

## Factsheet

# Medico-legal expertise for victims of domestic violence in the Netherlands: how do police and forensic physicians collaborate?

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### Background

In the Netherlands, police can request a physical examination of victims of domestic violence. These examinations are either carried out by the physician who has treated the victim, or, alternatively, by a forensic physician.

### Goals

The aim of the current study was:

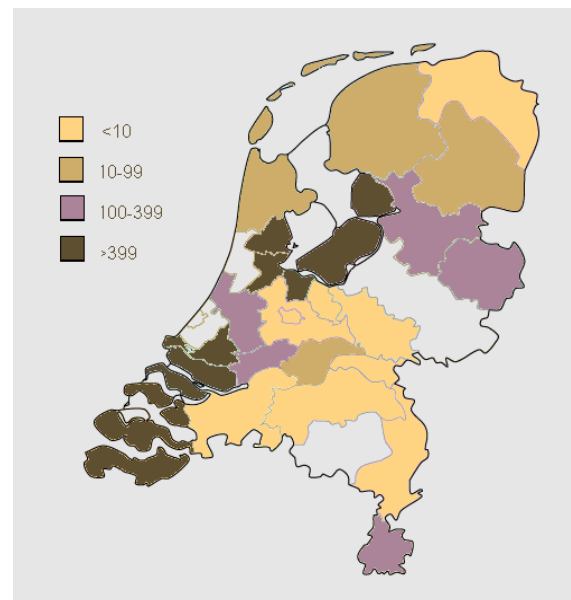
- (1) to describe the structure of forensic services for victims of domestic violence in the Netherlands,
- (2) to establish with whom the police request physical examinations of victims (forensic physician vs. physicians who have treated the victim),
- (3) to explore the underlying reasons for the choice made and
- (4) to elaborate how the current cooperation of police and forensic physicians can be improved in favour of victims of domestic violence.

### Outcomes

There are large differences between regions in the Netherlands concerning the number of medical examinations carried out by forensic services (see graph). Moreover, victims of domestic violence can access forensic services almost exclusively on referral by the police. The study also indicated that the police in most cases requests physical examinations from physicians who have treated the victim and not from forensic physicians. Reasons for referring victims to treating physicians instead of forensic physicians are costs and lack of information on forensic services. The quality of reports provided by treating physicians are criticized by the police for being illegible, incomprehensible for medical lays, and lacking

information on aspects which are of importance during the legal procedure.

### Number of physical examinations carried out by forensic services in the Netherlands in 2007 per region



### Conclusion

In short, the legal position of victims of domestic violence could be strengthened by requesting physical examinations from forensic physicians instead from treating physicians as forensic physicians are independent and trained in examining victims of violence and reporting to the police. A major obstacle to change is a lack of funding. Furthermore, forensic services for victims of domestic violence in the Netherlands could be improved if victims could consult forensic physicians without referral of the police.