'violence', between 'intimate terrorism' and 'situational violence' do not provide a sufficient framework to classify IPV situations, given the many different types of experiences and the alternation within the same trajectories of different forms of violence. In practice, therefore, these models/tools are very complicated to implement, and this is even more so for generalist and/or first-line workers. The same applies to identification of a process of control and domination beyond an incident or an accumulation of incidents. While attention to power dynamics remains essential in the fight against IPV, it is nevertheless very complex: penal rationality, in particular, encounters major difficulties in integrating an approach other than that of focusing on incidents that can be isolated, and legally qualified on the basis of evidence.*

The models and tools for decoding situations must therefore be rethought from the perspective of openness, broadening and increasing complexity. They should be able to take greater account of the protagonists' perceptions. From an operational point of view, they should make it possible to identify and specify the significant diversity of IPV situations, while developing adequate intervention tools. Finally, in view of the significant differences observed between Flanders and the Walloon-Brussels Federation (FWB) in terms of reference models and theoretical background, the conditions for a joint approach favouring reciprocal learning should be put in place.

There is also a need for an intersectional approach that takes into account the intersection of gender inequalities with *other structural inequalities* that have an important influence on the occurrence of IPV, on their reporting and on the mode of intervention. These include social



inequalities (income, labour market status, housing, level of education, etc.), inequalities related to origin and nationality, resident status in Belgium ('undocumented', residency obtained through family reunification, etc.), inequalities related to (lack of) knowledge of the Region's language, of a national language, and/or English, as well as to the lack of<sup>107</sup> or reliability of interpreters, and inequalities related to sexuality and sexual orientation.

The positioning of a person at *the intersection* of several types of structural inequalities makes her or him particularly vulnerable both to the occurrence of IPV and to the offer of help or any form of intervention - police, judicial or psycho-medico-social (PMS). This is relevant whether the person is a victim, perpetrator, or both, in the IPV situation.

IPV must be recognised as a phenomenon that is part of a *structural* situation of inequality between women and men from a macrosocial point of view. From a *individual* point of view, however, this does not mean that men are not also victims of IPV, including processes of control and domination, but they are much less frequently (and usually with less physical damage). Furthermore, not all IPV situations are part of a domination and control relationship.

## **R2. Strengthen the quality of the frontline response**

In IPV situations, the - mainly local - police are most often in the front line and are the main 'gateway' for initiating a judicial intervention. Depending on the region, other institutions, such as the *Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk* (CAW) or the Public Social Welfare Centres (CPAS/OCMW), also play an important role, especially in Flanders. General practitioners also have a key role in identifying situations of violence at an early stage.

The workers concerned are most often non-specialised and contact with IPV situations is only one aspect of their work and a rather minor part of their job. Moreover, their intervention very often takes place in a context of both urgency and work overload.

In view of this, the general recommendation to strengthen the quality of frontline intervention will be broken down into seven sub-points.

### (1) Strengthening and improving police training

The first concerns *training*. This is not a new recommendation; it has been made repeatedly since the first NAPs were drawn up. Even if a positive evolution has been observed over the years, this movement still needs to be largely reinforced. The results of the research have helped identify the gaps more clearly and formulate more specific proposals concerning both the *content* and the *organisation* of training. The content needs to be made more complex and adapted to the changes in the definition and approach of the IPV (see R1). At the organisational level, there are problems at both national and local levels.

The lack of a *central coordination point at police level* is sorely felt. This coordination must be implemented at federal (and certainly supra-local) level. The lack of such coordination explains why there is still no centralized inventory of training available to police officers. Similarly, there is no clarity on what is the subject of compulsory training, of which a basic foundation should be generalised. Some police academies have taken initiatives to pay more attention to this

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<sup>107</sup> It has been noted that there have been budget cuts in the interpreters' budget, despite the fact that there is already a shortage.

type of training, but these endeavours are scattered and suffer from a lack of coordination and a central referent in this matter. The quality of the training provided therefore varies widely depending on the region, province or even police zone.

At the local level, and this differs according to the area, this type of training suffers from a lack of *valorisation*. This lack of recognition, coupled with the police officer's workload and the choices he or she has to make in order to access training, is generally detrimental to police officer training in the field of IPV. The research has shown the importance of the role of the hierarchy, of the *head of the corps*, but also of the *trade unions* in the valorisation of and access to this type of training.

At both levels, special attention must be paid to frontline police officers and intervention teams.

#### (2) Including IPV as a priority in the Zonal Security Plan (ZSP)

Currently, although there has been a significant evolution over the years, IPV is only listed as a priority in at most about half of the PZSs. Not being listed as a priority does not mean that no local policy is developed in this matter. However, the research shows that this inclusion in the PZS is an important support, and in some cases a necessary condition, both for legitimising the initiatives developed by local police officers - reference police officers or police victim assistance services (SAPV) - and for providing and ensuring that these initiatives have sufficient resources in terms of money or staff and working time for a real organisational commitment to this issue.

#### (3) Systematically designating a reference police officer specialised in IPV, create a coordination function or cell (and establish a list of reference police officers)

The reference police officer for IPV has an essential role to play in terms of the attention given to this issue at local level (raising the awareness of the hierarchy, of colleagues), in terms of contacts with the reference magistrate of the public prosecutor's office, or internal relays with the police victim assistance services (SAPV/DSZ) and externally at the local level with the CPAS/ OCMW, hospitals, the accommodation sector and the entire PMS sector in the broad sense. This also concerns the CAWs in Flanders and the Family Justice Centres (FJCs), mainly in Flanders along with the areas concerned by the pilot projects in FWB (in the framework of the chain approach). This function of the IPV reference police officer should be valued and the necessary time should be provided for her/him to carry out this task.

It is not certain that a reference police officer is designated in each police zone, and no list has been drawn up and no horizontal coordination is ensured with a view to exchanges (of good practices, for example), information or consultation between these professionals who perform a similar function. The existence of such coordination would be a considerable support. In concrete terms, the recommendation is therefore threefold: designate a reference police officer in each zone, compile a list of these reference police officers (185) and create a bilingual function or cell to coordinate the reference police officers.

#### (4) Organising automatic referral to the SAPV

Structurally, the establishment of the SAPVs and the definition of their tasks (both structural and specialised victim assistance) has created a place within the police to provide initial assistance to the victim of IPV and to refer her or him to any other service for appropriate help.

The research results seem to indicate, however, that the use of these services is not massive or at least leaves little trace in the material observed at the judicial level. It should therefore be examined whether it would not be appropriate to generalise an automatic referral to the SAPV, such as exists in certain police zones, by means of a circular, for example, as is the case for the practice of 'revisiting' by the police (COL 20/20) and/or to find other means to reinforce the proactivity of the SAPVs with regard to victims of IPV.

(5) Structurally organising and promoting a victim-oriented - and perpetrator-oriented - approach (from the initial intervention)

As far as the perpetrators (or presumed perpetrators) are concerned, the situation is structurally different in Flanders and in the Walloon-Brussels Federation. In Flanders, the police officer can directly refer the perpetrator (or the couple) to the CAW where a professional with psychosocial training can assess the situation with a minimum of required skills, and possibly ensure the relay to a service adapted to the perpetrator's needs (Centre for Mental Health (CSM), CPAS/OCMW, training, psycho-medico-social assistance, etc). In FWB, there is no structural provision for this - thus a missing 'link'. Both the initiative and the burden of this information and guidance falls on the frontline police officer or the police officer of reference, who has neither the time nor the psycho-medico-social tools. (It may be that local mechanisms have been set up, but we have not been informed of them). In principle, however, all types of actors emphasise the importance of rapid intervention with regard to the perpetrator, one that is not solely penal. In FWB, there is therefore a need to set up this type of system structurally.

(6) Developing a first-line consultation with the Public Social Welfare Centres (CPAS/OCMW) and appoint an IPV referent in each CPAS/OCMW

The CPASs or OCMWs are important actors at the local level but are nevertheless quite differently involved in the IPV prevention policy. In Flanders, some are involved in the cooperation established by the FJCs and/or the chain approach. Some OCMWs have a service or a person specialised in this field. The *appointment of a reference person* in each CPAS or OCMW should be generalised. This person would be responsible for raising awareness of the issue among colleagues, promoting training in the field, developing or promoting initiatives at CPAS/OCMW level and getting involved in the various existing consultations (FJCs or others). This reference person should receive specific training.

More generally, attention to the IPV issue within the CPASs or OCMWs also implies both a *simplification of the procedure* (of the documents) and an *acceleration of the deadlines* in order to respond to situations of urgent need.

(7) Learning from the experiences of the Multidisciplinary Sexual Violence Centres (CPVS/ZSG)

Even if the issues differ in many respects, lessons could also be learned from the operation of the multidisciplinary sexual violence centres (CPVS/ZSG) that receive victims in Brussels, Charleroi, Antwerp, Ghent and Liège and are located on the front line within hospitals, outside the sphere of justice.

### R3. Develop a multidisciplinary approach

A *consensus* is emerging on the need to develop a multidisciplinary approach, i.e. an approach that allows for cooperation between actors from different disciplines and functions involved in intervention in the field of IPV (police, magistracy - at the correctional and youth level -, CAW, CPAS/OCMW, PMS sector, etc.). This need is seen as paramount and it is now essential to give concrete expression to this common will through the general implementation of operational methods that also meet with consensus. However, on this point, obstacles still remain.

In relation to this issue, the situations are different in Flanders and FWB. In Flanders, the chain approach (Ketenaanpak) was launched in 2012 and integrated in the Flemish government's policy in 2017. FJCs have been gradually set up since 2016, conceived as 'one-stop shops'<sup>108</sup>. The chain cooperation is based on multidisciplinary cooperation between justice, police and social services (CAW, OCMW, etc.) in complex cases of domestic violence and case consultations are organised in this perspective.

In FWB, the creation of FJCs (or maisons VIF) is envisaged, and projects (Namur, Dinant) have been launched, accompanied by an evaluation process (Collignon 2019). However, this undertaking is coming about in a certain climate of distrust. In addition to distrust for a 'turnkey' import of a model adapted to the restructuring of services in Flanders (Collignon 2019), the reticence mainly concerns two points: the predominant place given to the justice system to the detriment of the (non-profit) PMS sector and the respect of professional secrecy in the context of consultations on concrete cases. The COL 04/2018 on case consultation and professional secrecy gives the public prosecutor's office a significant role and a power of control. The 'network of expertise in matters of crime against persons' set up within the College of Prosecutors General (and under the management of the Prosecutor General of Liège) has initiated reflections, in several areas at local level, on the implementation of these case consultations, bearing in mind the fundamental questions relating to ethics and the need to preserve the bond of trust established by the protagonists with the PMS actors (Laouar 2019)

The Flemish model that grew from the restructuring is not immune to internal criticism either. First of all, the reorganisation of the associations in the CAWs is seen to favour a 'depoliticization of social work'<sup>109</sup> by reducing the power of initiative and the possibility of contestation: the logic of services to individual users would be to the detriment of a commitment by these organisations to a more global fight against structural social inequalities. Secondly, from a practical point of view, although the model has the advantage of progressively creating a network logic between all the services, it was first implemented for *short-term* intervention and still needs to be reinforced for *long-term* intervention. Furthermore, the lack of resources and the problem of accessibility to services concentrated in one place, occasionally with long waiting lists, are also denounced.

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<sup>108</sup> The chain approach is seen as a method of working, while the CJF refers to a place where all partners are brought together under one roof.

<sup>109</sup> This criticism is reflected in the scientific literature but also in the results of the DELPHI survey.

Reflection on this matter must therefore continue at the federal level and at the level of the federated entities, also involving the associative sector in order to develop a policy that meets this objective.

#### **R4. Reconsider the function of justice and strengthen its involvement in a network approach**

The research results reveal too much is expected from the criminal justice system, which has to deal with a very large and undifferentiated mass of reported IPV situations. Given the range and diversity of situations, a response to expectations and needs must be provided, but not necessarily and only in the form of a judicial response. This may not be appropriate or necessary, or even have undesirable effects, particularly in view of the needs of the victim or the resources of the administration to ensure adequate implementation. The principle of 'primo no nocere' should apply. In cases where a judicial response is required, a repressive response is not necessarily the most appropriate, and when a repressive response is unavoidable, it should be accompanied by psychosocial follow-up of both the victim and the perpetrator.

In view of these observations, the magistrate of the public prosecutor's office has a decision-making function that is both essential and complex. In order to carry out this function properly, it seems essential to strengthen their involvement in a *network approach*. Furthermore, several mechanisms and tools have already been put in place at the initiative of the College of Procurators General, but these have not (yet) been generalised or systematically implemented. In concrete terms, the following recommendations can be made:

- Strengthening and expanding the role of the IPV reference magistrate as part of a network approach: an active role in raising awareness among police officers, taking initiatives at the level of local public prosecutors' offices, participating in coordination bodies with the various sectors, including associations (in order to promote inter-knowledge), acting as an interface (or point of contact) between the justice system and the PMS sector at the district level, etc.
- Strengthening coordination between IPV reference magistrates to promote a learning dynamic
- Increasing the visibility of the reference magistrates vis-à-vis the actors of all the sectors concerned
- And, at their level, continuing participation in the reflection and the initiatives in progress for the implementation of 'case consultations' in a network approach perspective<sup>110</sup>
- Evaluating the application of the 'frontline risk assessment tool for domestic violence by police and public prosecutors', which has been generalised, as ordered under circular COL15/20
- Evaluating the COL 20/20 tool to 'Generalise the practice of police 'revisiting' victims of partner violence during the coronavirus health crisis'
- Assessing the use of Temporary Residence Orders (ITR/TRB) and in particular the obstacles that limit their application
- Drawing up and making available the Action Plans on domestic violence provided for by COL 4/2006 at the initiative of the Public Prosecutor of each district (these are not currently

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<sup>110</sup> See Laouar 2019

produced systematically), with a view to a network approach (both internal and external to the justice system). Possibly extend the annual periodicity currently provided for

- Making available the analysis of available statistical data (see R11 & R12) to support the development of a network approach

### **R5. Make prevention a structural policy priority**

In general, the research shows that the IPV policy is insufficiently oriented towards prevention, although both actors and beneficiaries believe that this should be a priority.

Three levels of prevention are classically distinguished: primary, secondary and tertiary prevention (WHO 2010). It can be noted that the recent National Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence (2021-2025), published in November 2021, highlights these prevention objectives.

#### **(1) Strengthening primary prevention**

Primary prevention, which is favoured in a public health approach, is that which aims to prevent violence from occurring. It is about reducing new cases of IPV by acting from an early age, and throughout life, in a holistic way on the factors that make them likely.

The results of the research show that, up to now, politicians have given very low priority to this objective. It is essential to pay more attention to education on relationships, emotions and sexuality, taking into account the diversity of populations and forms of violence. This must be integrated into the more general framework of a civic education to learn about individual rights and limits (equality of men and women) and relationships (non-violent communication, notion of consent, promotion of assertiveness, deconstruction of gender stereotypes).

In Wallonia and Brussels, the majority of competences in the field of primary prevention lie with the ONE and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Schemes such as EVRAS (*Education à la Vie Relationnelle, Affective et Sexuelle*), developed in partnership with the Family Planning Federations, theoretically target a wide range of the population both in and out of school, but in practice only reach a very small portion of the general population. In Flanders, the competence for primary prevention lies with organisations such as Sensoa, Kind & Gezin, CAW and some services of the Flemish government's Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family. In FWB, associations are also developing primary prevention mainly in the framework of "éducation permanente" initiatives. Although there are experiences, the projects are too limited and dispersed, and the means are insufficient.

In short, both the scope and the resources allocated to primary prevention are too limited to be effective. Beyond the existing initiatives, resource allocation should also be considered in a more structural framework:

- Integrating education activities on this issue into the school curriculum
- Developing and disseminating an inventory of primary prevention tools that can be made available to teachers or a wider<sup>111</sup> public
- Strengthening the resources of existing projects that target primary prevention

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<sup>111</sup> For example, this catalogue of prevention tools developed in the Loire region of France [http://www.cartablecps.org/\\_docs/Fichier/2019/4-190822083327.pdf](http://www.cartablecps.org/_docs/Fichier/2019/4-190822083327.pdf)

## (2) Strengthening secondary prevention

Secondary prevention focuses on the most immediate responses to the IPV situation. Strengthening secondary prevention essentially concerns *training* of the various professionals involved in the field of policing. Basic training, which has already been specifically emphasised for police officers (see R2 (1)), is also necessary for any actor confronted with the problem in any context: general practitioner<sup>112</sup>, pharmacist, CPAS/OCMW, schools, local associations, mental health, etc.

A compulsory training period should be structured into the basic training of these different professionals.

## (3) Strengthening tertiary prevention

Tertiary prevention concerns the long-term follow-up of the IPV problem. There are many needs at this level that require structural measures, such as:

- broadening the response in terms of emergency or non-emergency housing (diversified housing to respond to the different problems of victims and perpetrators)
- facilitating the exit from specialised housing and the empowerment of victims by finding solutions to the problem of high rents, as part of a general approach to combating discrimination in the labour and rental market<sup>113</sup>
- providing the possibility for accessible and free or income-related care and legal support or PMS, taking into account multiple vulnerabilities and difficulties related to disability, lack of language skills, access to digital information, resident status, parenthood or single status, etc.
- addressing the problem of long waiting lists for access to aid which also impact vulnerable groups

## **R6. Develop medium- and long-term victim protection**

The aim is to strengthen medium- and long-term care through the following actions

- improving the organisation of follow-up trajectories, by working within a network logic between social workers
- combining the Temporary Restraining Order (ITR/TBR) with a harassment alarm (or application) to strengthen the protection of victims who remain at home under a ITR/TBR, and encourage its development
- clarifying the role of the Houses of Justice, particularly in the context of monitoring ITR/TBR
- *structural* support for the relevant specialised services (victim support, psychological support, etc.) in terms of staff and resources
- strengthening post-separation follow-up
- if the victim is a parent: systematically setting up parenting work
- valuing community support in the context of discussion groups, testimonies, peer support

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<sup>112</sup> (Scattered) initiatives to raise awareness among GPs are being taken, for example, in the context of the provincial consultation platforms (Ruyskart 2019).

<sup>113</sup> See in particular UNIA's initiatives to fight against this discrimination <https://www.unia.be/fr/domaines-daction/logement>

### **R7. Strengthen the care and follow-up of the perpetrators (or the couple)**

The research findings suggest the following actions to be recommended for perpetrators or couples (see R2. (4)):

- avoiding a purely repressive reaction and to reinforce a preventive approach towards perpetrators
- considering any form of PMS follow-up, including upstream, for complaints that does not require legal action (all the more so if the victim does not express a desire for separation)
- creating and developing structural accommodation solutions for perpetrators as well as specialised supervision of the problem (with specific training for those involved)
- in the FWB, structurally developing front-line assistance to perpetrators or couples
- in the FWB, improving the visibility of the '*Services d'aide aux justiciables*' as well as the role of family planning centres, which are generalist services open to all
- offering the possibility for individual follow-up in parallel with group follow-up and allowing the articulation between these two types of follow-up
- introducing a follow-up of IPV perpetrators specifically in prison
- if the perpetrator is a parent: systematically setting up work on parenthood and, if necessary, conducting a risk analysis for maintaining contact with the children
- strengthening post-separation follow-up
- strengthening post-sentence and/or long-term follow-up of perpetrators
- promoting community support in the context of discussion groups, eyewitnesses, peer helpers

### **R8. Strengthen the care and follow-up of child (co)victims of IPV**

Many children are affected by IPV, either as members of the household<sup>114</sup> or linked to one of the protagonists. However, their fate is a 'blind spot' in the functioning of IPV policies, even though they can be an object of blackmail, a means of continuing to harass the parent, or the reason a victim will not dare to oppose or leave the violent partner. It is therefore essential to take children into account. We recommend:

- developing a 'child reflex' among IPV workers involving attention to parenting support for both parents and listening to children.
- establishing communication between the PMS actors and the various para-judicial and judicial actors (criminal prosecution, youth prosecution, family court, youth court) involved in a family history where there is a question of IPV
- developing a research programme that sheds light on the impact that parental violence in the family and the social reaction to it has on the children involved, with a focus on the timing and aftermath of a parental separation, in order to enable appropriate recommendations to be made in this area.

### **R9. Increase attention to and combat discrimination against populations that are particularly vulnerable because of their resident status**

The research found that there are significant difficulties experienced by victims of IPV whose resident status is precarious or irregular. The need to adopt an intersectionality perspective (see R1) applies particularly to these situations and leads to the following recommendations

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<sup>114</sup> At least 55% of the perpetrators reported in 2010 were in a household with children.



- taking legislative and administrative measures to ensure that Belgium complies with *Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention*, which requires (1) an autonomous (renewable) residence permit for an IPV victim whose resident status makes her dependent on her partner, (2) the suspension of expulsion proceedings against IPV victims and (3) the recovery of lost resident status in cases of forced marriage of IPV victims. In its 2020 final report (item 40), GREVIO 'strongly encourages the Belgian authorities to undertake an in-depth review of their immigration laws and policies in order to bring them into line with their obligations under Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention'
- simplifying and accelerating administrative measures to protect these victims of IPV, which (often) require urgent application to be effective. The administration of these measures must also take into account the particular difficulties involved in leaving an IPV situation (e.g. sending documents to an address other than that of the perpetrator)
- simplifying the documents and speeding up the deadlines for these categories of victims at the CPAS/OCMW level
- finding a solution so that 'undocumented' victims can file a complaint in a protected manner and can register in *ad hoc* shelters. The lack of shelter and space in shelters is often particularly detrimental to this category of victims (specific places are provided in some regions but they are insufficient).
- including in the training of neighbourhood police officers various aspects of integration and career counselling and protection measures in the context of foreigners' law.

#### **R10. Increase attention to and combat discrimination against populations particularly vulnerable on the basis of their sexual orientation**

The research also highlighted the difficulties faced by people of minority sexual orientation (LGBTQIA+) in dealing with both the police and PMS actors. They are still often stereotyped, which in turn delays the use of services for fear of stigmatisation or discrimination.

In view of this, we recommend

- strengthening awareness-raising activities on IPV among these particular groups of the population (via specific support associations)
- raising awareness about these difficulties in the training given to the various IPV stakeholders
- developing a specific study on the as yet little known difficulties of these populations, which do not constitute a single entity.

#### **R11. Strengthen attention to populations particularly vulnerable due to disability**

The results also show that the particular difficulties faced by people with disabilities are not given enough attention in the systems. More attention needs to be given to these situations, as the recommendations for the general population also apply. An additional difficulty, for example, is that when the victim is placed under administrative control due to a mental disability, the administrator's mobilisation is required for any protection measure.

#### **R12. Improve the recording, dissemination and analysis of statistical data on IPV**

In IPV situations reported to the police and the justice system (since the instructions of COL 3 and 4/2006), the available statistical information still has many limitations (Vanneste 2020). The main shortcomings - which go far beyond the issue of IPV alone - concern (1) the lack of

(sufficiently reliable or usable) data on victims, including their gender, (2) the fact that data are only available at the police and prosecution level but are not statistically identifiable at the level of convictions<sup>115</sup> and the execution of sentences and measures (3). Existing reports (e.g. from the Board of Public Prosecutors), furthermore, are not sufficiently accessible to the public. Finally, (4) the two sources currently available (police and public prosecutors' offices) are insufficiently analysed, exploited and placed in perspective.

In view of these findings, several recommendations are made:

- Prioritising the recording (or improvement) of information on victims with a view to the completeness (validity and reliability) of information on their gender, number<sup>116</sup> and age (1)
- Ensuring that IPV perpetrators who can be identified at the level of the public prosecutor's office by means of a context code can also be identified at the level of statistics on convictions (based on the criminal record), the execution of sentences (prison statistics) and measures (Houses of Justice), as part of a more general approach to integrated criminal statistics (2)
- Ensuring public access to the reports on IPV produced by the College of General Prosecutor analysts (e.g. on their website <https://www.om-mp.be/stat/>) (3)
- Creating an *IPV statistical data cell* to act as an interface between IPV data producers. Its objective will be to improve the production of IPV data in each of the sectors, to clarify and harmonize as far as possible the definitions of the categories used, to pursue more in-depth analyses on a regular basis (such as analyses on recidivism<sup>117</sup>), to produce regular reports for any audience but in particular for the sectors involved in IPV intervention, to provide training for these actors with a view to interpreting the statistical data (criminological and socio-demographic).

### **R13. Improve the statistical recording of homicides (and feminicides) in the context of IPV: create a coherent and efficient system of specific data collection**

Belgium does not have sufficiently accurate statistical data on homicide, and feminicide in particular, in the context of IPV (IPH). The term homicide is used here in the generic sense, including female and male or non-binary genders. The term feminicide is used here to refer to IPH in which the victim is a woman, regardless of whether the motive for the killing is gender-related or not. This definition is the only way to account for gender. The more restrictive definition of 'killing a woman because she is a woman', regardless of the lack of consensus on its operational use (content and relevance), is not suitable for statistical counting.

Although some information is available in the computer records of the criminal prosecution office and the police, there are still many gaps. This is particularly true when it comes to the gender of the victim, which is not yet (systematically) identifiable, data that do not systematically distinguish between attempted and completed homicides, or evolution in the qualification of the facts, which changes according to the stage of the procedure. Improvements are under way in this area, but these systems (which cover nearly one million

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<sup>115</sup> It is therefore not possible to know the nature of the sentences handed down, nor how they will be enforced in the event of an IPV.

<sup>116</sup> Currently it is not possible to identify whether repeated IPV offences committed by a specific perpetrator are committed against one or more different victims.

<sup>117</sup> See Vanneste 2016.

cases annually at the police level and over 600,000 at the criminal prosecution office) are in no way able to collect data specifying the context of these homicides, which leaves serious gaps in the information.

The information collected by the public health sector in the context of 'death certificates' is totally deficient. For an improvement to be possible, there would have to be a stage at which the information collected is returned to the courts (after judgment) confirming the legal status of homicide on which a doctor cannot pronounce, followed by communication of the information to public health. However, this procedure would also fail to provide a solution for cases where the perpetrator killed himself after the fact, thus extinguishing the public prosecution. The public health system (dealing with 100,000 to 125,000 deaths per year) does not currently allow for the collection of more precise contextual information, any more than the criminal justice system.

In view of these shortcomings and difficulties, we recommend the creation of a more effective *system of data collection specific to homicide cases* (Uniform Homicide Report)

- Whatever the context: since the annual number in Belgium of homicides in all contexts is 220 on average (and 720 attempted homicides)<sup>118</sup>, the implementation of such a system is very reasonable. *Homicide monitors* already exist in several countries, and international projects are being developed in this area<sup>119</sup>. The establishment of such a monitor would also make it possible to respond adequately to parliamentary questions on the subject, and to international investigations as well.
- And/or, especially for what directly concerns our research object, specific to *homicides in the context of IPV (IPH)* in particular (Uniform IPH Report). Since the annual average of completed IPHs can be estimated at about 35<sup>120</sup> (and 128<sup>121</sup> if we include events qualified as attempted IPHs), the possibilities of collecting very precise and contextualised information are both essential and very reasonable. This data collection should be coordinated at the national level *within the framework of a specific IPH data collection unit* that should be created. This cell should set up an information collection mechanism in collaboration with the relevant information producers in the police, justice, health, and other PMS sectors that may be involved in a pre-IPH intervention. This unit would be in charge of analysing this information and would also serve as an interface and contact point for researchers and requests from the various actors and the political world<sup>122</sup>.

#### **R14. Learn from homicide (and feminicide) cases by setting up a case analysis committee (feasibility study underway)**

As in Canada<sup>123</sup> and England, lessons can be learned from cases of intimate partner homicide (IPH) in order to improve the management of the most serious cases.

<sup>118</sup> Average calculated on the basis of police-reported data for the European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Statistics from 2000 to 2016. <https://wp.unil.ch/europeansourcebook/>

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.ihemi.fr/publications/ondrp/projets/projets-internationaux/european-homicide-monitor-ehm> led by the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland.

<sup>120</sup> Estimated average based on the years 2017 to 2020 (see point 4.4.3)

<sup>121</sup> Average calculated on the basis of figures from correctional prosecution offices from 2007 to 2020.

<sup>122</sup> Foreign experiences can serve as a reference, such as the model developed in English-speaking countries (Dawson 2017) <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/domestic-homicide-review>

<sup>123</sup> Canada has established 'Domestic Violence Death Review Boards' to conduct in-depth reviews of domestic homicides (after the prosecution is completed).

We recommend examining the feasibility of setting up some form of committee to analyse concrete IPH cases in depth once the legal proceedings have been completed. This committee should be multidisciplinary and include professionals from the different sectors involved in IPV. The objective should be to identify risk and protective factors, structural causes or blind spots in procedures and practices that had detrimental effects leading to the fatal act. The establishment of such a committee would therefore have benefits in terms of improving knowledge and making recommendations to improve IPV interventions.

This type of system would contribute to the multidisciplinary approach recommended elsewhere (see R3)

## **5. DISSEMINATION AND VALORISATION**

Dissemination has been achieved in three main ways: the organisation of events specific to IPV-PRO&POL research, the organisation of symposia in general, or in specific IPV, conferences, and through individual presentations at various conferences or training sessions.

Communications to the media as well as participation in a hearing of a Senate committee have also contributed to the dissemination of this research.

## 5.1. ORGANISATION OF IPV-PRO&POL EVENTS

Inaugural conference of the IPV-PRO&POL research by Elisa Herman, author of the book *Lutter contre les violences conjugales. Féminisme, travail social, politique publique* (2016). Conference entitled *Quelles politiques de lutte contre les violences conjugales ? Regards sociohistorique et ethnographique*, Brussels, SPF Justice, 30 November 2017 (NICC).

Final conference IPV-PRO&POL, 17 February 2022 (online), Recordings and slides on <https://incc.fgov.be/ipv-propol> <https://nicc.fgov.be/ipv-propol> (Events) and on BELSPO BRAIN-be [https://www.belspo.be/belspo/brain-be/themes\\_4\\_Strategic\\_fr.stm](https://www.belspo.be/belspo/brain-be/themes_4_Strategic_fr.stm)

### Conférence finale IPV-PRO&POL Eindconferentie

#### IPV PRO&POL

**Intimate Partner Violence: impact, processes, evolution and related public policies in Belgium**  
**Violences entre partenaires : impact, processus, évolution et politiques publiques**  
**Partnergeweld : impact, processen, evoluties en publiek beleid**  
*Online 17.02.2022*

- 10h **Mot de bienvenue. Welkomstwoord** *Charlotte Vanneste*
- 10h05 **Communication au nom du Président de BELSPO. Communicatie namens de voorzitter van BELSPO**  
*Aziz Naji*
- 10h10 **Introduction : questions, enjeux et approches de recherche développées dans IPV-PRO&POL**  
**Inleiding: onderzoeksvragen, uitdagingen en in IPV-PRO&POL ontwikkelde benaderingen**  
*Charlotte Vanneste*
- 10h30 **Analyse des entretiens menés avec des acteurs-clé en Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles (FWB)**  
**Analyse op basis van de interviews met sleutelactoren in de Wallonië-Brussel Federatie (FWB)**  
*Anne Lemonne, Valentine Mahieu, Charlotte Vanneste*
- 11h00 **Een intersectoriele analyse op basis van de interviews met sleutelactoren in Vlaanderen**  
**Analyse intersectionnelle des entretiens menés avec des acteurs-clé en Flandre**  
*Eva Vergaert, Gily Coene, Sophie Withaecx*
- 11h40 **De uitdagingen van het strafrechtelijke « maatpak ». Een analyse van gerechtelijke dossiers**  
**Les défis du « costume » pénal. Une analyse de dossiers judiciaires**  
*Isabelle Ravier, Sarah Van Praet*
- 12h10 **Analyse des entretiens menés avec des victimes et des auteurs**  
**Analyse op basis van de interviews met slachtoffers en daders**  
*Amandine Dziewa, Fabienne Glowacz*
- 12h40 **De rol van huisartsen in situaties van partnergeweld**  
**Le rôle des médecins dans les situations de violences entre partenaires**  
*Eva Vergaert*
- 14h00 **Le profil sociodémographique des auteurs signalés à la justice pour IPV : renvoi vers la justice, décisions judiciaires et positionnement social. Het sociaal-demografische profiel van de daders die voor IPV bij justitie zijn gesignaleerd: doorverwijzing naar justitie, gerechtelijke beslissingen en sociale positionering**  
*Jean-Paul Sanderson et Charlotte Vanneste*
- 14h30 **Que sait-on des homicides entre partenaires et des féminicides en Belgique ?**  
**Wat weten we over intieme partnerdoodslag en feminicide in België ?**  
*Xavier Rousseaux, Jean-Paul Sanderson, Audrey Plavsic, Thierry Eggericks*
- 15h00 **Analyse de l'enquête de validation Delphi**  
**Analyse van het Delphi validatieonderzoek**  
*Aline Thiry et Catherine Fallon*
- 15h45 **Conclusions et recommandations. Conclusies en aanbevelingen**  
*Catherine Fallon et Fabienne Glowacz*
- 16h15 **Clôture de la conférence. Afsluiting van de conferentie** *Charlotte Vanneste*

<https://incc.fgov.be/ipv-propol> - <https://nicc.fgov.be/ipv-propol>



## 5.2. ORGANISATION OF SYMPOSIA

Organisation of a symposium *Violences sexuelles entre partenaires, une réalité négligée. Entre représentations, vécus et traumas : quelles interventions ?* CIFAS, 9<sup>ème</sup> Congrès international francophone sur l'agression sexuelle, Montréal, 2 June 2017 (Glowacz, ULiège).

Organisation of a symposium *Violences conjugales : différences et approche de genre*, XVI<sup>e</sup> Colloque d'Association Internationale des Criminologues de Langue Française (AICLF) Lausanne, Switzerland, 4 June 2018 (Vanneste, INCC, ULiège)

Organisation of a symposium *Consentement et violences sexuelles dans le couple : Représentations et Frontières*. CIFAS, 10<sup>ème</sup> Congrès international francophone sur l'agression sexuelle, Montpellier, 14 June 2019 (Glowacz, ULiège).

Organisation of a symposium *Violence and desistance studies: qualitative methods for approaching processes and dynamic*. European Society of Criminology Conference, Ghent, 20 September 2019 (Glowacz, ULiège).

Organisation of a symposium *Studies on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): a discussion around analysis of public policies in Belgium, France and Italy*. European Society of Criminology Conference Ghent, 21 September 2019. (Vanneste, INCC, Liège).

Organisation of a symposium *Violences entre partenaires intimes : la sortie des violences un défi pour les professionnels*. Colloque Trajetvi Parcours de violence conjugale et de recherche d'aide : comprendre, s'engager et agir contre les violences envers les femmes. Montréal, Canada (Online), 29 septembre 2021 (Glowacz, ULiège).

Organisation of a symposium *Interrogating Belgian public policies on domestic violence from various glances*. European Society of Criminology (online) <https://eurocrim2021.secure-platform.com/a>, 8 September 2021 (Lemonne, INCC).

Organisation of a symposium *La justice belge face aux violences conjugales : des politiques publiques en développement ?* Colloque Trajetvi Parcours de violence conjugale et de recherche d'aide : comprendre, s'engager et agir contre les violences envers les femmes. Montréal, Canada (Online) 13 October 2021 (Vanneste, Ravier, Lemonne, INCC).

## 5.3. PRESENTATIONS (IN CONFERENCES, SYMPOSIA, TRAINING SESSIONS)

Dziewa D. (2018) Violence conjugale : comment construire la désistance ? Communication, XVI<sup>e</sup> Colloque de l'Association Internationale des Criminologues de langue française (AICLF), Université de Lausanne, Suisse, 5 juin 2018.

Dziewa A. (2019) Violences sexuelles dans le couple. Présentation de cas cliniques, 10<sup>ième</sup> congrès international francophone sur l'agression sexuelle (CIFAS), Sexualité et transgressions : la question de l'autre, lois, soins et préventions, Montpellier, 12 juin 2019.

Dziewa A. (2019) Desistance from domestic violence: narratives of trajectories as new lenses to analyze violence and disengagement, 19th annual conference of European Society of Criminology (ESC), Ghent, 20 septembre 2019.

Dziewa A., Glowacz F. (Décembre 2020). Going out of violence between partners: what processes of change ? Communication. Centennial congress of applied psychology. Mexico.

Dziewa A. (2021) Violences entre partenaires intimes : quels processus de sortie pour les auteurs de violences ? Colloque Trajetvi. Symposium Violences entre partenaires intimes : la sortie des violences un défi pour les professionnels. Montréal, Canada (Online), 29 septembre 2021.

Dziewa A., Glowacz F. (2022) Analyses basées sur les entretiens avec des victimes et des auteurs de IPV. Final conference IPV-PRO&POL, 17 February 2022 (online).

Fallon C, Thiry A. (2021) La crise du Covid-19 comme occasion de requalification de la prise en charge des IPV ? Communication à la Conférence ABSP 2021-ST 33, Dé/re/politisation et action publique : les politiques de crise, 5 avril 2021.

Fallon C, Thiry A. (2021) Qualifications multiples de la prise en charge des Intimate Partners Violence (IPV), Séminaire FER-ULG, Université de Liège, 8 novembre 2021.

- Fallon C. (2021) Evaluation des politiques publiques et perspective de genre, Séminaire IEP Lyon (sur invitation), 11 janvier 2022.
- Glowacz F. (2018). Femmes et migration, des défis aux projets : Parcours de Résilience. Présentation au Colloque organisé par le Service provincial Égalité des chances. Volet Violences conjugales et intrafamiliales et CEDS
- Glowacz F. (2019) Cyberviolences sexuelles et sexistes dans les relations amoureuses : internet vecteur de violences et de contrôle ? 10<sup>ième</sup> congrès international francophone sur l'agression sexuelle (CIFAS), Sexualité et transgressions : la question de l'autre, lois, soins et préventions, Montpellier, 12 juin 2019.
- Glowacz F. (2019) Consentement et violences sexuelles dans le couple : Représentations et Frontières, 10<sup>ième</sup> congrès international francophone sur l'agression sexuelle (CIFAS), Sexualité et transgressions : la question de l'autre, lois, soins et préventions, Montpellier, 14 juin 2019.
- Glowacz F. (2019). Violences conjugales : le cas particulier des violences sexuelles. 10<sup>ième</sup> congrès international francophone sur l'agression sexuelle (CIFAS), Sexualité et transgressions : la question de l'autre, lois, soins et préventions, Montpellier, 14 juin 2019.
- Glowacz F. (2021) Violences entre partenaires intimes : évolutions du contexte socio-politique belge à l'épreuve de la clinique des violences. Colloque Trajetvi. Symposium Violences entre partenaires intimes : la sortie des violences un défi pour les professionnels. Montréal, Canada (Online), 29 septembre 2021.
- Glowacz F., Fallon C. (2022) Conclusions et recommandations. Final conference IPV-PRO&POL, 17 February 2022 (online).
- Glowacz F. (2022) Désistance et violences conjugales : paradigme à développer pour l'intervention auprès des auteurs. Colloque PRAXIS 1992-2022. À la rencontre des auteurs de violences conjugales. Réfléchir à un positionnement clinique comme point de départ de la responsabilisation Université de Liège, 29 avril 2022 (planned).
- Jaillet M. (2018) Violence entre partenaires et victimisation masculine : une réflexion autour du concept de masculinité hégémonique. XVI<sup>e</sup> Colloque de l'Association Internationale des Criminologues de langue française (AICLF), Lausanne, 4 juin 2018.
- Lemonne, A. (2018) L'évaluation des risques en matière de violence conjugale : différents modèles, différentes approches, différents usages. XVI<sup>e</sup> Colloque de l'Association Internationale des Criminologues de langue française (AICLF), Lausanne, 5 juin 2018.
- Lemonne A., Plavsic, A., Rousseaux X. (2018) Violences entre partenaires : impacts, processus, évolution et politiques publiques. Présentation de la recherche dans le cadre d'une après-midi sur la médiatisation des violences faites aux femmes en Belgique francophone, à destination des étudiants de l'École de communication (UCLouvain), 13 décembre 2018.
- Lemonne A. (2019) Analyse critique de deux contributions féministes au courant de criminologie culturelle, dans le cadre du séminaire *The new cultural criminology, french (belgian) style*, Centre de recherches sur la pénalité, la sécurité et les déviations de l'Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Institut National de Criminologie et de Criminologie (INCC) et Département de criminologie de l'Université d'Ottawa (Ottawa), Belgique, du 1-4 juillet 2019.
- Lemonne A., Jaillet M. (2019) From political claims to policy in practice: structure and dynamic of the public action against domestic violence in Belgium, Symposium Studies on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): a discussion around analysis of public policies in Belgium, France and Italy. 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the European Society of Criminology, Ghent, Belgium, 18-21 September 2019.
- Lemonne A, Mahieu V. (2021) Les politiques publiques en matière de violence conjugale et le défi de la gouvernance multi-niveaux : une analyse d'entretiens avec des acteurs professionnels des différents secteurs en Belgique. Colloque Trajetvi Symposium La justice belge face aux violences conjugales : des politiques publiques en développement ? Montréal, Canada (Online) 13 Octobre 2021.
- Mahieu V., Lemonne A. (2021) Intimate partner violence and Intimate partner violence policies in Belgium: crossed insights based on discourses of key actors ...? Symposium Interrogating Belgian public policies on domestic violence from various glances. European Society of Criminology Conference (online) <https://eurocrim2021.secure-platform.com/a>, 8 September 2021.
- Mahieu V., Lemonne A. (2021) Violence conjugale et politiques de lutte contre les violences conjugales en Belgique : regards croisés à partir de discours d'acteurs clés, Colloque Trajetvi Symposium La

justice belge face aux violences conjugales : des politiques publiques en développement ? Montréal, Canada (Online) 13 octobre 2021.

Mahieu V., Lemonne A. (2022) Les politiques publiques de lutte contre les violences conjugales en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles : regards croisés d'acteurs-clés. Midis de la recherche du Centre de recherches Pénalité, sécurité & déviations, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 18 janvier 2022.

Mahieu V., Lemonne A., Vanneste C. (2022) Analyse des entretiens menés avec des acteurs-clés en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. Final conference IPV-PRO&POL, 17 February 2022 (online).

Plavsic A., Sanderson J.-P. (2019) La violence intrafamiliale au prisme des homicides : Analyse d'une source particulière, les bulletins de décès en Belgique. Présenté au Colloque international interdisciplinaire Violence en famille. Poitiers, France, avril 2019.

Plavsic A., Van Cleemput O. (2020) Gender disparities in injury mortality in Belgium: An historical approach (1886-2016). 11th demographic conference of "young demographers". Prague, Czech Republic, février 2020.

Plavsic, A. (2022) L'impact de la crise économique sur les violences interpersonnelles en Belgique. XXIème colloque international de l'AIDELF Démographie et crises. Athènes, Grèce, mai 2022 (*planned*)

Ravier I., Van Praet S. (2021) Reporting Intimate Partner Violence to the Justice System: Hopes and Expectations of Victims Confronting the Judicial Strait-Jacket. An Analysis of Judicial Files of the Public Prosecutor in Belgium. Symposium Interrogating Belgian public policies on domestic violence from various glances. European Society of Criminology Conference (online), 8 September 2021.

Ravier I., Van Praet S. (2021) Les défis posés à la justice par les violences entre partenaires : une analyse de dossiers judiciaires. Signaler la violence entre partenaires intimes au système judiciaire : les attentes des victimes et la confrontation avec le costume pénal. Colloque Trajetvi Symposium La justice belge face aux violences conjugales : des politiques publiques en développement ? Montréal, Canada (Online) 13 Octobre 2021.

Ravier I., Van Praet S. (2022) Les défis du 'costume' pénal. Une analyse de dossiers judiciaires. Final conference IPV-PRO&POL (online), 17 February 2022.

Rousseaux X., Sanderson J-P, Plavsic A., Eggericks T., Que sait-on des homicides entre partenaires et des féminicides en Belgique ? Final conference IPV-PRO&POL (online), 17 February 2022.

Sanderson J.-P, Vanneste C., Plavsic A (2021). Leçons d'une analyse du profil sociodémographique des auteurs signalés à la justice. Violence entre partenaires, renvoi vers la justice et positionnement social, Colloque Trajetvi Symposium La justice belge face aux violences conjugales : des politiques publiques en développement ? Montréal, Canada (Online) 13 octobre 2021.

Sanderson J.-P, Vanneste C. (2022) Le profil sociodémographique des auteurs signalés à la justice pour IPV : renvoi vers la justice, décisions judiciaires et positionnement social. Final conference IPV-PRO&POL (online), 17 February 2022.

Thiry A, Fallon C. (2022) Analyse de l'enquête de validation Delphi. Final conference IPV-PRO&POL (online), 17 February 2022.

Thiry A., Fallon C. (2021) Les violences entre partenaires intimes : des actions publiques sensibles au genre? Séminaire Interfacultaire Spiral, Université de Liège 18 mars 2021.

Vanneste C. (2017) La violence sexuelle entre partenaires et la réaction judiciaire : les enseignements d'une vaste recherche statistique portant sur les pratiques judiciaires belges en matière de violence conjugale. Symposium Violences sexuelles entre partenaires, une réalité négligée, CIFAS, 9ème Congrès international francophone sur l'agression sexuelle, Montréal, Canada, 2 juin 2017.

Vanneste C. (2017) Analyse criminologique et lecture de genre en matière de violences conjugales : questions, enjeux et évaluations. Communication sur invitation, Congrès Le genre dans l'intervention en violence conjugale : une lecture obsolète ou actuelle ? Idéologique ou scientifique ? organisé par les Pôles de Ressources Spécialisées en Violences conjugales et intrafamiliales Liège, 27 octobre 2017. <http://www.cvfe.be/actualites/archives?page=6>, <http://www.cvfe.be/publications/pdf/intervention-charlotte-vanneste>

Vanneste C. (2017) Présentation du projet de recherche Intimate partner violence: impact, processes, evolution and related public policies in Belgium (IPV-PRO&POL). Conférence inaugurale IPV-PRO&POL, Bruxelles, SPF Justice, 30 novembre 2017.



- Vanneste C., Lemonne A. (2018) *Violences conjugales : de l'évaluation de la politique criminelle à l'évaluation des situations individuelles*. Formation des magistrats, Institut de Formation Judiciaire (IFJ), Bruxelles, 16 mars 2018.
- Vanneste C. (2018) *Lecture de genre et violences conjugales : réflexions au départ d'une analyse des enregistrements statistiques effectués dans les parquets belges*. XVIe Colloque d'Association Internationale des Criminologues de Langue Française (AICLF), Lausanne, Suisse, 4 juin 2018.
- Vanneste C. (2018) *Violences conjugales. Politique criminelle, mise en oeuvre et enjeux*. Séminaire du Groupe d'Etudes sur les politiques de sécurité, Politea, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique, 8 juin 2018.
- Vanneste C., Sanderson J.P (2019) *La violence sexuelle dans le couple : quelle réaction judiciaire et quel public-cible ?* Symposium *Violences sexuelles dans les couples : une agression sexuelle ? Représentations, Réactions Judiciaires et Cliniques*, CIFAS, 10e Congrès international francophone sur l'agression sexuelle, Montpellier, 12 juin 2019.
- Vanneste C. (2019) *Criminal policy regarding Intimate Partner Violence in (the French-speaking part of) Belgium: the place and effects in terms of recidivism of perpetrator programmes*, European Society of Criminology Conference, Ghent, 21 September 2019.
- Vanneste C. (2019) *Quelle place pour les programmes à l'égard des auteurs de violences conjugales dans les pratiques judiciaires belges et quels effets en termes de récurrence ?* Journée d'études *Violences conjugales, masculinités, rapports de genre*, Maison interuniversitaire des sciences de l'homme (MISHA), Université de Strasbourg, Projet UMR 7367 Dynamiques Européennes, Strasbourg, 5 novembre 2019.
- Vanneste C. (2019) *Normes et transgressions sexuelles. Point de vue criminologique*. Colloque anniversaire *20 ans d'évaluation et de traitement d'auteurs d'infractions à caractère sexuel*, organisé par le Centre d'Appui Bruxellois, Bruxelles, ULB, 28 novembre 2019.
- Vanneste C. (2020) *Audition par le Comité d'avis pour l'égalité des chances entre les femmes et les hommes du Sénat de Belgique*, Bruxelles, Sénat, 20 mars 2020, voir Rapport du 26 juin 2020 sur La violence entre partenaires, document 7-123/1, <https://www.senate.be/>.
- Vanneste C. (2022) *Introduction : questions, enjeux et approches de recherche développées dans IPV-PRO&POL*. Final conference IPV-PRO&POL (online), 17 February 2022.
- Vanneste C. (2022) *Récidives et violences conjugales. De quelques résultats de recherche à propos du programme PRAXIS*. Colloque PRAXIS 1992-2022. À la rencontre des auteurs de violences conjugales. Réfléchir à un positionnement clinique comme point de départ de la responsabilisation Université de Liège, 28 avril 2022 (planned)
- Vanneste C. (2022) *Leçons en termes de politique publique au départ d'entretiens avec des professionnels de la violence entre partenaires et d'une analyse sociodémographique du profil des prévenus signalés pour ce type de faits*. Symposium *Les violences entre partenaires intimes au croisement des approches criminologique, psychologique et socio-politique*. XVIIe Colloque de l'AICLF, Ottawa du 15-17 mai 2022 (planned).
- Vergaert E. (2018) *Wetenschappelijke uitwisseling over beleid, intersectionaliteit en partnergeweld*, Western University. Centre for research & education on violence against women & children, London, Ontario, 9-13 juli 2018.
- Vergaert E. (2018) *Voorstelling van het project IPV-PRO&POL*, Vergadering FMDO (federatie mondiale verenigingen), Brussel, 5 oktober 2018.
- Vergaert E. (2019) *What does it mean to care? A critical interpretive synthesis of the literature on primary health care practices in case of intimate partner violence*. European Conference for Domestic Violence, Oslo, Noorwegen, 4 september 2019.
- Vergaert E. (2019) *Panelgesprek week van de ethiek 'Take a position! Positionality and diversity in research'*, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 4 december 2019.
- Vergaert E. (2020) *Gastles Researching Intimate Partner Violence. Praktijk van de moraalwetenschappen*. UGent, Gent, 2 maart 2020.
- Vergaert E. (2020) *Gastles Researching Intimate Partner Violence. Ethiek van de seksualiteit*. VUB, Brussel, 19 april 2020.
- Vergaert E. (2020) *Gastles inleiding genderstudies: 'gender en geweld'*, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, 14 mei 2020.

Vergaert E. (2021) Victims of IPV and general practitioners: care throughout the life course. Colloque Trajetvi. Symposium Violences entre partenaires intimes : la sortie des violences un défi pour les professionnels. Montréal, Canada (Online), 29 Septembre 2021.

Vergaert E., Withaekcx S., Coene G. (2022) Een intersectionele analyse van de interviews met sleutelactoren in Vlaanderen. Final conference IPV-PRO&POL, 17 February 2022 (online).

Vergaert E., De rol van huisartsen in situaties van partnergeweld. Final conference IPV-PRO&POL, 17 February 2022 (online).

Withaekcx S. (2018), Intersectionality as a tool for rethinking Harmful Cultural Practices. XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology, Toronto, Canada, Symposium Gender, Sexuality and Embodiment (organized with Coene G), 18 July 2018.

#### 5.4. COMMUNICATIONS IN THE MEDIA

Vanneste C. (2019) Interview par Thierry Denoël, Le vif l'Express, Comment mettre fin aux féminicides, 21 novembre 2019, 29-33.

Vanneste C. (2019) Interview par Clément Boileau, La Libre, Rubrique Débats, Faut-il inscrire le féminicide dans le code pénal ? 30 septembre 2019.

Vanneste C. (2019) Interview pour le Site Web de RTBF.be par Aline Wavreille, Tuée parce que femme : faut-il parler de féminicide ? 27 avril 2019.

Withaekcx S. (2019) Interview door Catherine Vuylsteke, De Knack, 'Femicide. De moord op vrouwen door hun (ex-)partners: een miskend fenomeen', 9 oktober 2019.

## 5. PUBLICATIONS

In addition to the final IPV-PRO&POL report (for BELSPO), several more detailed reports, in French and Dutch, have been published or are in press. A (similar) book will also be published in June 2022, in French and Dutch and two PhD theses will be defended in March and June 2022. Lastly, a series of publications have appeared in journals or collective works.

### 6.1. DETAILED REPORTS

Lemonne A. (2022) Violences entre partenaires : impact, processus, évolution et politiques publiques. Analyse des entretiens menés avec des acteurs-clé en Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles. Tome 3 : Le secteur psychomédicosocial (promotrices Vanneste C., Lemonne A., Ravier I.). Collection des rapports de recherche de la Direction opérationnelle de Criminologie n°50, Institut National de Criminalistique et de Criminologie (sous presse mars 2022). <https://incc.fgov.be/ipv-propol>  
<https://incc.fgov.be/criminologie/publicaties>

Mahieu V. (2022) Violences entre partenaires : impact, processus, évolution et politiques publiques. Analyse des entretiens menés avec des acteurs-clé en Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles. Tome 2 : Les secteurs judiciaire, parajudiciaire et les acteurs de la coordination (promotrices Vanneste C., Lemonne A., Ravier I.). Collection des rapports de recherche de la Direction opérationnelle de Criminologie n°49, Institut National de Criminalistique et de Criminologie (sous presse mars 2022). <https://incc.fgov.be/ipv-propol>  
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## 6.3. PHD THESES

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