

# Further development of the Victim Monitor survey: A mixed-methods approach

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## **Colophon**

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## Summary

The treatment and support of crime victims during criminal proceedings is considered crucial in the Netherlands. Various improvements and extensions have been undertaken in this domain, such as the implementation of a European guideline that determines the minimal requirements to secure the rights, support and protection of crime victims. These innovations have added value for victims in terms of coping with the crime and the manner in which they feel judicial organizations approach and treat them.

### **The Victim Monitor: content and goal**

However, the added value of an altered and extended support of crime victims can only be reached when this support has a high quality level *and* is delivered to those who really have a need for such support. For this reason, the Ministry of Justice and Security in the Netherlands periodically examines how victims experience the support offered through the judicial organisation, as well as the perceived importance of this support – by means of the Victim Monitor. The goal of this monitor is to map periodically the degree to which the victim support (still) matches the needs of victims and which aspects of this support could be improved.

A survey is used to conduct these periodic measurements, which is administered among victims who were in contact with one or more judicial organisations (the police, the Public Prosecution Service, the Judiciary, Victim support the Netherlands, the Violent Offences Compensation Fund and the Victim Compensation Measures Information System). In the survey, victims answer questions about their experiences with and the perceived importance of specific quality indicators of the victim support offered by these organisations. These quality indicators are treatment, information supply, options to participate and for material compensation, the experience of safety during the criminal proceedings and coping with feelings of fear.

The goal of this Victim Monitor is to follow the developments in the perceived quality of the victim support offered over the years. This monitor function facilitates the detection of gaps and deficits in the support offered as well as offers indications about the impact of policy changes on victim support practices.

### **Motivation for and goal of the project**

To date, the survey has been administered twice: in 2011-2012 and in 2016. After the second measurement, a number of critical questions were raised concerning the quality of the Victim Monitor:

- \* **Gaps.** Are certain aspects of the judicial victim support not or ill-measured?
- \* **Redundancy.** Which items and/or response categories can be removed from the survey, because they do not elicit relevant data or elicit insights that other items already provide in? In general, the survey is considered to be too long.
- \* **Reliability.** Are the survey items formulated clearly and concretely enough, such that these items would elicit similar outcomes when administered several times among the same respondents? Do the items that are meant to measure a construct form a reliable scale when taken together?
- \* **Validity.** Does each respondent understand an item / answer in the same way as the researcher intended?

\* **Language use.** 1) Do respondents with various educational levels understand the survey and are they able to fill it out? 2) Are (illegitimate) assumptions made?

\* **Order of questions.** Is the order of questions such that it prevents a sense of repetition or the feeling that the survey is difficult to take?

The Ministry of Justice and Security has asked to screen the Victim Monitor thoroughly before the start of the third measurement (around 2021). In this way, the critical questions can be answered, and the monitor can be adjusted where necessary. The goal of this project therefore was to conduct this developmental assignment; it aimed to deliver a revised survey along with a description of the research process underlying the revision.

Two aspects were taken into account for this assignment: 1) the proposed changes to the survey should be as minimal as possible to facilitate comparison to previous measurements 2) in the revised survey, future developments in the support offered to crime victims should be incorporated as good as possible.

### **The development process: Approach and findings**

We evaluated and revised the Victim Monitor using a mixed-methods approach. The goal of the first two steps of this approach was to answer the critical questions concerning **gaps, redundancy, reliability, validity, language use** and **order of questions**. We selected only those suggestions for improvement based on step 1 and 2 when these resulted in a minimal change of the survey and/or implied a significant improvement of the quality of the survey.

In **step 1** the surveys and data of measurement 1 and 2 were first subjected to analyses, namely: a) an informal test of the surveys, b) quantitative analyses of the data and c) a qualitative analysis of the open question in which victims indicated issues that were not addressed in the survey.

a) During the informal test, we identified a considerable number of suggestions to reduce **redundancy** and increase the **validity** of the survey, such as improving the clarity of the formulations used for the items, explanatory texts in the survey and response categories. With regard to **gaps** identified, suggestions that were selected for the revised survey were for example adding questions about cyber- and digitalized crime as well as about online contact with judicial organisations.

b) The quantitative analyses indicated that the majority of items and composed variables did not show irregularities. However, very few of the respondents answered two specific items, as these appeared not relevant for many of the respondents. In addition, we examined the **validity** and **reliability** of the scales that measure the factors of underlying the support offered by the judicial organisations. We identified one item among the scales of the police and two items among the scales of the Victim Compensation Measures Information System that could be removed. Finally, we analysed specific pairs of items that appeared to overlap considerably to reduce redundancy. This resulted in four items that could be removed from the survey.

c) The qualitative analyses of the open question gave rise to multiple suggestions for improvement regarding **gaps, redundancy** and **language use**. Suggestions that we selected for the revised survey were clarification of the general instruction of the survey, reducing the length of the survey, providing more opportunities to indicate how judicial organisations (mal)function and which needs they did not fulfill for victims, formulation and form of questions, and improvements concerning the response categories.

In **step 2** six semi-structured interviews were undertaken with professionals working at each of the six judicial organisations. This was done to a) examine to what extent the survey used for measurement 2 still matches the current support offered by these organisations (**gaps**) and b) whether there are aspects of the survey that the organization suggests to change or omit, based on their experiences with victims (**redundancy**).

Across all interviews, the most important issues were: 1) **gaps**, such as the possibility of digital contact with employees of the judicial organisations, questions about cyber- and/or digitalised crime, questions about permanent contact persons and organisation-specific forms of support or services, 2) the **order** of first all items concerning victims' experiences and then all items regarding the perceived importance – this was considered too repetitive 3) the **validity** of the items used, such as administering questions about services that were not applicable for some victims, 4) **redundancy** – preventing repetition and deleting items that overlap too much and 5) the **language use** which might not be accessible enough for a diverse group of respondents.

In **step 3**, we drafted a first revised concept of the survey based on the findings described above and the criteria of minimal changes and/or significant improvement of quality. The most significant alteration suggested in concept 1 to increase the **validity**, concerned changing the **order** of the items regarding experiences and perceived importance. One of the suggestions seems very difficult to implement: the suggestion derived from step 2 to tailor the survey more to respondents in such a manner that it becomes impossible that they receive items that are not applicable to them.

In **step 4** we discussed concept 1 with the supervisory committee and in **step 5** adjusted to concept 2 based on the decisions taken and advice received in that meeting. Two new criteria were added in step 4 to select suggestions for improvement for the revised survey: 1) the perspective of victims on the support received from the judicial organisations is a key focus point of the survey 2) to reduce the **redundancy** and length of the survey the quantitative analyses of step 1 are leading. Using these extra criteria, in step 5 we again went over the suggestions for improvement of step 1 and 2 and selected suggestions for concept 2.

In **step 6**, two expert reviewers were invited to evaluate concept 2, including the substantiation of this revision. One of these reviewers is an expert in the area of victimology, the other in the research methodology domain. Both reviewers were positive about the mixed-methods approach, the timing of this developmental assignment and the proposed suggestions for improvements. In addition, both reviewers provided important feedback regarding sharpening and/or additions to the suggestions for improvement (e.g. consistency), adjustments in the **order** of items about services in line with the timeline for victims, adding items about whether victims' cases were handled yet or not, trust in the police, and crime severity. The research methodology reviewer proposed to administer two versions during the third measurement, to assess the comparability of the revised survey with the one used for the second measurement. In **step 7**, we set up concept 3 of the revised survey based on the suggestions we took over from the expert reviewers.

In **step 8**, we presented this third concept to a text writer / editor and asked her to conduct a test to see whether this concept matches B1 Dutch language proficiency. She asked two individuals with B1 Dutch language proficiency to comment on the survey and tested the survey herself as well. She proposed three types of changes: 1) adjusting long, complex sentences / items to shorter, simple and actively worded sentences / items, 2) replacing words that are difficult to understand to words

understandable on a B1 language level, and 3) adding sentences for clarification. In **step 9**, the majority of these suggestions were implemented in concept 4 of the revised survey.

In **step 10**, we discussed concept 4 including its substantiation with the supervisory committee. This resulted in the following suggestions: omitting items regarding the collaboration between judicial organisations, adding contact information in the survey to receive victim support and adding items about victims' right to view the criminal case file, adding information to the case file, and to have legal support. Given the many changes regarding the language use in the survey, the suggestion was supported to administer at the third measurement the revised as well as the survey used for measurement 2; to measure the comparability of both versions. In **step 11**, we set up concept 5: the final, revised survey of the Victim Monitor based on the suggestions raised in the meeting with the supervisory committee.

In **step 12**, we sent concept 5 including its substantiation to the professionals at the judicial organisations that we interviewed previously, for a final check on factual errors. No factual errors were found.

### **Final reflection**

The thorough, mixed-methods approach of this developmental project has resulted in an improved version of the survey for the Victim Monitor that can be used for the third measurement (around 2021). This improved survey is tailored better to the current practice of victim support, contains less redundancy, offers better opportunities to map differences in the perceived quality between forms of victim support and is better equipped for respondents with B1 Dutch language proficiency. In addition, the reliability and validity of the survey has improved due to the use of clearer and more specific item formulations. At the third measurement moment of the Victim Monitor, this will result in a survey that is more understandable for victims and will lead to more valid and reliable outcomes.

Recommendations based on this developmental process are:

- a) to examine the impact of all changes made in the revised survey, for example by administering at measurement 3 among two-third of the respondents the revised survey and among a third of the respondents the survey used for measurement 2.
- b) to re-analyse the factor structure of the revised survey after measurement 3, to examine whether the factor structure in terms of the quality indicators can be replicated.

A methodological limitation of this research is that victims were not involved directly in this development of the revised version. Indirectly they were involved, as we analysed their answers to the open questions in the previous measurements. A second limitation concerns the coding of the open question and the elaborations of the interviews: the interrater reliability of these research activities cannot be checked as one researcher executed each of these activities. However, there was calibration about the manner of coding and elaboration of interviews in the research team.

To conclude, the Victim Monitor is an example of an instrument that monitors a practice which changes continuously. Inherent to this kind of research is that one cannot anticipate how victim support practices are organized when measurement 3 will be administered. Therefore, when it is decided that the revised survey we developed in this project will be used for measurement 3, our advice would be to have professionals of the judicial organisations examined in the Victim Monitor check this survey again just before this third measurement.