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# Crime victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance in relation to cooperation: a qualitative study in the Netherlands

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research suggests that perceived negative treatment by police officers may have consequences for victims' willingness to share information with the police. This might explain why particularly repeat victims are less likely to cooperate with the police. The current study explores why this would be true by conducting in-depth interviews with 32 crime victims who had recently reported their victimisation of property crime or violent crime to the police. Results indicate that victims of both types of crime had similar thoughts on what was deemed fair treatment. Victims who were deeply touched by the crime and/or the offender thought it was also important that the police took a clear-stance against the crime. While rapid case handling seemed to be more important for property crime victims than police officers' investigative actions and the outcome, victims of violent crime expected the police to find the offender to make it clear to the offender that such (law-breaking) behaviour was not tolerated. When victims of violent crime felt that the police had failed in this task, they would feel abandoned by the police. This feeling had not only negative consequences for these victims' willingness to cooperate, but could even lead to feelings of vigilantism, particularly among victims of violent crime who knew their offender. Implications for policy and future research are discussed.

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Victim-police interactions; procedural justice; police performance; cooperation

## Introduction

When crime victims decide to report their victimisation to the police, the contact between crime victims and police officers is important for both parties. It is important for the police, because crime victims may be able to share relevant information about the circumstances of the crime and possibly the offender (Cirel *et al.* 1977, Sampson *et al.* 1997). This kind of information may help the police to solve the crime and, more generally, such information may be helpful to preserve law and order (Skogan and Antunes 1979). In turn, contact with the police is also important for crime victims as they depend on the police to investigate the crime and apprehend the offender or offenders. Crime victims themselves may not have the recourses to do so, and if they do, they may resist this temptation out of fear of their own prosecution and conviction for taking justice into their own hands (e.g. Field 2012, see also Grobbink *et al.* 2015).

Research suggests that perceived negative experiences with the police may be harmful for victims' willingness to share information with the police (Ziegenhagen 1976, Shapland *et al.* 1985, Ipsos MORI

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2003). This might explain why, as is suggested by previous research (e.g. López 2001, Van Dijk 2001, Tarling and Morris 2010), particularly repeat victims are less likely to cooperate with the police. Victims' experiences with the police in previous cases might not only explain why particularly repeat crime victims seem to be less willing to cooperate with the police, but may also uncover useful information for the police to counter this unfavourable situation. For example, Ipsos MORI (2003) marked victims' evaluations of treatment by police officers and victims' evaluations of investigative efforts by officers as two important issues of the police response with regard to future engagement with the police and more broadly the criminal justice system. Following up on this observation, the current study explores why this would be true by conducting in-depth interviews with victims who have recently reported their victimisation to the police.

### ***The meaning of fair treatment and investigative efforts by the police for crime victims***

The meaning of fair treatment and the meaning of investigative actions for crime victims has been examined in three recent studies (Elliott *et al.* 2011, 2012, De Mesmaecker 2014). These studies were based on Tyler's theoretical framework of procedural justice (Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Tyler 2006, 2011, Tyler and Jackson 2014). Based on the group-value model, Tyler and colleagues argue that citizens derive self-relevant information about their standing in society from direct interactions with the police (Tyler and Lind 1992, Tyler and Blader 2003). That is, a procedurally just treatment signals inclusion and communicates that citizens are valued and respected members of society, while a procedurally unfair treatment signals exclusion and communicates that citizens are unworthy of a respectful treatment (Tyler 2006, 2011).

Tyler (1997) distinguished four elements that characterised a procedurally just treatment: (1) 'voice', (2) neutrality, (3) respect, and (4) trustworthiness. 'Voice' relates to the opportunity to express one's views to genuinely interested police officers, neutrality refers to police officers being unbiased, respect relates to being treated with dignity, and trustworthiness refers to police officers showing sensitivity and concern for people's needs and concerns indicating that they are motivated to achieve the best possible solution for all parties involved. These elements were also identified in the studies of De Mesmaecker (2014) and Elliott *et al.* (2011, 2012) among crime victims. According to these studies, victims valued these aspects in their interaction with the police, because it made them feel believed and taken seriously by officers. In addition, Elliott *et al.* (2011) also note that receiving a fair treatment by the police encouraged victims to cooperate with the police in the future.

Besides the elements of procedural justice, De Mesmaecker (2014) and Elliott *et al.* (2012) also suggest that victims were concerned with police officers' investigative efforts to solve the crime, which is regarded as police performance (Kristina 2009). Victims' evaluations of procedural justice and their evaluations of police performance are at least theoretically distinct. For example, whereas victims' evaluations of procedural justice captures their evaluations of the way they have been treated by police officers, such as whether they felt that police officers were polite and courteous, (Elliott *et al.* 2012), victims' evaluations of police performance reflect victims' opinions of the investigative actions taken by police officers, such as whether they felt that the police officers were prompt, efficient, and took appropriate action (Elliott *et al.* 2012). De Mesmaecker (2014) also notes that victims were interested in whether the police caught the offender. While acknowledging that this may indicate a concern with outcome as opposed to process, she observed that this interest was not particularly out of retaliation motives, but rather because it informed victims that they and their case were being taken seriously. As the status of the case may be informative on the investigative efforts taken by the police (especially when the case has been forwarded to the prosecution), it seems worthwhile to take the status of the case into account when studying victims' evaluations of police performance in relation to cooperation in cases where the police investigation has ended.

While the studies by De Mesmaecker (2014) and Elliott *et al.* (2011, 2012) provide useful information on what victims value in their contact with the police and why, these studies did not consider

why procedural justice and police performance may have an impact on *future cooperation* with the police. The next section discusses how and why evaluations of procedural justice and police performance may relate to future cooperation with the police based on Tyler's theoretical framework on procedural justice.

### ***How and why evaluations of procedural justice and police performance may relate to future cooperation with the police***

To further understand the relationship between victims' perceptions of procedural justice and police performance and cooperation, we rely once more on Tyler's theoretical framework of procedural justice (Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Tyler 2006, 2011, Tyler and Jackson 2014) expanded with information derived from the studies of De Mesmaecker (2014) and Elliott *et al.* (2012). This expansion entails that our focus is not only on the elements of procedural justice as identified by Tyler (1997), but also on police officers' investigative efforts. Based on the group engagement model (Tyler and Lind 1992, Tyler and Blader 2003), one might argue that positive perceptions of the police response in terms of treatment and investigative efforts may have a norm-reinforcing effect. By treating victims in a fair manner and by performing investigative actions, police officers can show that they take victims and their case seriously and that they are willing to enforce society's norms (see Elliott *et al.* 2011, 2012, De Mesmaecker 2014). Consequently, victims will view the police organisation as a legitimate organisation (i.e. an organisation that can be trusted to faithfully uphold the law and therefore evoke appropriate behaviour, such as cooperation with the police (Tyler 2011, Tyler and Jackson 2014)). As a result, this perceived legitimacy of the police may encourage victims' intrinsic sense of responsibility and their willingness to help to establish or maintain social order in the community by cooperating with the police.

This line of reasoning with respect to victims of crime has up to date only been examined and partially supported by quantitative studies (see for an overview Koster *et al.* 2016, see also Koster 2017). While quantitative studies provide important information on the statistical relationships between victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance, perceived legitimacy, and victims' willingness to cooperate with the police, the underlying context behind these relationships remains unclear. Detailed information about the nature of victims' experiences with the police can give us further insight into how and why victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance are related to willingness to cooperate with the police. Such in-depth information could be derived from qualitative research.

### ***The current study***

The current study seeks to advance previous literature and theory development by exploring the underlying context behind the relationships between victims' perceptions of procedural justice, police performance, perceived legitimacy and willingness to cooperate with the police in case of future victimisation. It does so by simultaneously taking into account whether victims had been notified about the outcome of the police investigation (i.e. the case had been dropped by the police or the case had been referred to the prosecution) or not (i.e. the case was still under investigation by the police). This is important, because it provides information on victims' evaluations of the police response during the police investigation phase, but also on victims' evaluations of the police response when the police investigation phase has ended. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature and might also help police officers in their daily interactions with crime victims to promote cooperation with the police in case of future victimisation. A secondary aim is to examine whether the findings of De Mesmaecker (2014) and Elliott *et al.* (2011, 2012) also apply in the context of the current study.

## Methods

### Procedure

Participants were recruited via the police of The Hague, the third-largest police region in the Netherlands in terms of operational strength (Nationale Politie 2015). Victims who had reported their victimisation of a property crime (i.e. domestic burglary or attempted domestic burglary) or a violent crime (i.e. threat or physical assault) and were over 18 at the moment of victimisation were sent a letter by the police, on behalf of the researchers. For privacy reasons, no contact details of victims were directly sent to the researchers. The letter contained information about the purpose of the study, the voluntariness of participation in the study, the anonymous processing of the data, the estimated duration of the interview (one hour), and contact details of the first author. This information was accompanied by a letter of support from the police organisation. Victims who agreed to participate had to contact the first author themselves to make an appointment for the interview by contacting the researcher either by phone or by e-mail. All interviews were conducted face-to-face by the first author and lasted from 40 minutes to one and a half hours. Based on the participants' choice, interviews were held in a private room of a university or at the participants' home. At the start of the interview, permission was asked to audio-record the interview. All interviewees gave their permission. The interviewer considered Liamputtong's (2007) concerns on interviewing vulnerable people and signed a confidentiality statement compiled by the Dutch police in order to protect victims' privacy. Data collection took place over a 3-month period, from August 2015 until November 2015.

### Participants

The invitation letter for participation was sent to victims of 352 cases. These cases were extracted from all eligible cases during the study period by making separate files for all property crime victims and all victims of violent crime respectively and systematically selecting each  $n^{\text{th}}$  case in both files. In doing so, victims who were invited to participate were randomly selected out of all eligible crime victims as each victim had an equal chance of being selected. Thirty-two crime victims who reported 28 cases in the police region The Hague agreed to participate, a response rate of 8.0%. Conducting this research, our aim was to interview approximately 30 crime victims that met our inclusion criteria. In our first attempt to approach crime victims, invitation letters were sent out to 30 crime victims. Only two of these crime victims contacted the first author for an interview. Reminders were sent to the 28 crime victims that had not responded, but none of them contacted the researcher. As a crime may weigh high on crime victims, it was decided not to send an additional reminder, but to approach other crime victims. Another 322 letters were sent out and 30 crime victims responded to the request to be interviewed. Given that crime victims were approached by mail instead of a more direct approach (e.g. face-to-face or per telephone) might have contributed to the low response rate. After all, this approach required crime victims to actively contact the researchers and the researchers were unable to provide additional information on the study to potentially hesitating victims. This may have caused that a specific type of crime victim was drawn to agree to participate in our study. It may be that specifically those who were extremely satisfied with the police response or those who were extremely unsatisfied with the police response were more likely to actively contact the researchers to be interviewed. While such selection may be detrimental for studies that seek generalizability of study findings, it may be beneficial for our study's purpose to examine the underlying mechanisms behind the relationship between victims' evaluations of the police response and their willingness to cooperate with the police in case of future crime victimisation. This allowed us to more easily contrast victims with positive experiences to victims with negative experiences with the police in relation to their willingness to cooperate with the police to provide contextual insight into how and why evaluations of the police response may shape victims' willingness to cooperate with the police.

The number of interviewed crime victims (32) exceeds the number of cases (28) as some of the burglary victims wished to be interviewed as a couple. Victims of 14 cases were interviewed within three weeks after victimisation, to examine their evaluations of procedural justice and police performance while the police investigation was still running. Victims of the 14 other cases were interviewed three months after victimisation, to examine victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance when the police investigation had ended. Of the ended police investigations, 6 resulted in the case being referred to the prosecution office and 8 cases were dropped by the police, either because the police deemed the importance of the incident too small or because of a lack of leads to proceed with the investigation. Participants' age ranged from 19 to 83 ( $M = 46.63$ ;  $SD = 19.43$ ). Of the participants, 14 (43.8%) were female victims and 18 (56.3%) were male victims. Concerning the type of crime, 14 (50%) interviews were held with 18 victims of (attempted) domestic burglary and 14 (50%) interviews were held with victims of physical threat or physical assault. In 11 (71.4%) of the violent cases the victim knew their offender at least by name. None of the burglary victims expressed that they knew the offender.

### **Materials**

The interview schedule was developed to allow participants to elaborate on why they had reported their victimisation to the police, their perceptions of the police response to their victimisation, whether they would have contacted the police given what they knew at the time of the interview and in case of future victimisation, and what they would advise police officers who interact with crime victims (not necessarily in this order). Open follow-up questions on these topics with regard to the criteria of procedural justice and police performance (Elliott *et al.* 2012, De Mesmaecker 2014) were used to stimulate an extensive and in-depth response from participants.

### **Data analysis**

Data was transcribed and analysed using ATLAS.ti version 7.5.6. This is one of the most comprehensive computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The data was analysed using a combination of a hybrid approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006) and a approach of constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Using the hybrid approach, we used both the theory-driven deductive approach in which the data was analysed for theoretical themes (Crabtree and Miller 1999) and the data-driven inductive approach in which relevant themes emerged from the data (Boyatzis 1998). In addition to these methods, the approach of constant comparison was used in which the data was coded in three phases: open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss 1990). After additional data collection, this process of coding continued based on the insights of the analysis of the analysed data and thereby informed the analyses of the additional data. Codes were assigned to all text parts that seemed relevant for identifying the underlying mechanisms behind the current study's framework. These coded texts parts were then grouped if they had similar meaning. Thematic analysis of these categories, including looking at co-occurring or overlapping codes, depth, frequency, and relationships between codes, was used to examine what value victims placed on their interactions with police officers and how this related to their willingness to cooperate with the police. The interviews were held in Dutch, quotes used below have been translated into English by the authors. Translations were cross-checked using back translation from English to Dutch by the first author. If she doubted on the correct translations, she consulted a colleague and a decision was made in agreement. Each participant was assigned a unique reference code which appears each time when the participant was cited. The first letter indicates whether the participant was a victim of property crime (P) or violent crime (V), the second letter indicates whether the participant was male (M) or female (F), the number indicates the unique number of the participant, followed by the age of the participant and the status (i.e. case open) or outcome of the case (i.e. case dropped or case prosecuted) as known by the victim.



## Results and discussion

Participants spoke very differently about what had happened to them and about the aftermath of the crime. These differences did not seem to exclusively depend on the outcome of the police investigation (i.e. whether the case was dropped by the police or whether the case was referred to the prosecution), but also on whether victims expressed that they felt severely harmed and/or humiliated by the crime and/or the offender. While some victims expressed that they were not deeply affected by the crime, others said that they were deeply touched and expressed feelings of fear, anger, and resentment. Intense emotions and rumination of the crime were mostly expressed by victims of violent crime, particularly when they knew their offender. Four victims of violent crime went to see a doctor for their injuries and four other victims of violent crime coped with minor physical injuries. Four burglary victims felt seriously harmed by the crime and/or the offender and experienced feelings of anger towards their burglar(s). They reported that they found it difficult to leave their house for longer periods of time in the weeks after the event. In our examination of what value crime victims place on their interactions with police officers, we focus on victims' evaluations of procedural justice first, before turning to victims' evaluations of police performance.

### *Victims' evaluations of procedural justice*

In general and in line with previous studies by De Mesmaecker (2014) and Elliott *et al.* (2012), both victims of property crime and victims of violent crime valued a treatment in accordance with the elements of procedural justice ('voice', neutrality, respect, trustworthiness) by the police. This was important to them, because it made them feel valued and respected (De Mesmaecker; Elliott *et al.*). However, we found something interesting that was not mentioned in the studies by De Mesmaecker and Elliott *et al.* concerning the neutrality element of procedural justice. We found that some of the crime victims who expressed that they were deeply harmed by what had happened to them felt reassured if police officers angrily expressed their disapproval of the offender:

She [the police officer] was also a little agitated ... against the offender, and they should keep doing that. I think that's best for crime victims, empathy. (VM14, 80 years, case prosecuted)

While condemning the crime may affirm the norms and values in society, officers should be careful with condemning the *alleged* offender. The latter may indicate bias and partiality in favour of the crime victim, thereby jeopardising the neutrality aspect of procedural justice. Nevertheless, by saying that it was not the victim's fault, officers make it clear that blame falls on the offender and not the victim, which is often appreciated by crime victims (De Mesmaecker).

Besides the elements of procedural justice, victims' evaluations of being able to contact police officers easily (preferably on a personal work email address of the case-handling officer) and being informed about the proceedings in their case were other important aspects in contact with the police of (see also De Mesmaecker; Elliott, *et al.*). This latter aspect was particularly true for victims (mostly, but not exclusively victims of violent crime) who were deeply touched by the event, as it showed them that the police was committed to their case and made them feel being taken seriously. In contrast, only one victim expressed the wish not to be informed: 'At a certain point, you just leave it all behind and don't want to be confronted with information anymore. It's done'. (PM12, 34 years, case open).

No apparent differences were discovered on victims' evaluations of procedural justice with regard to age or sex. We have found some differences in perceptions of procedural justice with regard to being informed by the police that may have been affected by time. Victims who were interviewed shortly after reporting their victimisation were less satisfied about being informed by the police than victims who were interviewed after they were informed about the outcome of the case (regardless of the content of the outcome). This makes sense, even if victims in the latter group were not informed about the proceedings in the case during the police investigation, they were as at least

informed about the outcome of the case, while victims in the first group had not (yet) received such information.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, property crime victims and victims of violent crime seemed to have an equally important interest in being treated in a procedurally just manner, irrespective of the status of the police investigation (i.e. open or closed). Interestingly, victims who said that they were angry or sad about what had happened to them, mostly – but not exclusively – victims of violent crime, thought it was important that the police took clear stance, not only against the crime, but often also against the offender. While seemingly appreciated by crime victims, police officers should be aware that doing so may indicate bias and impartiality in favour of the crime victim. Differences between property crime victims' evaluations and evaluations of victims of violent crime became more apparent with regard to police performance.

## **Victims' evaluations of police performance**

It should be noted that although we distinguished between victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance for reasons of clarity, this distinction is often blurred in practice (see Elliott *et al.* 2012, De Mesmaecker 2014). Difficulties with the theoretical distinction between evaluations of procedural justice and police performance become particularly noticeable with regard to victims' judgments of being kept informed about the proceedings in their case. While being informed in itself may be part of procedural justice (i.e. fair treatment), the content of the information shared or asked by the police could indicate (a lack of) police performance. Additionally, particularly evaluations of police officers' investigative actions of victims of violent crime seemed to be largely shaped by the results of these actions (i.e. the outcome of the case). Therefore crime victims' evaluations of police performance will be considered with due regard to the status (i.e. open or closed) or outcome (i.e. dropped by the police or forwarded to the prosecution) of the police investigation in their case.

## **Victims of domestic burglary**

In most of domestic burglary cases, police officers had searched for fingerprints, traces of burglary and took some photos of the crime scene, which made victims feel that the officers had done everything they reasonably could to investigate the crime, even if those efforts had not resulted in an apprehension of a suspect. Most victims generally expressed their understanding if police officers closed the case because of a lack of investigative leads and more or less accepted that the investigation would not result in the apprehension of the burglar. Burglary victims' judgments of adequate police performance were mainly shaped by their evaluations of rapid case handling for insurance reasons. These findings are in line with Elliott *et al.* (2012). However, they also stated that these victims found it difficult to accept that the police had lost interest in their case. Such sentiments were not reported in the current study. An explanation for this inconsistent finding could be sought in the main reason for reporting the crime. While Elliott *et al.* are not clear about the reasons for reporting, one of the main reasons for burglary victims in the current study to report the crime to the police was to get financial compensation from insurance companies. Once the report was filed, they thought the police had done everything they reasonably could to help them and did not expect anything more from the police. This was true for most burglary victims, but not for those who felt outraged by the crime and could not easily pick up their lives again:

If the police are able to give us the answer: 'we have found a suspect', then I could leave it all behind me. But as long as I have not received a message, I will have to wait. And then I am left hanging [...] I cannot distance myself from it. (PF18, 47 years, case open)



### ***Victims of violent crime***

While most victims of domestic burglary did not expect much more from the police than an initial search in and around the house, this was different for almost all victims of violent crime who expected the police officers to make it clear to offenders that they should comply with the norms and values in society and that crime would not be tolerated. When victims judged that the police failed to do so, even when these victims had not (yet) received official notification that the case was dropped by the police, they felt abandoned, alienated and excluded. These findings are in line with findings reported by De Mesmaecker (2014). In addition, we found that both male and female victims of violent crime who felt abandoned questioned the impartiality and utility of the police:

The police let that boy just walk away. I was knocked-out myself [...], but I've heard from others that the police just stood there and didn't do anything. That's incomprehensible [...] Then you wonder: 'Who is the police for anyway? For the victim or for the offender?' Well, apparently for the offender. They let the victim stand alone. (VM6, 42 years, case open)

Besides that I'm angry because of what happened I'm even angrier with the fact that nothing happens. That apparently this [the crime] is all allowed. [...] At the moment, I don't understand the utility of the police. [...] Then they can be all friendly, but that doesn't bring me anything. (VF9, 38 years, case dropped)

For victims of violent crime, it seemed that their perceptions of (lack of) police performance were to a large extent shaped by the status or outcome of the police investigation in their case. Particularly victims of violent crime whose cases were dropped by the police, but also victims whose violent crime case was still under police investigation accused the police of not doing enough to solve the crime. In contrast, victims of violent crime whose cases were referred to the prosecution seemed to evaluate the police performance in their case as adequate. For these victims, evaluations of adequate police performance seemed to affirm judgments of the norms and values the police stand for:

I thought they handled [the case] very neatly and actually really adequately. There was a clear division of tasks: one officer dealt with him, the other officer dealt with me. And then they questioned him [...] This means to me that they are there for you, to help you with these things. Thus for the victim, and against violence. (PF13, 42 years, case prosecuted)

### ***Conclusion***

Overall, it seems that evaluations with regard to procedural justice (i.e. fair treatment) and evaluations with regard to police performance (i.e. adequate police performance) both inform victims whether or not they are being taken seriously. While virtually all victims expressed that they were treated in a polite and friendly manner, differences were found in victims' evaluations of police performance. Victims of violent crime appeared to have different standards of adequate police performance than property crime victims. While most interviewed victims of domestic burglary pointed out that they understood that the police could not do much more than searching for fingerprints, traces of burglary, and taking photos, most victims of violent crime wanted the police to reaffirm the norms and values in society and to take investigative actions to make that happen. If victims thought the police had failed at their investigative tasks, they seemed to feel alienated and left alone. According to the framework of procedural justice, such feelings would result in non-cooperation (Tyler 2011). The next section explores how differences in crime victims' expectations and wishes and consequently different evaluations of the police response (in particular with regard to police performance) relate to victims' willingness to cooperate with the police.

### ***Victims' evaluations of the police response in relation to future cooperation***

Victims' evaluations of fair treatment and adequate investigative actions are assumed to increase victims' willingness to cooperate with the police, based on the current study's framework (Tyler

2011, see for an overview Koster *et al.* 2016). In contrast, perceived unfair treatment and inadequate investigative actions would result in non-cooperation. This section explores what would motivate crime victims to cooperate with the police with a specific focus on victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance in their current case.

### ***Victims of domestic burglary***

For burglary victims, it seemed that one of the main reasons to report their victimisation was to get financial compensation by insurance companies. This is in line with previous research (see Wittebrood 2006, Van Dijk *et al.* 2007, Huys and Smit 2009). Moreover, a majority of the burglary victims considered the case being taken care of once an official report was filed by the police which they could hand over to the insurance company for payment. However, even when financial damage was low or practically non-existent, burglary victims felt a responsibility to inform the police in case of future victimisation: 'It is a sort of civic duty to call the police' (PM20, 62 years, case open). Another victim explained:

The only right thing to do is to call the police. That is what you should do. You could do nothing, but then it won't stop either. It is their [the police's] job to do something about it, but you have to do something yourself as well. If you don't pass something on [provide information], then they can't do anything with it. Then they won't know about it. (PF19, 62 years, case open)

It seems that in addition to financial motives, informing the police about what happens in a neighbourhood is an important reason for burglary victims to contact the police in case of future victimisation. These victims expressed that when the police are informed about the number of burglaries, they may be able to distribute their resources more efficiently and effectively by targeting high crime areas. These victims said that the police could patrol more often in a specific area and although realising that it may not directly result in a burglar being caught in the act, they hoped it would deter potential burglars. In addition, several victims talked about initiatives to assist the police such as neighbourhood watch groups that had been set up in response to burglaries that were committed in their neighbourhood:

The police can't be everywhere of course. So to keep your neighbourhood safe, you can also do something yourself. That doesn't only help your neighbourhood, but also the police. People from the neighbourhood will notice things faster. They know what's normal and what's not normal in a neighbourhood and they are with more [people] of course. (PM7, 19 years, case open)

Such initiatives, in which residents actively cooperate with local police officers, could be helpful in reducing crime (see for an overview Bennett *et al.* 2008). For example, visible and frequent surveillance by residents may not only increase the information flow from the public to the police on suspicious activities after which the police can take appropriate action, but might also deter potential offenders to commit crimes as this would increase the potential offenders' perceptions of the risk of being caught.

For burglary victims, perceptions of police performance and the outcome seemed to be less important in motivating cooperation. These victims seemed to acknowledge and understand that the police could not do much to find the burglar(s). Rather, being treated in a respectful manner made victims believe that the police wanted to apprehend the burglars, even if the chances to do so were slim. This would enforce perceived police legitimacy for these victims, even though burglary victims' willingness to cooperate with the police seem to be mostly induced by financial motives (see also Kääriäinen and Sirén 2011).

### ***Victims of violent crime***

In contrast to burglary victims, victims of violent crime seemed to be more concerned with police officers performing investigative actions and making the offender understand that such behaviour

is not tolerated in society. Particularly a lack of perceived police performance might have a negative impact on the willingness to cooperate with the police for victims of violent crime. As one victim of physical threat pointed out:

I've been threatened another time thereafter. I have e-mails to prove it, but I don't do anything with it anymore. No. They [the police] won't do anything with it anyway. That may not be how it is supposed to go, but they can thank themselves for that. (VM26, 52 years, case dropped)

This illustrates how evaluations of lack of police performance may result in non-cooperation for victims of violent crime. Among victims of this type of crime who felt particularly harmed by the offender, disappointment with the way how the police handled their case could even turn into feelings of vigilantism:

I felt like they didn't understand me and particularly felt not being taken seriously. What the police basically said was: 'Take care of it yourself, we don't do anything'. I felt alone and I thought: Why do we have the police? They should help me, shouldn't they? But they did nothing. [...] I have really wondered why on earth I had reported this. I really get it that some people in some circumstances take the right in their own hands. (VF9, 38 years, case dropped)

Such feelings of vigilantism might take serious forms as another victim of violent crime expressed:

When I look at how they dealt with my report, they do nothing at all. You cannot count on the police in the Netherlands. They are there for themselves and themselves alone. From now on, I will never call the police again [...] the police has the choice, it's in their hands. If they do something, then I'll do nothing. If they don't do anything, than I will. (VM6, 42 years, case open)

Feelings of vigilantism, in different degrees, were shared among seven of the 11 victims of violent crime who knew their offender and by one victim who did not know the offender. Victims who expressed such emotions often held strong feelings of anger towards their offender. Most of them also had a longer history of experiences with the police, for example as a suspect of a crime (often in the cases of male victims) or because they had repeatedly asked the police for assistance on the current matter (in the cases of female victims). Women and elder men who experienced feelings of vigilantism – even though they wanted to get back at their offender – expressed that they would not act on those feelings. As main reasons for not acting on those feelings, they reported that they would not be able to physically stand a chance against the offender, that it would be morally wrong to act on vigilantism or that they feared their own prosecution for taking the law in their own hands. On the other hand, younger male victims expressed more serious feelings of vigilantism and the will to act on those feelings.

Empirical research among crime victims' feelings or acts of vigilantism is almost non-existent (Silke 2001). An exception is the quantitative study by Weisburd (1988). He had not included age in his model, but reported that males and victims were more likely to perform some form of vigilant act than females and non-victims. Although this may seem to contradict with the findings reported here regarding victims' gender, Weisburd's study (1988) was specifically focused on self-reported acts of vigilantism by the general public instead of victims of violent crime' feelings of vigilantism and its findings may therefore not be generalisable to the current study. Another exception is the quantitative study by Orth (2004). He found that younger female victims of sexual crime retrospectively expressed more feelings of revenge than older male victims of non-sexual crime in the four weeks after victimisation. However, four years after the victimisation, age, gender and type of crime was no longer predictive of reported feelings of revenge.

Victims of violent crime who expressed feelings of vigilantism in the current study experienced feelings of desolation and despair when they felt that the police lacked in their investigative efforts. Prominent is the feeling of being left alone by the police, who are supposed to protect citizens from becoming victimised (again). This perceived unresponsiveness may have negative consequences for perceptions of police legitimacy for these victims. Lack of perceived legitimacy may in turn not only make victims of violent crime who know their offender less willing to cooperate

with the police, but also more supportive of vigilantism. Although previous studies on the relationship between perceived legitimacy and vigilantism are often focused on *public* support for the use of violence to settle disputes, they seem to concur with this line of reasoning (see Tankebe 2009, Haas *et al.* 2012, 2014, Jackson *et al.* 2013, Nivette 2016). In these studies – which reported mixed results on associations with regard to gender and age – negative relationships were found between perceived legitimacy of the police and public support for vigilantism. Moreover, Haas *et al.* (2014) – using an experimental vignette-design in which they manipulated police responsiveness – found that lack of police responsiveness caused higher levels of support for vigilantism. Of course, this is not to say that the victims who expressed these sentiments in the current study will actually turn to vigilantism. However, these thoughts by themselves could be harmful for police legitimacy as they threaten the belief that the police hold up the law in a faithful manner and are the only rightful force in society to use violence (Jackson *et al.* 2013).

Important to note is that thoughts about vigilantism were exclusively expressed by victims of violent crime in the present study and not by victims of property crime. Perhaps this could be explained by the motives of burglary victims to report which seemed to be fairly unrelated to the offender. Another explanation could be that none of the burglary victims knew who had broken into their house and thus had no reasonable opportunity to get back at the offender. Perceived police legitimacy and willingness to cooperate for these victims may be mainly shaped by evaluations of procedural justice and to a lesser extent by evaluations of police performance and the outcome. In contrast, while evaluations of procedural justice are also important for victims of violent crime, evaluations of police performance and the outcome may be just as, or perhaps even more important in shaping perceived legitimacy and cooperation for these victims, particularly when they know their offender and feel intensely hurt by the offender and/or the crime.

## General discussion

Previous research suggests that victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance are related to their willingness to cooperate with the police in case of future victimisation, but has two important limitations; (1) studies examining the relationship between victims' evaluations of procedural justice (Hickman and Simpson 2003, Johnson 2007) and/or police performance (Conaway and Lohr 1994, Xie *et al.* 2006, Koster 2017) and cooperation are all of a quantitative nature; (2) qualitative studies on victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance have not linked this to future cooperation (Elliott *et al.* 2012, De Mesmaecker 2014). As such, contextual information on why victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance are linked to cooperation is lacking. However, such information seems necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role police officers may play in fostering future cooperation among repeat crime victims. Therefore, the current study explored what value property crime victims and victims of violent crime place on perceived procedural justice and police performance in their interaction with police officers and why this relates to their willingness to cooperate with the police in the future. In doing so, the current study included victims whose case was still under police investigation at the moment of the interview and victims who had received a notification that the case had either been dropped by the police or referred to the prosecution for further investigation.

Our findings suggest that victims of both property crimes and violent crimes place much value in being fairly treated (i.e. in accordance with the elements of procedural justice; Tyler 1997) which is in line with previous research (Elliott *et al.* 2012, De Mesmaecker 2014). We also found that victims who expressed that they felt deeply harmed by the crime and/or the offender, appreciated it when officers angrily expressed their disapproval of the crime and/or the alleged offender. This finding relates to findings by De Mesmaecker (2014) and with procedural justice theory in the sense that an absence of prejudice on the victims' role in the incident (i.e. guilt) is related to the neutrality aspect of procedural justice (De Mesmaecker 2014, see also Tyler and Lind 1992). However, it brings up an important question whether victims truly want officers to be neutral or that they would prefer that the police officer

takes the victim's side (at the cost of the alleged offender). While it can be argued that the latter would show sensitivity to victims' needs and concerns (trustworthiness element of procedural justice) it could also jeopardise the neutrality aspect of procedural justice. In addition to these elements, crime victims also expressed that they wanted to be informed about the proceedings in their case and being able to contact the case-handling police officers easily. While these needs are generally not regarded as specific elements of procedural justice, it could be linked to neutrality, which entails that police officers should be transparent about the proceedings to the one's they deal with (Hollander-Blumoff and Tyler 2011). Our findings suggest transparency of proceedings may be more emphasised in procedural justice theory than currently is the case when this framework is applied to crime victims and their own case (Hollander-Blumoff and Tyler 2011).

Additionally, our findings suggest that differences emerged between victims of property crimes and violent crimes with regard to their perceptions of police officers' investigative actions (i.e. police performance). Most burglary victims understood and accepted that it would be hard for the police to find the burglar and more or less agreed that the police would not perform further investigations beyond searching for fingerprints, traces of burglary, and taking photos of the crime scene. Their evaluations of police performance seemed generally not to be shaped by the outcome of the case. This could be explained by property crime victims' main reasons for reporting their victimisation: to get financial compensation by insurance companies and to inform the police about what had happened in their neighbourhood (see Wittebrood 2006, Van Dijk *et al.* 2007, Huys and Smit 2009). It should be noted that this was different for victims of property crimes who felt outraged by the burglar. For these victims, needs with regard to police performance were more in line with the needs of victims of violent crime. Victims of violent crime were generally concerned with the police taking investigative efforts to find the offender and having a serious conversation with the offender to make it clear to the offender that such behaviour was not tolerated in society. It thus seems that particularly victims of violent crime are not only interested in the elements of fair treatment as identified by Tyler (1997), but also in police officers' investigative efforts during the investigation phase. For these victims, evaluations of police performance seemed also to be shaped to a large extent by the outcome in their case. The outcome and evaluations of police performance would inform these victims whether they and their case were being taken seriously, which is in line with the findings reported by De Mesmaecker (2014), but not with procedural justice theory which suggest that fair treatment and fair decision making is more important than police effectiveness (Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Tyler 2006, 2011, Tyler and Jackson 2014). When victims judged that the police had failed in their investigative efforts and their task to enforce society's norms (i.e. the case had not [yet] resulted in apprehension of the offender), most of them felt that they could not count on the police. Moreover, these victims generally felt that the police chose sides for the offender over them (i.e. the victim), which could have detrimental effects on their willingness to cooperate with the police in case of future victimisation.

Results of the current study suggest that victims of property crime would cooperate with the police in case of future crime victimisation to get financial compensation and to inform the police about the amount of burglaries in their neighbourhood, even when the police had not carried out many investigative actions after the initial examination of the crime scene. Most burglary crime victims understood and accepted that the police would not use all their resources to find the burglar and even when they would, chances of apprehending the offender would still be small due to lack of investigative leads. In other words, the police only performing a minimum of investigative actions did not seem to make burglary victims to question the police legitimacy. This seems to be in line with procedural justice theory, suggesting that evaluations of police performance are less important than perceptions of fair treatment to elicit cooperation (Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Tyler 2006, 2011, Tyler and Jackson 2014). In contrast, victims of violent crime who felt disappointed with police performance in their case seemed to question the legitimacy of the police which had negative consequences for their willingness to cooperate with the police. While most of these victims said they would not contact the police anymore, some felt alienated by the police to such

an extent that they considered vigilantism. This finding seems to suggest that fair treatment by the police is not enough for these crime victims to elicit cooperation and thereby contradicts procedural justice theory (Tyler 2006, 2011, Tyler and Jackson 2014). Instead, performing investigative actions and the outcome of the case seem to be (more) important predictors of future cooperation with the police among victims of violent crime. This could perhaps be explained by the personal stake that crime victims have in the police investigating their victimisation (see Aviv and Weisburd 2016). Interpersonal crimes (e.g. violent crime), may evoke more intense feelings of outrage for crime victims and consequently a more intense feeling that the offender needs to be informed about the morally wrongness of the crime than it does for victims of less personal crimes (e.g. property crime) (see Kilpatrick *et al.* 1987, Denkers and Winkel 1998). Overall, the findings suggest that procedural justice theory may be a constructive theory to explain why most property crime victims would cooperate with the police in case of future victimisation. However, it seems that more than fair treatment is necessary to elicit future cooperation among victims of violent crime, particularly in cases where the victim knew the offender. These victims seem to be more focused on police officers' investigative efforts and the outcome of the case, implying that procedural justice theory may fall short on explaining how cooperation among those victims can be encouraged.

### **Study limitations**

When interpreting these findings, it should be noted that the current sample was a small sample that cannot readily be regarded as a representative sample of burglary victims and victims of violent crime in the Netherlands. Respondents had to contact the researcher themselves. It could be that particularly victims who had either extremely positive or extremely negative evaluations of procedural justice and police performance in their case were more willing to participate in the current study, which could have hampered the generalizability of the results. However, our study was not aimed at generalizability of findings, but rather to provide useful contextual insight into how and why victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance may shape victims' willingness to cooperate with the police. In this sense, a possible selection of victims who felt extremely positive or extremely negative about the police response helped to contrast their respective experiences with the police more easily and provided relevant contextual insight in how and why this may shape victims' willingness to cooperate with the police. Moreover, while the current sample may be selective, it includes a diverse set of crime victims regarding age, sex, type of crime, emotional state, and status and outcome of the case. Another limitation is that we held information on victims' previous experiences with the police for some victims, but not for all victims. Therefore, we were unable to formulate definite conclusions on victims' previous experiences with the police and their perceptions of the police in the current case. For future research it is recommended to focus not only on victims' evaluations of the police response in the current case, but also on previous experiences with the police for all respondents.

Lastly, the current study relies on victims' reports of procedural justice and police performance in their case, we do not know what actually happened during the interactions victims had had with police officers. To gain more objective information on what happened during the interactions and how this relates to victims' evaluations of procedural justice and police performance, future research could use participant observation or recorded interviews by the police during their interactions with crime victims as a research method.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the findings suggest that a procedurally just treatment is appreciated by different types of crime victims, because it makes them feel that they and their case were taken seriously. Additionally, most crime victims who had recently reported their victimisation to the police expressed that they wanted to be informed about the in their case as it made them feel that the police was committed



to their case. For police practice, this means that crime victims should be regularly informed about the case progress, investigative actions that were taken, or the reasons why such actions were not taken. In addition, it seems that particularly victims of violent crime who felt deeply humiliated and harmed by the offender and the crime and had negative evaluations of police performance seemed to be less cooperative in case of future victimisation. While such information could also be derived from quantitative studies, the present qualitative study advances our knowledge on why this may be the case. Results suggest that, because of a perceived lack of police performance, these victims felt alienated and excluded by the police and not being taken seriously (Elliott *et al.* 2012, De Mesmaecker 2014). This seems to be important information for police practice. Police officers could identify victims of violent crime who cope with a lot of anger and resentment against the offender and specifically reaffirm their valuable position in society, particularly in cases in which they are unable to perform investigative actions. Police officers could for example do so by taking a clear-stance against the crime and underlining the importance that crime victims continue to report their victimisation to the police. It may well be that a current incident was not enough for the police to build a case, but perhaps it will be enough when more of such incidents are reported. Taking a clear-stance against the crime and underlining the importance of crime reporting could be linked to the trustworthiness element of procedural justice, which posits that police officers should express that they are sincerely motivated to come to the best solution for all parties involved, thereby making victims feel valued and respected by the police. Particularly in cases in which officers are not able to perform investigative actions that would result in apprehension of the offender, officers need to explicitly assure victims that they and their case are being taken seriously. This may perhaps temper victims' feelings of desolation and despair with the police, encouraging them to cooperate in case of future victimisation.

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