

# How Do Victims With the Need for Protection Judge Their Experiences With the Police in the Netherlands?

## An Exploration

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### Abstract

This article presents a preliminary analysis of how victims who report to the police for protection in the Netherlands judge their experiences with the police, in comparison with victims reporting crimes for other reasons. An existing dataset was used: the data was originally collected for a comprehensive survey among crime victims of 12 years and older in 2016. Female victims of violent (sexual and non-sexual) crimes constitute the major part of the victims for whom protection is the most important reporting reason. Victim perceptions of police contribution to safety as well as police information were investigated. The analyses show that overall, victim perceptions of the police's contribution to safety are rather negative. Contribution to safety is judged somewhat better by victims for whom protection is their most important reporting reason; however, the respondents who are positive still form a minority. Police information is judged positively by more victims than contribution to safety. Of the respondents for whom protection is a reporting reason, victims of sexual crimes appear to judge police information positively more often than victims of other crime types.

**Keywords:** victim needs, protection, reasons to report, contribution to safety, police information, victim-offender relationship.

## 1 Introduction

The need for protection is one of the reasons for victims to report a crime to the police.<sup>1</sup> Victims want to stop an actual incident, to prevent the crime from happening again to oneself and to others close to them like children and other family members, or to stop continuation in the case of an ongoing crime, for instance stalking or,

often, intimate partner violence. The need for protection may be perceived as fundamentally different from many other reasons for reporting criminal incidents to the police. Victims frequently mention such other reasons: the offender should be punished, to get money from the insurance, to recover property or just 'because it was a crime'.<sup>2</sup> Safety, security and thus the need for protection in cases in which this is not self-evident can be regarded as a basic human need.<sup>3</sup> This need may have to be fulfilled before other fundamental needs such as autonomy and esteem can be addressed.<sup>4</sup> The need for protection thus can be seen as a different reason to report a crime than other reasons. Neither anger nor revenge are involved. It also does not refer to social norms or relate to material possessions. It is ultimately about the victim's survival and may relate to feelings of life threat. Protection then is one of the rights included in the 'Declaration of rights of victims of criminal offences' in the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I explore how victims with the need for protection judge their experiences with the police in the Netherlands, in comparison to victims reporting for other reasons. In conclusion I put forward whether victims reporting for protection seem to be worse off than others.

Monitoring victim experiences with the police as a part of the criminal justice system is important. Positive experiences with the police and the absence of secondary victimisation are relevant for individual victims, the police, as well as society as a whole. Victim satisfaction with the police, especially positive experiences in the first weeks after a (singular) traumatic incident, may affect victims' emotional well-being and buffer the development of symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome

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1 E.g. R.B. Felson, S.F. Messner, A.W. Hoskin & G. Deane, 'Reasons for Reporting and Not Reporting Domestic Violence to the Police', 40 *Criminology* 617 (2002); H. Goudriaan, *Reporting Crime. Effects of Social Context on the Decision of Victims to Notify the Police* (2006); R. Tarling en K. Morris, 'Reporting Crime to the Police', 50 *British Journal of Criminology* 474 (2010).

2 E.g. Goudriaan, above n. 1; Tarling and Morris, above n. 1.

3 A.H. Maslow, 'A Theory of Human Motivation', 50 *Psychological Review* 370 (1943); E. Staub, 'Basic Human Needs, Altruism, and Aggression', in A.G. Miller (ed.), *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil* (2004) 51; A. Ten Boom and K.F. Kuijpers, 'Victims' Needs as Basic Human Needs', 18 *International Review of Victimology* 155 (2012).

4 Staub, above n. 3.

5 [www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/brochures/2017/04/03/verklaring-van-rechten-voor-slachtoffers-van-strafbare-feiten](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/brochures/2017/04/03/verklaring-van-rechten-voor-slachtoffers-van-strafbare-feiten).

(PTSS).<sup>6</sup> This buffering effect may not be achievable in cases of repeat or continuous victimisation. However, research suggests that for all victims the therapeutic value of procedural justice in victim-police interactions could be perceived as validation from a wider community.<sup>7</sup> It may be possible for victims to receive a sense of justice through the validation of their experiences by the police even when they do not proceed to court.<sup>8</sup> Positive experiences of all types of victims with the police are also important to prevent unnecessary levels of attrition in the first stage of the criminal justice process.<sup>9</sup> Positive evaluations of police performance and the outcome contribute to the perceived legitimacy of the police organisation and cooperation with the police in the future,<sup>10</sup> not only with victims themselves but also with their social networks. Negative experiences with the police lead to the erosion of trust and diminish the likelihood that people will report crimes they experience in the future. This is important for all crime victims, but even more so for repeat victims who may belong to marginalised groups (e.g. sex workers, homeless) and/or who may be repeatedly victimised by offenders well-known to them, such as victims of sexual assaults and (ex)partner violence. It can be assumed that these repeat victims disproportionately feel the need for protection. Victims who in the past judged their experiences with the police as negative are less likely to report any further abusive behaviour they may experience.<sup>11</sup> Because these groups of victims are important sources of information to the police, permanent monitoring in order to improve victim experiences is an important challenge for criminal justice systems around the world.

## 2 What Victims in Particular Need Protection?

Qualitative as well as quantitative studies show that protection is an important need of victims of violence.<sup>12</sup> In particular, the need for protection is a recurring theme in many qualitative studies on victims of (ex-)intimate partner violence, family violence, stalking, sexu-

al offences and human (sex) trafficking. These victims do not turn to the police easily – often many more incidents happen before they report to the police. But once they do so, studies on domestic and (ex)partner violence<sup>15</sup> suggest that for many of these victims' protection, that is preventing their partners or other family members from continuing to be abusing them, is an important reason for reporting. They most of all desire to be safe, immediately and on the longer term. Protection also is an important reporting reason for victims of stalking,<sup>14</sup> human (sex or labour) trafficking<sup>15</sup> and sexual assault.<sup>16</sup>

These qualitative studies – useful as they are for many reasons – usually do not differentiate between the needs of female and male victims and victims of different crime types. Ten Boom and colleagues however studied the needs of male and female victims of different crime types in different victim-offender relationships.<sup>17</sup> They did so by comparing them on the reporting reasons *protection* and *punishment*. Protection evidently was a frequently mentioned reason for reporting for female victims. However, it was not just female victims who appeared to feel vulnerable. Male victims of crimes committed by known offenders appeared to seek contact with the police for protection as well, more so than male victims of stranger crime.<sup>18</sup> The authors also found that although to a lesser extent, female and male victims of nonviolent crime, that is property crimes and vandalism, notify the police for protection too. Victims of known offenders of every type of crime distinguished in the study reported a heightened need for protection. It was suggested that perhaps nonviolent crimes could be seen as a forewarning for violence or a signal of other problems in ongoing relationships. These findings underline the importance of not limiting analyses to only (female) victims of violent crime.

Protection thus is an important need of victims of all crimes by known offenders. Victims of known offenders often have been victimised more than once before re-

6 M. Kunst, 'De therapeutische werking van slachtofferdeelname aan het strafproces: een kritische beschouwing vanuit een psychotraumaperspectief', 42 *Beleid en Maatschappij* 32 (2015).

7 I. Elliott, S. Thomas & J. Oglloff, 'Procedural Justice in Victim-Police Interactions and Victims' Recovery from Victimisation Experiences', 24 *Policing and Society* 588 (2014).

8 *Ibid.*

9 E.g. E. Sleath and L.L. Smith, 'Understanding the Factors that Predict Victim Retraction in Police Reported Allegations of Intimate Partner Violence', 7 *Psychology of Violence* 140 (2017).

10 N.S. Koster, J.P. van der Leun & M.J.J. Kunst, 'Crime Victims' Evaluations of Procedural Justice and Police Performance in Relation to Cooperation: A Qualitative Study', 30 *Policing and Society* 225 (2020).

11 Anecdotal evidence in: N. Ibrahim, 'Experiences of Abused Muslim Women with the Australian Criminal Justice System', 37 *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 2360 (2022); K. Lorenz, A. Kirkner & S.E. Ullman, 'Qualitative Study of Sexual Assault Survivors' Post-assault Legal System Experiences', 20 *Journal of Trauma Dissociation* 263 (2019).

12 Ten Boom and Kuijpers, above n. 3

13 E.g. S.C. Hare, 'What Do Battered Women Want? Victims' Opinions on Prosecution', 21 *Violence and Victims* 611 (2006); I.M. Johnson, 'Victims' Perceptions of Police Response to Domestic Violence Incidents', 35 *Journal of Criminal Justice* 498 (2007); R.L. Holder and K. Daly, 'Sequencing Justice: A Longitudinal Study of Justice Goals of Domestic Violence Victims', 58 *The British Journal of Criminology* 787 (2017); Ibrahim, above n. 11; K.M. Shearson, 'Seeking Help from Police for Intimate Partner Violence: Applying a Relationship Phase Framework to the Exploration of Victims' Evolving Needs', 36 *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 1745 (2021).

14 E.g. S. van der Aa and A. Groenen, 'Identifying the Needs of Stalking Victims and the Responsiveness of the Criminal Justice System: A Qualitative Study in Belgium and the Netherlands', 6 *Victims and Offenders* 19 (2010).

15 A. Farrell, M. Dank, I. de Vries, M. Kafafian, A. Hughes & S. Lockwood, 'Failing Victims? Challenges of the Police Response to Human Trafficking', 18 *Criminology & Public Policy* 649 (2019).

16 K. Murphy and J. Barkworth, 'Victim Willingness to Report Crime to Police: Does Procedural Justice or Outcome Matter Most?', 9 *Victims & Offenders* 178 (2014); Lorenz, Kirkner & Ullman, above, n. 11.

17 A. Ten Boom, A. Pemberton & M.S. Groenhuijsen, 'The Need for Protection and Punishment in Victims of Violent and Nonviolent Crime in the Netherlands: The Effect of Relational Distance', 14 *Victims & Offenders* 222 (2019).

18 *Ibid.*

porting and are, compared with victims of strangers, also more likely to be victimised in the future again. In her dissertation, Ten Boom argues for distinguishing more than merely two victim-offender relationships, so that the needs of victims at intermediate relational distance to the offender will become more visible and, as a consequence, also may be taken into account more seriously in the judicial process. In her study, victims of known offenders are classified as victims of intimates (partners, ex-partners, family members), as victims of non-intimates (neighbours, people from work, other acquaintances) and as victims of stranger offenders. In her sample of victims whose cases were treated by the Dutch Public Prosecution Service, the majority of victims of intimate offenders (59.4%) indicated that the need for protection was one of their reporting reasons, compared to 37.9% of the victims of non-intimate offenders and 23.5% of the victims of strangers.<sup>19</sup> Among victims of intimates, protection even appeared to be the number one reason to report and among victims of non-intimates the need for protection was the second most important one (after punishment for the offender).

### 3 What Are the Experiences With the Police of Victims With the Need for Protection? Impressions From the Literature

How do crime victims who turn to the police for protection judge their experiences with the police in comparison to victims who notify the police for other reasons? To the best of my knowledge, this question has not yet been studied to date in the Netherlands nor internationally. Indications may only be found indirectly, by drawing from studies on experiences with the police of crime victims for whom protection is known to be an important need, that is victims of intimate partner violence, stalking and sexual violence. Indications may also be found in studies on the experiences with the police of victims of crimes by known offenders in particular. The following overview is by no means complete but indicates the type of results that could be expected. For instance, an interview study on female and male stalking victims from the Netherlands and Belgium described several reasons for victim dissatisfaction with respect to the police.<sup>20</sup> These reasons included a lack of proper or respectful treatment from the police and the criminal justice's ineffectiveness at guaranteeing the victim's personal safety. Also the lack of information on

the progress of the case provoked victim frustration.<sup>21</sup> A more recent Dutch study<sup>22</sup> in which 30 female victims of sexual offences were interviewed, showed that the victim appreciation of their contact with the police varied. Victims who were positive (around half of the interviewed group) mainly appreciated the empathy that was shown and the human contact which made them feel they were taken seriously and heard. Others, on the contrary, did not feel they were taken seriously and said they felt the police did not believe them. In a recent study from the United States on the post-assault legal system experiences of female sexual assault victims,<sup>23</sup> Lorenz and colleagues reported mostly negative experiences such as poor treatment and a non-supportive response during the reporting process. In a recent Australian study,<sup>24</sup> Shearson reported the extremely low expectations of justice or protection of many female victims of intimate partner violence. However, Shearson also reported some positive experiences: victims often highlighted what they found most important: having an alliance with a police officer who they perceived as caring, protective and on their side through the sometimes lengthy legal proceedings.

Unfortunately, these qualitative studies did not compare the experiences of males and females or of victims of different crime types systematically, nor did they compare the experiences of victims in different victim-offender relationships. Some other studies did. For instance, Felson and Pare (analysing data collected in 1994-1996) found that both male and female victims of violent crimes were less satisfied with the police when the offender was someone they knew than when the offender was a stranger.<sup>25</sup> This specifically was the case when offenders were (ex-)intimate partners or other family members. No evidence was found that women were more likely to complain when the offender was their male partner. In fact, men were more likely than women to complain about a lack of investigation when they were assaulted by their female partners. Furthermore, male as well as female victims were more likely to complain about police insensitivity when the offender was their partner. Also, victims of sexual assault were less satisfied with the police than victims of physical assault.

Byrne and colleagues compared experiences with the police of female partner assault victims with those of non-partner assault victims.<sup>26</sup> Victims of assault by an intimate partner were less likely to report feeling satisfied with their experiences with police officers in com-

19 A. Ten Boom, *Slachtoffers van misdrijven door intimi, kennissen of vreemden. Verschillen in context, ervaringen en behoeften met betrekking tot justitie* (2016).

20 S. van der Aa and A. Groenen, 'Identifying the Needs of Stalking Victims and the Responsiveness of the Criminal Justice System: A Qualitative Study in Belgium and the Netherlands', 6 *Victims and Offenders* 19 (2010).

21 *Ibid.*

22 L. Bertling, A. Mack, H. Vonk & M. Timmermans, *Slachtoffers van zedenmisdrijven* (2017).

23 Lorenz, Kirkner & Ullman, above n. 11.

24 K.M. Shearson, 'Seeking Help from Police for Intimate Partner Violence: Applying a Relationship Phase Framework to the Exploration of Victims' Evolving Needs', 36 *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 1745 (2021).

25 R.B. Felson and P.P. Paré, 'Gender and the Victim's Experience with the Criminal Justice System', 37 *Social Science Research* 202 (2008).

26 C.A. Byrne, D.G. Kilpatrick, S.S. Howley & D. Beatty, 'Female Victims of Partner versus Nonpartner Violence: Experiences with the Criminal Justice System', 26 *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 275 (1999).

parison to victims of assaults by other offenders. In addition, victims of partner violence were less likely to report that the police officers involved in the case had demonstrated an interest in their feelings and tried to gather all the necessary evidence. There were no significant differences between the groups with regard to their perceptions of the police officers trying to be polite, seeming to care about what happened, giving the victims a chance to talk about what happened or seeming to be interested in catching the offender.

In the Netherlands, Laxminarayan compared three groups: female victims of domestic violence, female and male victims of sexual abuse and female and male victims of other serious crimes.<sup>27</sup> The results indicated that victims of sexual abuse were less positive in their evaluations of interpersonal justice (being treated with respect and taken seriously by the police) in comparison to victims of domestic violence. However, there was no significant association between perceptions of informational justice (police giving information about services, their rights and developments in the case) and victim category. Laxminarayan however noted that the low mean scores suggested that perceptions of informational justice were rather negative overall.

## 4 Interim Discussion

The aforementioned studies suggest that my group of interest, that is victims with the need for protection, may complain about aspects such as being treated disrespectfully, not being believed and supported, a lack of information and not being guaranteed safety. However, the qualitative studies do not make clear whether the experiences of victims with the need for protection differ from those of other victims. Remarkable, for example is the finding of Laxminarayan, based on comparative work, that perceptions of informational justice are negative *overall*. Then, when victim groups with a usually more prominent need for protection *are* compared to other victim groups, the problem is that – due to differences in group definitions – the exact groups under comparison are different in every study and do not allow for precise conclusions. Byrne et al., for instance found that when victims of assault by an *intimate partner* were compared to victims of assaults by others, they were less likely to report feeling satisfied with their experiences with the police. In another study, Felson and Pare found that victims of violent crimes were less satisfied with the police when the offender was *someone they knew* – not just if the offender was their (ex-)intimate partner. All in all, several differences are found between ‘possibly-partly-similar’ groups, but a clear picture cannot be drawn from the research to date. To conclude, informative guiding hypotheses based on previous work cannot

27 M. Laxminarayan, ‘Interactional Justice, Coping and the Legal System: Needs of Vulnerable Victims’, 19 *International Review of Victimology* 145 (2013).

be set and therefore the current study will be exploratory.

## 5 The Current Study

### 5.1 Exploratory Design

The question how crime victims who turn to the police for protection judge their experiences with the police in comparison to victims who notify the police for other reasons seems not to have been studied to date. Results from studies on experiences with the police of victims for whom protection is assumed to be a frequently mentioned need, are ambiguous. The aspects evaluated as well as the comparisons made in these studies cannot be compared to each other. To extend the literature with studies that allow for better comparisons, this study on victim judgements of the police includes male and female victims, of several crime types and in different victim-offender relationships. The feature these victims may share is that the need for protection was a reason for them to report the crime. Since guiding hypotheses based on previous work cannot be set, the study has an exploratory character.

In the current study, I explore how the group reporting for protection differs from the group reporting for other reasons in two dependent variables: the victim’s perception of the police’s contribution to his/her safety and the victim’s perception of the police informing him/her after having reported. The victim’s perception of the police’s contribution to his/her safety for the group of interest can be assumed to be key in the police performance. Additionally, the victim’s perception on the police’s informing him/her after having reported is investigated. The need for information is reported very often by all crime victims, the right to be informed is the number one right for victims in the Netherlands,<sup>28</sup> and perceptions of informational justice were found to be rather negative in an earlier Dutch study.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, receiving adequate information is (among other things) found to contribute to perceptions of safety in Dutch victims in cases where penal protection orders are obtained.<sup>30</sup> These are evidently victims with the need for protection. This is why the police informing him/her after having reported, in addition to police contribution to safety, is of special interest in this exploration.

### 5.2 Data

For this study, which is performed for this special issue, I used an existing dataset. These data were originally collected in 2016 in a comprehensive survey among a sample of crime victims aged 12 years and older.<sup>31</sup> The

28 Declaration of rights of victims of criminal offences, above n. 5.

29 Laxminarayan, above n. 27.

30 T. Fischer, I. Cleven, S. Struijk & W. Roggeveen, *Handhaving en veiligheid bij strafrechtelijke contact-, locatie- en gebiedsverboden ter bescherming van slachtoffers* (2019).

31 W. Andringa, L. Klein Kranenburg, J. Bouwmeester & F. ten Doeschot, *Slachtoffermonitor-hoofdrapport* (2017). The ‘Victim Support Monitor’ is a periodic study that assesses the experiences that victims have had with

original study was commissioned by the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice and was executed by I&O Research. The part of the dataset used for these secondary analyses was originally collected to learn about the experiences with the police of victims whose cases had come to the attention of the police in the Netherlands. The respondents were questioned about their experiences with the police. If they had reported the crime to the police themselves, they were also asked to answer questions about their reasons for filing the report. The survey had a response rate of 32%.

Persons who in the police registration system were explicitly marked as being victims of domestic violence, intentionally did not receive an invitation letter for participation in the survey. This was decided in the original study because it could be the case that the accused was not (yet) informed about the fact that his or her intimate partner or family member had notified the police about the domestic violence incident(s). If the accused would somehow find the invitation for the survey, this could be a safety risk for the reporting victim. The consequence of this safety procedure is that a part of the group of victims of crime by an intimate offender who notified the police is missing from the sample. The safety procedure however did not result in finding zero partners, ex-partners and other family members in the sample (which would clearly have made the data unfit for these secondary analyses). Still, 17 victims of crimes by intimates (one partner, six ex-partners and ten family members) were found in the dataset I worked with after cleaning. Probably these respondents did not live on the same address as the offender (anymore), which could have been the reason that they were not marked as domestic violence cases in the police registration system, and as a consequence were invited to participate. However, as a consequence the sample should not be considered as representative for the complete group of victims who themselves report a crime to the police. Moreover, victims of sexual crimes were oversampled in the original study, since comparing the experiences of victims of sexual crimes with those of other victims was intended. This is another reason not to consider this sample as representative. However, the sample is suitable for an exploratory study with regard to experiences with the police of victims in need of protection, all the more since an earlier study found that not only people victimised by intimates report crimes because of the need for protection.<sup>32</sup> Victims of crimes by non-intimate known offenders report for protection too.

The original dataset contained 802 respondents who were surveyed about their experiences with the police. Sixty-eight of these respondents were dismissed from the analysis because these records were labelled as ‘sus-

pect cases’ in the original dataset (for instance because of implausible answer combinations or straightlining). Ninety-two respondents appeared not to have reported the crime to the police themselves and as a consequence did not answer questions about their reporting reasons. Two hundred and fifty-four respondents were deleted because of missing values. There was a substantial number of missing values on the dependent variables police’s contribution to safety and police information, which were created for this secondary analyses. Some of the items were frequently found to be not applicable to their own situation by the respondents. For instance, with regard to safety items this was most frequently the case with the item ‘have advised me of ways to avoid future victimisation’ (n = 140). Finally, 388 respondents had no missing data on the dependent variables under consideration and were eligible for the analyses as planned. The only exception is the variable *most important reporting reason*. To answer this question was not obligatory. Since it is a central variable of interest, I choose to work with a smaller number of respondents (n = 219) in these analyses.

### 5.3 Variables

In the initial questionnaire type of crime was measured with a checklist of possible crimes. I categorised the crimes in property crimes (theft, burglary, fraud), violent non-sexual crimes (physical assault, threat, robbery), sexual crimes, vandalism/public order and other crimes. Male and female gender were distinguished. I categorised victims in different victim-offender relationships: intimate (offender is a partner, ex-partner or a family member of the respondent), non-intimate (offender is a neighbour, someone from work or another acquaintance of the respondent) and stranger.<sup>33</sup>

For the variable ‘protection as a reason for reporting’, I combined two reasons from the initial questionnaire: ‘I was afraid that the crime would be repeated’ and ‘I wanted the police to protect me’.<sup>34</sup> Respondents were allowed to mention more than one reporting reason. After that, they were asked which reason was the *most important reporting reason* to them. Of course only one answer was possible.

I created the victim’s perception of the police’s contribution to his/her safety by adding the scores on four items: The police officers have increased my feeling of safety; have advised me of ways to avoid future victimisation; have reduced the risk of repeat victimisation; have decreased my feelings of anxiety.<sup>35</sup> Every item can be scored 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree), with 3 as a neutral score. The total score on perception of the police’s contribution to safety may thus vary from 4 to 20. If the score is lower than 12 (i.e. less than mean score of 3 per item), I label the victim judgement as negative. If the score is 16 or more (i.e. the mean score of 4 per

judicial victim support. The first assessment was carried out in 2012. The data used for these secondary analyses are from the second assessment. The target group consists of persons who had contact with one or more judicial authorities in 2016.

32 Ten Boom, Pemberton & Groenhuijsen, above n. 17.

33 In line with Ten Boom, Pemberton & Groenhuijsen, above n. 17.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Items from the concepts ‘safety’ and ‘coping with anxiety’ in the original questionnaire design, see F. van Mierlo, A. Pemberton & R. van Tol, *Van Teverdenheid naar kwaliteit: een meetinstrument voor de slachtofferzorg* (2009).

item or more), I label the judgement as positive. If the score is in between (i.e. 12-15), I label the judgement as neutral.

Additionally, I created the victim's perception on the police's informing him/her after having reported the crime (further also named: police information) by adding the scores on six items: The police gave me information concerning their next steps; gave an explanation to me about the course of the process after notifying them; explained my rights as a victim; gave me information concerning the services of Victim Support; kept me informed of developments in my case; gave me information concerning follow-up help and support.<sup>36</sup> Every item can be scored 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree), with 3 as a neutral score. The total score on perception of the police information may vary from 6 to 30. If the score is under 18 (i.e. less than mean score of 3 per item), I label the victim judgement as negative. If the score is 24 or more (i.e. the mean score of 4 per item or more), I label the judgement as positive. If the score is in between (i.e. 18-23), I label the judgement as neutral.

#### 5.4 Analyses

Firstly, in Section 6.1, I compare the judgements of experiences with the police of victims with and without protection as a reporting reason, and with and without protection as their *most important* reason, respectively. Because of the relatively small sample size, no regression analyses are performed. However, results regarding police's contribution to safety and police information are split by gender, in order to detect a possible situation of middling out between the genders. Secondly, for the group with protection as a reason for reporting, in Section 6.2, the results are split by type of crime and by victim-offender relationship (these analyses are not performed for the group naming protection as the most important reporting reason because of the small frequencies).

In some instances the chi square testing resulted in too many cells having an expected count of less than 5, therefore alternative tests were used: the Kruskal-Wallis test (comparing more than two groups) and Mann-Whitney test (comparing two groups). These non-parametric tests can be used because the dependent variables, police's contribution to safety and police information, both have the ordinal level (values: positive, neutral, negative).

#### 5.5 Descriptives

Victims of violent non-sexual crimes are, at 38%, the largest part of the total group of self-reporting victims (first column in Table 1). The group of victims of property crimes (28%) is the second biggest group and then the group of victims of sexual crimes (14%). Male and female gender are distributed more or less equally. The majority of the victims do not know the offender (66%). Of the victims, 30% knows the offender, though not inti-

mately. For only 4% of the self-reporting victims in the sample the offender is an intimate. Subgroup 1 (second column in Table 1) is the group of 127 respondents that indicate that the need for protection was one of their reasons to report the crime to the police (see Table 2 for other reporting reasons which were mentioned). This group consists mostly of victims of violent non-sexual crimes (45%) followed by victims of sexual crimes (24%). The majority of this group is female (65%). Slightly more than half of the respondents do not know the offender (52%). Forty-two per cent does know the offender, though not intimately. For 6%, the offender is an intimate. Subgroup 2 (third column in Table 1) is the group of 33 respondents in the sample which indicate that protection was their most important reporting reason. This group consists mostly of victims of violent non-sexual crimes (52%) followed by victims of sexual crimes (21%). The big majority of this group is female (82%). Fifty-eight per cent of the respondents do not know the offender, 39% does know the offender, though not intimately and for only 3% the offender is an intimate.

Taking all reporting victims into account, the two subgroups for whom protection is relevant contain relatively many victims of violent and sexual crimes. Around 12% of the respondents reporting for protection are victims of property crime. Compared to all reporting victims the two subgroups for whom protection is relevant also contain relatively many female respondents. Almost a fifth of the respondents for whom protection was the most important reporting reason, are male (18%). Further, compared to the complete sample, many respondents for whom protection is relevant indicate that they know the offender (48% versus 34%). Of all reporting victims 30% is acquainted (i.e. known, but not intimately) to the offender. This is clearly higher (42%) among the victims for whom protection is a reporting reason. Yet, over half (58%) of the respondents for whom protection was the most important reporting reason are victims of stranger crimes (12 of these 19 respondents are the victim of a violent or sexual crime; ten of these are women).

## 6 Results

### 6.1 Judgement of Experiences With the Police

How do *victims for whom protection is a reason to report* judge their experiences with the police when it comes to the police's contribution to her or his safety and police information? The victim perception of the police contribution to safety is negative for a relatively large group (51%) regardless of the question of whether protection was a reason to report (Table 3). Not even a quarter of the respondents (24%) judge the police's contribution to safety as positive. There is no significant association between protection as a reason for reporting and judgement of the contribution to safety.

36 Items from the concept 'information' in the original questionnaire design, *ibid.*

The victim perception of police information appears to be positive for almost half of the respondents (47%), also regardless of the question whether protection was a reason to report (Table 4). Yet, 30% of the respondents judge the police information as negative. There is no significant association between protection as a reason for reporting and judgement of information.

How do victims for whom *protection is the most important reason to report* judge their experiences with the police when it comes to the police contribution to their safety and police information? The victim perception of the police's contribution to safety is positive for a relatively large group of respondents (36%) for whom protection was the most important reason to report, in comparison to 18% of the respondents reporting for other reasons (Table 5). It should be noted that the perception of a third (33%) of the respondents for whom protection was the most important reason to report is negative. The association between protection as the most important reason and the judgement of contribution to safety is significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 7.772, p = 0.021$ .

The victim perception of police information is positive for most respondents (61%) for whom protection was the most important reason to report (Table 6). The victim perception of police information is less frequently positive for the other respondents (46%). However, protection as the most important reason to report and the judgement of information are not significantly associated ( $p = 0.182$ ).

#### 6.1.1 Female Victims

How are the victim judgements of the police's contribution to safety and police information for female respondents for whom protection was the most important reason to report? The perception of females regarding the police contribution to their safety is perceived as positive by a relatively large group (41%, Table 7). Of the respondents reporting for other reasons only 18% is positive. Protection as the most important reporting reason and the judgement of safety are associated,  $\chi^2(2) = 7.338, p = 0.026$ .

The perception of females with regard to police information appears to be positive for a large group (67%) of respondents for whom protection was the most important reporting reason (Table 8). However, protection as the most important reporting reason and the judgement of information are not significantly related ( $p = 0.181$ ).

#### 6.1.2 Male Victims

The perception of males with regard to the police contribution to safety is negative for a large group (59%) of respondents, regardless whether or not protection was the most important reporting reason (Table 9). Protection as most important reason to report and the judgement of contribution to safety are not related.<sup>37</sup> Hereby it should be noted that the number of males with pro-

tection as their most important reporting reason is small ( $n = 6$ ).

The perception of males with regard to police information appears to be positive for only 40% of respondents, regardless of their most important reporting reason (Table 10). Protection as the most important reporting reason and the judgement of information are not associated. Again it should be noted that the number of males with protection as their most important reporting reason is small.

The male victims with protection as their most important reason to report may seem to be negative more often than their female counterparts. However, in a direct statistical comparison (not reported) this finding is found not to be significant. On the other hand, a gender difference is found in the larger group of victims for whom protection is *one of their* reporting reasons: females are more often positive (57%) than males about police information (30% – complete table is not reported).<sup>38</sup>

## 6.2 Judgement of Experiences With the Police of/Among Victims of Different Crime Types and in Different Victim-Offender Relationships

How do *victims of different crime types* for whom protection is a reason to report ( $n = 127$ ), judge their experiences with the police? As noted in Section 6.1, the victim perception of the police's contribution to his or her safety is negative for most respondents (52%). Only the victims of sexual crimes seem to be less often negative (42%, Table 11). However, this finding is not significant.<sup>39</sup>

How do victims of different crime types for whom protection is a reason to report judge police information? As noted in Section 6.1, the perception of police information is positive for 47% of these respondents. Only the victims of sexual crimes are more often positive about police information (74%, Table 12). This finding is significant, Kruskal-Wallis  $H(4) = 19.216, p = 0.001$ .

How do victims for whom protection is a reason to report *in different relationships to the offender* judge their experiences with the police? The victim perception of the police's contribution to safety seems to be less often negative (42%) among victims of strangers, compared to victims in other relationships to the offender (Table 13). However, this finding is not significant.<sup>40</sup>

As noted in Section 6.1, the victim perception of police information is positive for 47% of the respondents. Victims of intimate offenders seem to be positive more often than the other groups (Table 14), however, there is

38  $\chi^2(2) = 8.532, p = 0.014$ .

39 Kruskal-Wallis  $H(4) = 5.273, p = 0.260$ .

40 Kruskal-Wallis  $H(2) = 5.413, p = 0.067$ .

37 Mann-Whitney test, result not significant.

no association between victim-offender relationship and judgement on police information.<sup>41</sup>

## 7 Conclusion and Discussion

This article presents a preliminary analysis of how victims who report to the police for protection in the Netherlands judge their experiences with the police, in comparison with victims reporting crimes for other reasons. To my knowledge, this is the first study to date to systematically compare the judgements of the police made by victims reporting for protection with the judgements made by victims reporting for other reasons. Comparative work is important because much of the contemporary research on victim needs and experiences only involves victims of violent (sexual or non-sexual) crime and it often only concerns female victims.<sup>42</sup> The sample cannot be considered representative for all police-reporting victims in the Netherlands, since victims of domestic violence are underrepresented and victims of sexual violence are overrepresented. The data, however, are suitable to substantively explore the judgements of the police made by victims that do or do not need protection. In terms of generalisation, the results should be interpreted with much caution.

The analyses in this article reveal that victim perceptions of the police's contribution to safety are rather negative overall: a minority in this sample is positive. The police's contribution to safety is judged best by victims for whom protection is the most important reporting reason. Yet, only 36% of them is positive. Of victims who primarily report for other reasons only 18% is positive. It would be cynical to label the 36% positive as good news for victims with a pressing need for protection, since the victims being positive still form a minority.

The analyses also reveal that victim perceptions of police information are judged positively by a bigger group: 47% is positive, regardless of whether protection is a reason to report. Of the group for whom protection was the most important reason to report, a majority (61%) even judges police information as positive. Thus, victims with a pressing need for protection appear to be positive more often about police information than others.

There is no significant difference between the judgements of male and female victims with regard to contribution to safety and police information if we look at the respondents for whom protection was the most important reason to report. This may be a consequence of the small number of male victims in the sample for whom protection is paramount. A gender difference is found in the larger group of victims for whom protection is *one of*

*the* reporting reasons: females are more often positive than males about police information.

Further, of the respondents for whom protection is one of their reporting reasons, especially the victims of sexual crimes are relatively more often positive about police information than the victims of other crime types. This is remarkable, since earlier studies found fewer positive results concerning victims of sexual crimes. Whereas Laxminarayan in 2013 for instance found no differences between the perceptions of informational justice of (vulnerable versus not vulnerable) victims, in this study a better result on police information is found, for the complete group as well as for the group needing protection (the supposedly vulnerable group). Possibly the provision of information has improved since her study, as a result of the lasting attention for victims' rights (also in practice) in the Netherlands.

Reflecting on the descriptives of the current sample, it is not surprising to see that female victims of violent (sexual and non-sexual) crimes are found to constitute the major part of the victims for whom protection is the most important reporting reason. Also, in comparison with the complete group of self-reporting victims, the victims of crimes by non-intimately known offenders (acquaintances) relatively often mention protection as an important reporting reason. This confirms earlier research suggesting that the group of victims at intermediate distance of the offender should not be overlooked by victimologists and policymakers.<sup>43</sup> The needs of these victims do not coincide with those of the victims of crimes by intimates nor with those of the victims of stranger crimes. These victims are more often female than the victims of stranger crimes. They can be expected to struggle far more with the problem that the offender and his or her network are difficult to avoid. In addition, criminal incidents between acquaintances are more often conflict related than those between strangers.<sup>44</sup> This all leads to an increased vulnerability for repeat victimisation.<sup>45</sup> However, compared to these earlier findings, the current sample of victims who reported their cases to the police contains relatively many victims of crimes by stranger offenders who indicated reporting for protection too. It is possible that the large percentage of victims of stranger offenders in the group of victims whose paramount reporting reason was protection, is a consequence of the assumed underrepresentation of victims of domestic violence in the sample (as a result of the safety procedure in the original study as described). It is not known how many reporters were excluded from the police registration. However, it is known that the proportion of victims of intimate offenders was 15% in a sample of victims whose cases

41 Kruskal-Wallis H (2) = 1.890,  $p = 0.389$ .

42 See also S. Armstrong, T. McCulloch, B. Weaver & D. Reed, 'Measuring Justice: Defining Concepts, Developing Practice', 2020, [www.sccjr.ac.uk/](http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/). Last accessed 11-3-2022.

43 Ten Boom, Pemberton & Groenhuijsen, above n. 17. The conclusion then was based on a sample of victims whose cases were treated by the Dutch Public Prosecution Service, which is a selection of all victims who reported to the police.

44 See for instance R.B. Felson, 'Predatory and Dispute-Related Violence: A Social Interactionist Approach', 5 *Routine Activity and Rational Choice, Advances in Criminological Theory* 103 (1993).

45 *Ibid.*

were treated by the Dutch Public Prosecution Service (from which no subgroup was excluded).<sup>46</sup> This is far more than the 4% of intimately known offenders in the current sample. Moreover, the distribution in the current sample could also (at least partly) be the consequence of the different population. Victims in cases dealt with by the Public Prosecution Service make up a relatively small part of all crime victims in the Netherlands. Many on average less severe crimes that are reported to the police are not sent in for prosecution by the police at all. Part of these cases is not sent in because the police have not identified a suspect.

To conclude, it can be said that although the need for protection is a relatively more pressing reason for reporting victims of known offenders, victims of stranger offenders should not be overlooked. Furthermore, it is not by definition that only the female victim of violent crime for whom protection is paramount: in this study, almost a fifth of the victims for whom protection was the most important reporting reason was male and around 12% was the victim of a property crime. As suggested before, nonviolent crimes by known offenders could be a forewarning for violence or a signal of other problems.

In the introductory section of this article the question was put forward whether victims who primarily report for protection seem to be worse off than others. This may not be the case, since more victims with a pressing need for protection (compared to victims without this need) judge the police's contribution to their safety as positive. I found that victims with a need for protection judge their experiences with the police (with regard to safety and information) similar or more positive than victims without protection needs. It is possible that victims with a pressing need for protection are easily recognised by the police – maybe their cases receive extra attention. Perhaps this recognition contributes to the safety of the group which is most in need for this. However, the finding may have other explanations as well – these I have not studied at this point in time.

The finding that victims with a need for protection judge their experiences with the police similarly or more positively than victims without protection needs, does not imply that things can or should not be improved. The percentage of victims who judges the police's contribution to safety as positive or neutral can hardly be considered as being at a satisfactory level after all. In 2018 a national implementation of the 'individual assessment' in the Netherlands was enrolled: the police systematically assess the vulnerability of each victim and determine what protection measures are necessary.<sup>47</sup> The data used for this article were collected in 2016. It would be interesting to study the experiences with the police of victims with the need for protection again – one may expect these to have improved.

The results of this study should be considered along with their limitations. The study is of an exploratory nature. An existing dataset was used so that victims did not have to be bothered unnecessarily. The study cannot be considered representative for all victims reporting to the police in the Netherlands. After all, a part of the group of victims for whom protection is definitely relevant (domestic violence victims) is missing from the sample as a consequence of a safety procedure. Despite this procedure, the sample still includes partners, ex-partners and other family members. As mentioned, 17 victims of crimes by intimates (one partner, six ex-partners and ten family members) were included. Furthermore, the sample was relatively small because of the choice to work only with respondents with complete data on the central concepts *police contribution to safety* and *police information*. As a consequence, multivariate analyses were not possible. Yet, the dataset did contain data on some key variables, thereby making this exploratory exercise relevant to add to the literature on victim protection.

To conclude, most victim's perceptions of the police's contribution to safety are rather negative overall. Interestingly, this is only slightly better among victims for whom protection is the most important reason for reporting to the police. More victims should be allowed to profit from some kind of alliance with a police officer that is perceived as protective and on their side.<sup>48</sup> Victim's perception of police information is judged positively by a larger group of respondents, regardless of their reporting reasons. Since information is found to contribute to feelings of subjective safety of victims with the need for protection, it may, at least, be good news that the provision of information seems to have improved in the Netherlands.

46 Ten Boom, above n. 19.

47 Part of implementing Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

48 See Shearson, above n. 13.

**Table 1** *Description of the Studied Group and Subgroups*

		<b>Total Group: Self-Reporting Victims n = 388 (100%)</b>	<b>Subgroup 1: Victims With Protection as a Reporting Reason n = 127 (100%)</b>	<b>Subgroup 2: Victims With Protection as the Most Important Reporting Reason n = 33 (100%)</b>
Type of crime	Property	28	12	12
	Violent non-sexual	38	45	52
	Sexual	14	24	21
	Vandalism/public order	11	8	3
	Other	10	11	12
Gender of victim	Female	49	65	82
	Male	51	35	18
Known offender?	Yes	34	48	42
	No	66	52	58
Victim-offender relationship	Intimately known	4	6	3
	Non-intimately known	30	42	39
	Stranger	66	52	58

**Table 2** *Reporting Reasons Other Than Protection (n = 388; More Than One Answer Was Possible)*

	<b>%</b>
I needed a proof for the insurance	11
I wanted my stolen property back	10
I wanted to receive compensation for the damage/loss sustained	18
I was of the opinion that the offender(s) had to be punished	36
I found it so serious that the police had to know this	36
I wanted to ask the police to intervene or to act as a mediator	2
I wanted to get a different form of help or support through the police	2
Other reason	11

**Table 3** *Judgement on Contribution to Safety (Protection Is a Reporting Reason)*

	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Total</b>	
	n = 199	n = 97	n = 92	n = 388	
Protection a reason	52%	27%	21%	100%	n = 127
Protection no reason	51%	24%	25%	100%	n = 261
Complete group	51%	25%	24%	100%	n = 388

*Table 4 Judgement on Police Information (Protection Is a Reporting Reason)*

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 115	n = 90	n = 183	n = 388	
Protection a reason	32%	21%	47%	100%	n = 127
Protection no reason	29%	24%	47%	100%	n = 261
Complete group	30%	23%	47%	100%	n = 388

*Table 5 Judgement on Contribution to Safety (Protection Is the Reporting Reason)*

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 116	n = 58	n = 45	n = 219	
Protection most important	33%	30%	36%	100%	n = 33
Protection not most important	57%	26%	18%	100%	n = 186
Complete group	53%	17%	21%	100%	n = 219

*Table 6 Judgement on Police Information (Protection Is the Reporting Reason)*

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 61	n = 52	n = 106	n = 219	
Protection most important	27%	12%	61%	100%	n = 33
Protection not most important	28%	26%	46%	100%	n = 186
Complete group	28%	24%	48%	100%	n = 219

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*Table 7 Females Judgement on Contribution to Safety (Protection Is the Reason)*

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 59	n = 36	n = 28	n = 123	
Protection most important	30%	30%	41%	100%	n = 27
Protection not most important	53%	29%	18%	100%	n = 96
Complete group	48%	29%	23%	100%	n = 123

*Table 8 Females Judgement on Police Information (Protection Is the Reason)*

	Information			Total	
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 31	n = 24	n = 68	n = 123	
Protection most important	26%	7%	67%	100%	n = 27
Protection not most important	25%	23%	52%	100%	n = 96
Complete group	25%	20%	55%	100%	n = 123

Table 9 Males Judgement on Contribution to Safety (Protection Is the Reason)

Contribution to Safety					
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 57	n = 22	n = 17	n = 96	
Protection most important	50%	33%	17%	100%	n = 6
Protection not most important	60%	22%	18%	100%	n = 90
Complete group	59%	23%	18%	100%	n = 96

Table 10 Males Judgement on Police Information (Protection Is the Reason)

Information					
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 30	n = 28	n = 38	n = 96	
Protection most important	33%	33%	33%	100%	n = 6
Protection not most important	31%	29%	40%	100%	n = 90
Complete group	31%	29%	40%	100%	n = 96

Table 11 Judgement on Contribution to Safety (Protection Is a Reporting Reason)

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 66	n = 34	n = 27	n = 127	
Property	53%	27%	20%	100%	n = 15
Violent	53%	26%	21%	100%	n = 57
Sexual	42%	29%	29%	100%	n = 31
Vandalism	80%	20%	-	100%	n = 10
Other	50%	29%	21%	100%	n = 14
Complete group	52%	27%	21%	100%	n = 127

Table 12 Judgement on Police Information (Protection Is a Reporting Reason)

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 40	n = 27	n = 60	n = 127	
Property	40%	20%	40%	100%	n = 15
Violent	30%	26%	44%	100%	n = 57
Sexual	13%	13%	74%	100%	n = 31
Vandalism	70%	30%	-	100%	n = 10
Other	43%	14%	43%	100%	n = 14
Complete group	32%	21%	47%	100%	n = 127

*Table 13 Judgement on Contribution to Safety (Protection Is a Reporting Reason)*

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 66	n = 34	n = 27	n = 127	
Intimate	75%	-	25%	100%	n = 8
Non-intimate	60%	26%	13%	100%	n = 53
Stranger	42%	30%	27%	100%	n = 66
Complete group	52%	27%	21%	100%	n = 127

*Table 14 Judgement on Police Information (Protection Is a Reporting Reason)*

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	n = 40	n = 27	n = 60	n = 127	
Intimate	25%	-	75%	100%	n = 8
Non-intimate	36%	21%	43%	100%	n = 53
Stranger	29%	24%	47%	100%	n = 66
Complete group	32%	21%	47%	100%	n = 127