From policy to practice: A qualitative study of the approach to stalking in the city of Groningen

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Preface

Dear reader,

I am pleased to present my thesis for the MSc in Sociology, specialising in the Criminality and Safety track. Over the past months, I have worked on the topic of stalking, focusing specifically on the related policies and practices. This study has been a great learning process for me, as it has allowed me to step into the work field and experience conducting qualitative research. Working on such a sensitive topic has been a unique experience for me, and I would like to thank all the participants for allowing me to explore this topic. Your knowledge, applied examples, and recommendations for my study have been of great value. I will carry the gained insights with me into both my professional and personal future. Your stories have greatly enlarged my interest in this topic.

I would also like to thank those who have provided guidance and support throughout the writing process. I would like to thank my supervisor, Daniel Redhead, for his constructive feedback and insightful advice, and my second reader, Marieke van Gerner-Haan, for her valuable insights in strengthening this thesis. Finally, I am grateful for my friends and family who offered me encouragement and breaks along the way.

I hope you enjoy reading this thesis.

Lieke Boender

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Preface

Abstract

In recent years, high-profile stalking cases in the Netherlands have highlighted the urgent need for timely and effective interventions. Victims often do not report stalking to police, and even when they do, they frequently do not receive adequate support. This highlights the importance of researching stalking policies to better understand how such practices are developed, implemented and experienced in practice. In the existing literature, how stalking is addressed in smaller, local contexts, remains largely understudied. This study, therefore, provides new insights through examining the stalking policies in the city of Groningen. To explore the developments in the approach to stalking in Groningen, this study seeks to answer the following research question: "How has the approach to stalking developed in the city of Groningen, considering the policies of involved organisations, and what factors played a role in the changes of the approach?". A qualitative research design was used and ten in-depth interviews were conducted. In total, twelve participants took part in this study, all of whom were professionals working in various organisations within the field of stalking. The interviews were analysed through a codebook thematic analysis approach.

The results show that the approach has shifted towards a more victim-centred approach, while also enhancing interventions targeting offenders. Although professionals mainly believe the approach to be effective, they continue to face challenges related to inter-organisational collaboration, staffing constraints and risk assessment. However, several policy changes have been introduced with the aim of improving the current approach. These policy developments are mainly driven by the need to enhance collaboration between organisations. In addition, experience with stalking incidents have also led to changes in the approach. For example, the high-profile case of Hümeyra in 2018 has led to the nationwide implementation of the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH) tool by the police, thereby increasing consistency in risk assessment of stalking cases.

Participants provided several recommendations to further strengthen the approach in Groningen, which also form the practical recommendations of this study. Participants recommended implementing the current pilots of the victim device and the stalking table that's developing in Groningen. Furthermore, they suggested investing in training sessions and workshops to increase professionals' expertise on stalking. To address the challenge of inter-organisational collaboration, participants suggested improving information sharing by

adopting a more flexible approach to privacy regulations or developing a joint information-sharing system.

In conclusion, the approach to stalking in Groningen has placed an emphasis on victim safety and support in recent years. While most involved organisations follow nationally developed policies, Groningen also adapts its approach to local needs. For example, recent developments such as the establishment of Filomena and the introduction of the victim device aim to enhance victims' safety and freedom. The policy developments are mainly driven by challenges in inter-organisational collaboration or incidents with stalking cases, thereby highlighting the reactive nature of policy development. The findings suggest that better alignment of organisational policies and enhanced inter-organisational collaboration could further strengthen the overall response to stalking in the city of Groningen.

Based on this study, several recommendations can be made for future research. It is recommended to conduct interviews with the Public Prosecution Service as well as with victims, as their perspectives are highly relevant for understanding how stalking policies are implemented and experienced in practice. In addition, including a document analysis of organisational policies could provide deeper insights into the development and design of stalking policies in Groningen.

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1. Introduction

Headlines reporting stalking cases appear frequently, ranging from stalking in (ex-)relationships, to workplace stalking, and even stalking of well-known public figures (Malsch et al., 2002). In this study, stalking is defined according to the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport as 'the intentional, systematic harassment of someone, causing that person to feel unsafe' (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2023). Victims of stalking may for example experience intimidation, being followed, or receiving unwanted phone calls (Sheridan et al., 2003). In many cases, early warning signs, such as controlling behaviour or isolation of the victim, are overlooked or not taken seriously. As a consequence, stalking often leads to psychological harm, with nearly three-quarters of victims reporting mental health problems (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2024). This underscores the urgent need for early recognition and effective intervention to prevent further harm.

The urgency of improving the Dutch response to stalking became particularly evident in 2018, following the murder of the 16-year-old girl Hümeyra by her ex-boyfriend. The 31-year-old ex-boyfriend had been stalking her for months prior to her death. During this period, she made several reports to the police, but did not receive adequate measures to ensure her safety. The widespread media coverage of the case prompted the Ministry of Justice and Security to publish an inspection report in 2019, which revealed several failures in the response of key institutions in this stalking case, especially the police (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2019).

Stalking incidents are not limited to high-profile cases covered in the media, but also occur in everyday contexts, including in the city of Groningen. In the summer of 2025, a stalking case involving a radio presenter drew media attention, revealing that the perpetrator was a resident of the city of Groningen. The victim received hateful emails, and was also the target of offensive posts on social media platforms (Vloeimans, 2025). The perpetrator, a male resident of the city of Groningen, was convicted of stalking and threatening the radio presenter and received a prison sentence and a restraining order (Vloeimans, 2025).

Effectively responding to stalking requires the involvement of multiple organisations, as the complexity of the cases often require expertise from different fields such as the police, the Public Prosecution Service, probation services, and victim support services. In this study, "the approach to stalking" refers to the policies and practices implemented by organisations to address stalking. To address the issue of stalking, legislation was introduced in 2000, making stalking a criminal offense under Article 285b of the Dutch Criminal Code. Because

the implementation of this law involves several actors involved at different stages, collaboration between the different parties involved is crucial to ensure a coordinated response. Effective inter-organisational collaboration enables the exchange of case-related information, alignment of work processes and agreement on case priorities. Conversely, when organisations operate in isolation, or fail to coordinate effectively, victims may not receive the timely or appropriate support. As a result, the victim's safety may be put at risk, and cases may escalate before adequate intervention takes place. Therefore, identifying factors that enhance or hinder this collaboration provides possibilities for improving inter-organisational collaboration and the overall effectiveness of the response to stalking.

This study focuses on the current design and implementation of the approach to stalking in the city of Groningen, as well as how this approach is perceived by the professionals involved. Both national policies and local initiatives shape how Groningen addresses the issue of stalking. Furthermore, the study explores the factors that drive policy changes, with the aim to gain understanding of how these changes arise. This study also considers to what extent the approach is victim-centred. A victim-centred approach refers to policies focused on addressing the needs of victims, with an emphasis on the harm they experience (Gromet et al., 2012). Understanding this approach provides insight into how the victim- and offender-oriented practices are shaped in Groningen. Collectively, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how local and national policies can more effectively prevent stalking and ensure the safety of (potential) victims.

1.1   Research question

This study seeks to answer the following research question: *How has the approach to stalking developed in the city of Groningen, considering the policies of involved organisations, and what factors played a role in the changes of the approach?* To answer this question, the following sub-questions have been formed:

- What policies and practices do organisations use to address stalking, and how do professionals experience the current approaches to both victim support and offender intervention?
- According to professionals, what factors or developments have contributed to changes in the approach to stalking?
- How do professionals reflect on current challenges in addressing stalking, and what changes in the approach do they propose?

1.2   Relevance

1.2.1 Societal relevance

When someone is a victim of stalking, they often experience both psychological and physical harm (Fox et al., 2010; McEwan et al., 2006). Victims are forced to move houses, change phone numbers or get a new job (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 2000; Sheridan et al., 2003). Their lives are controlled by their stalker. Despite this harm, a large number of the stalking victims in the Netherlands do not report stalking to the police, and even when they do, adequate support and protection is not always provided. This highlights the importance of examining current policies and practices, to understand how victim support and offender interventions are structured across organisations. By exploring professionals' experiences regarding the effectiveness and potential challenges of current policies, this study aims to contribute to improving coordination and effectiveness of services. Ultimately, examining how involved organisations work together to address stalking, can help improve collaborations, which in turn can reduce harm to victims and enhance the overall response to stalking.

1.2.2 Sociological relevance

Although stalking primarily takes place within the private sphere, it has significant societal consequences. Victims frequently suffer from psychological effects, such as anxiety and depression (Boehnlein et al., 2020). Additionally, victims may experience physical health problems resulting from chronic stress (Davis et al., 2002). These consequences can affect daily functioning, with some victims becoming unable to work, resulting in a loss of productivity, more need for support services, and increased healthcare costs (Boehnlein et al., 2020).

From a sociological perspective, the issue of stalking demonstrates how individual experiences at the micro level, can have broader macro-level consequences and implications for institutions and policies. The impact of stalking highlights how personal events can have consequences for the broader society, demonstrating the need to address it as a collective issue. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how organisations collaborate to address stalking

not only as an individual problem, but also in the context of organisations, policies and collaborations.

1.2.3 Scientific relevance

This thesis contributes to a better academic understanding of how stalking is addressed in practice, focusing on both how offenders are approached and how victims are supported. While existing research mainly examines stalking from a psychological perspective or concentrates on victims' experiences, relatively little attention has been paid to how organisations and institutions shape responses to stalking. Even when organisational contexts are discussed, the focus often lies on national frameworks, leaving more local or regional contexts to be understudied. This study on Groningen, therefore, offers valuable insights into how policies are designed and function in a medium-sized city, and the role local organisations play in implementing these policies.

In addition, this thesis explores how anti-stalking policies are implemented and experienced by professionals in practice, highlighting the challenges that arise. "The approach to stalking" involves close collaboration between various chain partners, each having their own roles and responsibilities in the joint response to stalking. Key actors in this approach include the police, the Public Prosecution Service, *Veilig Thuis*, and the probation service, who work together to address stalking (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). By examining how the approach to stalking in Groningen has developed since the 2000 anti-stalking law, this research provides a historical perspective on policy development and organisational responses to social problems. This enables us to identify what factors drive policy changes, thereby filling a gap in the literature and improving our knowledge of practices in addressing stalking.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter outlines the key elements of the Dutch national approach to stalking. Specific attention is given to inter-organisational collaboration, as addressing stalking involves multiple actors, making effective coordination crucial. Next, the most significant policy changes influencing Groningen's approach to stalking are presented. The key elements are then reflected upon in the stalking case pathway as formed in Groningen. Finally, the theoretical foundation for the research design is outlined, along with the expected outcomes of the study.

2.1 Key elements of the national approach to stalking

According to the Inspectorate of Justice and Security, the approach to stalking is structured around four key elements that are crucial for effectively addressing stalking (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). The first element is the recognition of stalking. This is necessary to start the process of taking legal action to stop the stalking behaviour. The second element is the risk assessment, which is crucial to protect the victim. This element includes the use of assessment tools such as the Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment (SASH), which help determine the risk level of stalking cases and provide a foundation for the follow-up actions that should be taken. Additionally, focusing on motives for stalking can help determine risk assessment. Several authors have distinguished between different categories of stalkers, emphasizing that each type of stalker may require specific forms of intervention (Davis & Chipman, 1997). Their behaviours and motivations vary across categories, requiring targeted responses. When interventions are not tailored to the particular type of stalker, they may be ineffective or even have adverse consequences (Davis & Chipman, 1997). Therefore, recognizing and addressing the characteristics of different types of stalkers is essential for effectively addressing stalking. The third element in effectively addressing stalking is making sure case responsibility and management are in order (Dutch: *zaaksverantwoordelijkheid en regie).* This element is about gathering information about the case and organising this information. Lastly, collaboration and communication between involved organisations is crucial for an effective approach to stalking. The next section explores the factors that may influence this collaboration and communication.

2.2   Inter-organisational collaboration

Effective collaboration between organisations is one of the four key elements for addressing stalking (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024; Raišienė et al., 2019). Victims of stalking often come in contact with multiple organisations, including the police and victim support services (Cleaver et al., 2019). Effective collaboration between organisations ensures that victims do not have to repeatedly share their story with each organisation involved and can facilitate a faster process.

Although collaboration between organisations is considered crucial for addressing complex social issues, research has paid limited attention to how these collaborations are shaped specifically in the context of stalking (Van Alphen et al., 2019). In this study, inter-organisational collaboration is defined as "a cooperative relationship among organizations that relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control" (Phillips et al., 2000, p. 24). The existing literature identifies several factors that influence the effectiveness of inter-organisational collaboration, which are discussed in the sections below.

Communication

Communication plays a central role in inter-organisational collaboration (Atkinson et al., 2002; Raišienė et al., 2019). Effective communication is characterised by the coordination of work processes, the maintenance of relationships and the fostering of new ideas within and between organisations (Fielding, 2006; Myers & Myers, 1982). The coordination of work processes ensures that actions are aligned across organisations, while maintaining relationships helps to build continuity and trust in collaboration. Clear communication can enhance mutual understanding of the shared goals and helps clarify how collaborating with each organisation contributes to achieving these goals (Raišienė et al., 2019). It also facilitates a better understanding of each actor's perspectives on a case, which is crucial for making joint decisions and avoiding misunderstandings (Atikson et al., 2002). Ultimately, effective communication ensures that all organisations involved obtain the relevant knowledge on a stalking case and can operate more efficiently together. This communication can be further strengthened through inter-agency initiatives, which brings organisations into closer contact and increases familiarity with each other's working methods (Atkinson et al., 2002). By requiring organisations to collaborate and work towards the same goal, mutual

understanding is enhanced, which in turn supports more effective communication and collaboration across organisations.

Responsibilities

Another important aspect of effective collaboration is a clear division of responsibilities. It is essential that every involved party is aware of their tasks and responsibilities/roles to enable collaboration (Gil-Garcia et al., 2019; Raišienė et al., 2019). When new organisations become involved, this process can be complicated, as responsibilities need to be redefined and shared understanding of desired outcomes need to be established (Gil-Garcia et al., 2019; Raišienė et al., 2019). In Groningen, for example, new organisations such as *Filomena* have gained a role in the approach to stalking, and the municipality has taken on a more prominent role in recent years. The introduction of new organisations can influence the dynamics of inter-organisational collaboration. These organisations must, therefore, clearly define their roles within the approach, to ensure that all parties are aligned and that the approach remains effective.

Information sharing

Effective inter-organisational collaboration relies strongly on the exchange of information between involved actors (Sloper, 2004; Wong et al., 2019). Effective information sharing refers to the unrestricted exchange of timely and correct knowledge (Hatala & Lutta, 2009). To achieve this, the shared information must remain accurate, consistent and reliable when exchanged between organisations (Wong et al., 2019). However, research shows that information sharing between organisations often faces challenges (Hill, 2001). Uncertainties about privacy regulations and confidentially concerns between organisations often lead to limited information exchange and consequently, insufficient knowledge of cases (Hill, 2001; Van Alphen, 2019). These confidentially concerns can point to the issue of trust between organisations (Yang & Maxwell, 2011).

Information sharing between organisations is crucial in addressing stalking as each organisation may hold additional information about the victim or perpetrator (Robinson, 2004). Combining this information enhances the overall understanding of the case, and can therefore guide the appropriate follow-up actions that should be taken (Robinson, 2004). One

way to facilitate information sharing is through the introduction of shared systems that are accessible to the organisations involved (Atkinson et al., 2002). For instance, a common digital system through which data can be securely exchanged between professionals can facilitate coordination (Casey et al., 2016). This would reduce any delays in the process and ensure that all organisations involved have access to relevant information. However, this may be challenging as organisations often use very different systems that are difficult to combine into one (Yang & Maxwell, 2011).

Organisational capacity building

Organisational capacity can be defined as the extent to which an organisation is able to effectively realise its goals (Hailey et al., 2005; Krishnaveni & Sujatha, 2013). Adequate organisational capacity is crucial for managing knowledge, resources and collaborations (Krishnaveni & Sujatha, 2013). In the context of the organisations involved in addressing stalking, organisational capacity can shape the way policies and practices are implemented, for instance by ensuring that staff are trained and procedures are clear. Capacity building can enhance the quality of responses by improving knowledge, having sufficient personnel and clear policies. This, in turn, also affects inter-organisational collaboration, as the availability and expertise of personnel can either hinder of facilitate cooperation between organisations.

2.3   Impactful changes in the approach

A major development in addressing stalking was the introduction of the anti-stalking law (Article 285b of the Dutch Criminal Code) in 2000. Since then, stalking has been recognised as a serious criminal offense, allowing for prosecution of offenders under this article. The law enabled victims to take concrete legal action against their perpetrators and has therefore played an important role in enhancing victim protection and ensuring accountability for offenders. In addition to addressing offenders and protecting victims, the introduction of the anti-stalking law also carries a symbolic societal message. By formally criminalising stalking, greater public awareness was raised, and the seriousness of the problem was emphasised.

Another development that underscored the seriousness of stalking was the Hümeyra case, which led to the Inspection Report "*Inspectieonderzoek naar de aanpak van de stalking door Bekir E.*" (2019). This report exposed serious shortcomings in the response to stalking and had a significant impact on the organisations involved, as they were confronted with their

inadequate procedures. Because there was no designated contact person within the police, the reports ended up with many different staff members, leading to insufficient oversight of the case. There was also very little information shared between *Veilig Thuis* and the police, which further contributed to missing details and a lack of clarity about the case. The report triggered important changes that improved coordination within and between organisations and clarified responsibilities. Since then, each stalking case is expected to have a case coordinator, making sure each individual case is well managed (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024).

Another significant development in the national approach to stalking following the 2019 Inspection report, is the implementation of the SASH. The use of this risk assessment tool was made mandatory for the police, making it a crucial step in enhancing risk assessment of stalking cases as it requires the police to conduct the risk assessment, thereby ensuring greater focus on safeguarding the victim's safety (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). A risk assessment helps decide the risk to a victim's safety and identifies which measures need to be taken to ensure their protection (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2019). The outcome of the SASH helps to decide which organisations need to be involved and with what urgency the case should be handled. All professionals using the SASH should receive training in its application. However, the 2024 follow-up Inspection Report indicates that not all professionals using the SASH have been trained, which may limit its effectiveness (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). Furthermore, the report reveals that the police and the Public Prosecution Service do not always assign a single contact person for stalking victims, which may lead to reports being viewed as separate incidents rather than as part of one stalking case (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024).

Building on these national developments, local initiatives have also been introduced to strengthen the protection of victims. A key local development in Groningen is the pilot project involving the victim device, which has been in operation since 2024 (*Slachtofferdevice Bij Stalking en Huiselijk Geweld - Reclassering Nederland*, 2025). This device is designed to monitor whether the perpetrator and the victim come into close proximity. The victim carries the device equipped with GPS, which is linked to the perpetrator's electronic ankle monitor. Therefore, in order to make use of this device, the perpetrator needs to be under electronic supervision and have a location ban. If the perpetrator and victim's locations come too close to each other, a signal is automatically sent to the probation services, who can then immediately intervene and guide the victim through

the situation. The system is aimed at enhancing victim protection and risk prevention by preventing any unwanted encounters between victims and offenders.

Together, these national and local developments have significantly shaped the way stalking is addressed in Groningen. The introduction of the anti-stalking law and the use of the victim device enhance victim safety and protection. The implementation of the SASH has strengthened the risk assessment of stalking cases. The Inspection Report has influenced the coordination and collaboration across organisations. Collectively, these developments reflect a shift towards a more preventive, victim-centred, and collaborative approach to stalking.

2.4   The stalking case pathway in Groningen

Stalking cases often require the involvement of multiple organisations, including the police, *Veilig Thuis*, The Public Prosecution Service and probation services. A clear division of responsibilities and knowledge about who should be involved at what stage is crucial for effective coordination within a stalking case. Insufficient coordination can lead to delays, missed warning signs, and may ultimately put the victim's safety at risk. To address these coordination challenges, Groningen has designed an approach that structures the collaboration between the involved parties, aiming to effectively tackle stalking.

A stalking case often begins with the victim providing a report to the police, or may become apparent through a victim support service. The process begins with the recognition of stalking, for which the police hold primarily responsibility (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). When a victim makes a report to the police, it is not always evident that the situation should be classified as stalking. It is therefore the police's task to recognise when a case falls under stalking. Once it is established that it's a stalking case, the police perform a SASH to assess whether the victim is a low, medium or high risk. Police may also conduct a *stopgesprek* with the offender, which is a conversation in which the offender is informed about the consequences of their behaviour, with the aim of stopping the stalking.

The risk assessment conducted by the police is shared with *Veilig Thuis* and forms the basis for the subsequent steps that need to be taken. In addition, *Veilig Thuis* uses their own triage on stalking cases as well, in which they assess the urgency of a case (Van Alphen et al., 2019). *Veilig Thuis* provides support specifically to victims of stalking within domestic relationships. There are other organisations that provide a form of support for victims as well. *Wender* and *Filomena* provide emotional support, guidance and have a women's shelter in

Groningen. Next to this, *Leger des Heils* offers support and accommodation to victims in need of safety. The last victim support service, *Slachtofferhulp Nederland,* is more focused on guidance through the legal process, as well as offering emotional support.

Within this legal process, the Public Prosecution Service is responsible for the prosecuting and sentencing of offenders. Alongside this, the probation services supervise offenders, and are responsible for considering electronic monitoring in a stalking case (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). They also play a central role in the implementation of the victim device, as they monitor the perpetrator's ankle bracelet.

The entire process of addressing a stalking case requires close coordination between involved organisations. The *Zorg- en Veiligheidshuis* plays a central role in aligning the work processes of different organisations, facilitating communication, and ensuring that each party gets a better understanding of the roles and tasks of other organisations involved. Additionally, the municipality of Groningen holds responsibility for overseeing the local approach to stalking, with a focus on policy development and the funding of initiatives aimed at prevention and victim protection. A notable example is the establishment of Filomena, which is a municipal initiative designed to support victims. Together, these organisations form a network that provides support to victims, focuses on changing offenders' behaviour, and aims to tackle stalking as effectively and efficiently as possible.

2.5   Expectations

The theoretical concepts discussed above provide the foundation for the sub-questions that guide this research. These questions allow for relating theoretical concepts to practice within the context of the city of Groningen.

The first sub-question, "What policies and practices do organisations use to address stalking, and how do professionals experience the current approaches to both victim support and offender intervention?" is informed by the stalking case pathway, which provides an overview of how the approach to stalking is shaped. Theories on inter-organisational collaboration and related factors, such as communication and information-sharing, are used to understand how collaboration is experienced. It is expected that policies will reflect a victim-centred approach, illustrated by practices such as the pilot victim device. Additionally, risk assessment tools are anticipated to play a key role in how the stalking response is shaped for both victims and offenders.

The second sub-question, "According to professionals, what factors or developments have contributed to changes in the approach to stalking?", builds on theoretical insights regarding how policy change emerges in response to incidents, evaluations, and public attention. It is expected that both national and local developments have influenced the current approach to stalking in Groningen. For instance, high-profile cases, such as the Hümeyra case, are anticipated to have driven changes by exposing shortcomings in the approach and raising awareness on the outcomes of inadequate practices. At the local level, the municipality has taken initiatives aimed at increasing awareness, which may also be a trigger for change in the approach.

The third sub-question, "How do professionals reflect on current challenges in addressing stalking, and what changes in the approach do they propose?" builds on literature discussing inter-organisational collaboration, which frequently identifies challenges related to communication, responsibilities and information-sharing. Based on the theoretical framework, inter-organisational collaboration is expected to be a recurring theme, with potential challenges and recommendations related to communication and information sharing. Collectively, these theoretical insights provide a foundation for how collaboration and policy changes influence the approach to stalking in Groningen.

3. Methods

This chapter outlines the choice for a qualitative research design. The methods of data collection are then discussed, including participant selection, participant recruitment and the interview guide. The subsequent section describes the approach to data analysis used in this study. Finally, issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations are addressed.

3.1   Research method

A qualitative research design was chosen to answer the research question: "*How has the approach to stalking developed in the city of Groningen, considering the policies of involved organisations, and what factors played a role in the changes of the approach?*". This research design was selected because qualitative research allows for understanding participants' opinions, experiences and interpretations (Hennink et al., 2020). A qualitative approach is essential in this case, because a deep understanding is crucial for investigating how the approach to stalking has developed in the city of Groningen. It also enables exploring the underlying reasons for these developments through the perspectives and interpretations of participants.

To obtain these insights, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with professionals involved in stalking. The structure of these interviews provided participants the opportunity to share their experiences and views in detail (Hennink et al., 2020). The collected data were then analysed through a thematic analysis approach, allowing for the identification of patterns and themes from the interviews. The following paragraph describes how the data collection was carried out in practice.

3.2   Data collection

Data were collected through ten in-depth interviews with twelve professionals from various organisations involved in stalking cases. These interviews were conducted over a period of six weeks, during June and July 2025. A semi-structured interview guide was used to lead the conversations (see Appendix D). This interview guide consisted of key questions along with probes, which enabled follow-up questions to further explore participants' underlying meanings or reasoning (Roose & Meuleman, 2021).

To create a setting in which participants felt comfortable sharing these experiences, attention was paid to the location of the interviews. The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' workplaces. In most cases these interviews were conducted one-on-one. One of the face-to-face interviews was a joint interview, involving two participants who were colleagues. All interviews were conducted in a private setting, where no one was able to overhear the conversation, thereby ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for the participants to share their experiences. Three interviews were conducted online due to participant preferences or location constraints. This included one phone call and two Microsoft Teams meetings, one of which was a joint interview with two participants. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent using a voice recorder.

3.2.1 Participant selection

As this study focuses on policies in Groningen, participants were selected on the basis of the following inclusion criteria: they either (1) worked for an organisation involved with stalking in Groningen or (2) had significant knowledge about Groningen's policies on stalking. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met at least one of these criteria (Hennink et al., 2020). The process of participant selection began with determining the organisations involved in the approach to stalking. As the study aims to give insights into both offender and victim policies, professionals from both the criminal justice system (e.g. probation services, police) and organisations providing victim support (e.g. *Slachtofferhulp*, *Veilig Thuis*) were selected for participation. A diverse group of participants is important for gaining a broad understanding of the topic, as it aims to include different backgrounds and contexts (Hennink et al., 2020). These different contexts reflect the variety of organisations represented by participants, which may lead to varying perspectives on policies and their effectiveness, making it important to explore these different viewpoints within the study. Factors such as age or gender, were not used as selection criteria, as the focus was on organisational variation. To ensure organisational diversity, the aim was to recruit at least ten participants, a sample size determined according to six criteria for achieving saturation (Hennink et al., 2020). Given the researcher's limited prior experience with interviews, a slightly larger sample was planned to ensure adequate data quality.

3.2.2 Participant recruitment

After determining the study population and the selection criteria, the recruitment process began with online searches for individuals potentially working at one of the involved organisations, and specifically working on the topic of stalking. Some contact details of potential participants were provided by my internship organisation. Furthermore, LinkedIn was used to search for individuals based in Groningen who were involved in addressing or researching stalking. I contacted six individuals via LinkedIn, of whom three did not respond. The other three individuals were successfully recruited for participation through LinkedIn. These individuals were selected based on their current job title and relevance to the research topic. They were sent a private message with information about the goal of the study and what their participation would mean. The researcher's contact details were included in the message, which often led to further communication via phone. Participants were not offered any incentives for taking part in the study.

Seven interviews were planned via email, with the informed consent form attached to ensure that participants understood the process of data collection and data storage prior to participation. This enabled them to make an informed decision about participation prior to the study. In addition, six other individuals were contacted via email but did not respond. All of the email addresses were obtained either through my internship organisation, online searches or referrals from other participants. These individuals were contacted because of their professional involvement with stalking cases within one of the involved organisations.

At the end of each interview, participants were asked what professionals they would recommend to approach for this study. This snowball sampling technique allowed for recruitment of additional participants as the study progressed (Hennink et al., 2020). Through this, new names were received, often with contact details such as phone numbers or email addresses, which allowed for direct outreach. When only a name was provided with no further contact information, the individual was approached via LinkedIn. On some occasions, individuals who were approached considered themselves to not be suitable for participation and subsequently referred a colleague as a potential participant. Notably, as the number of completed interviews increased, the frequency of suggestions for additional participants gradually declined. Participants seemed to believe that the current sample already represented the relevant population well, based on the organisational backgrounds provided to them. The informed consent form does not mention the sharing of organisational characteristics, but

only specifies that the data cannot be tracked back to the participant. This is further addressed in the discussion section.

This recruitment process led to twelve participants representing various organisations and backgrounds regarding the approach of stalking. In addition to professionals from the criminal justice system and organisations providing victim support, the final sample included two policymakers, as they could offer important perspectives on policy changes and the considerations that influenced such changes.

Only one participant was not directly employed within the province of Groningen, but held a position that covered all three provinces of the Northern Netherlands, including Groningen. For a complete overview of all participants in this study, see Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' background information

Participant	Affiliation or organisation	Duration of the interview in minutes
P1	Academic researcher	31:12
P2	Slachtofferhulp Nederland	39:35
P3	Police	30:21
P4	Verslavingszorg Noord-Nederland	41:14
P5	Police	45:44
P6	Veilig Thuis	39:08
P7	Policymaker	55:24
P8	Policymaker	Same as above
P9	Zorg- en Veiligheidshuis	1:00:39
P10	Reclassering Nederland	39:19
P11	Wender	58:33
P12	Filomena	Same as above

3.2.3 Interview guide

The interview guide for the in-depth interviews focused on the main topics derived from the sub-questions and the research question. The interview guide started with a few opening questions, such as asking about the participants' job title and their involvement with stalking. After getting a clear view of the participants' roles in the approach to stalking, the key questions were posed. These were the most important questions for answering the research

question (Hennink et al., 2020). These key questions were divided into subthemes to ensure a logical and well-structured flow of questions during the interviews. For example, the guide included questions about current policies. A question that fell under this subtheme was as follows: "How do you think the approach to stalking in Groningen has changed in recent years?". Participants were also asked about reasons behind policy changes through the following question: "To what extent have specific developments or contextual factors, both nationally and locally, contributed to these changes in policies in Groningen?". These questions were followed by questions on collaboration with other organisations. For example, participants were asked: "Could you tell me about the collaboration with other organisations regarding the approach to stalking?". The last sub-theme focused on creating a timeline of key policy changes in the approach to stalking. Participants were asked: "In your view, what have been the most important developments in the approach to stalking?", and together we developed a timeline of the key changes based on their experiences (see Appendix D). Here, participants were also asked to elaborate on underlying factors influencing these developments. This allowed for creating a comprehensive timeline of policy changes.

The interviews concluded with closing questions, such as asking the participants what changes they would suggest to improve the approach. To ensure content validity, Dr. Eric Blaauw, an expert in the field of stalking, reviewed the interview guide and provided valuable suggestions for improvement. This review helped optimise the interview guide for clarity and relevance. For the full interview guide, see Appendix D.

3.3   Data analysis

For the data analysis, a thematic analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti 25. The thematic analysis facilitated the interpretation of the data and provided a deeper understanding of participants' answers, thereby contributing to answering the research question. Specifically, the codebook thematic analysis approach was used (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This method entails defining deductive codes beforehand, but additionally inductive codes may emerge during the analysis, making it a flexible approach (Haan & Venema, 2025). This flexibility made the codebook approach particularly suitable, as it enabled the identification of new insights and the creation of codes for aspects which were not yet documented in the existing literature.

Following this approach, the data analysis process consisted of six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Nowell et al., 2017). This next section gives insight into how these six phases were carried out.

The first phase consists of getting familiar with the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Nowell et al., 2017). Because all interviews were conducted by one researcher, familiarity with the data was already partly established. Listening to the interview recordings and transcribing them further increased this familiarity. In addition, notes were written down during some interviews which highlighted core topics from the conversations. Attention was paid to recurring topics, such as changes in the approach after the published *Inspectierapport* in 2019 or challenges in collaborations between organisations. The identification of these topics and patterns provided a basis for generating thoughts about potential codes.

After getting familiar with the data, the interviews were systematically coded using Atlas.ti 25. A method of codebook TA was used, allowing for both deductive and inductive coding. Prior to starting the coding of the interviews, a deductive codebook was formed based on topics from the interview guide, theory and issues identified in the literature. Each transcript was carefully examined, and relevant segments of text were assigned to the appropriate codes. Some deductive quotes required small changes to fit the content of the data. By refining the codes to align with the data and accurately represent the relevant information, the validity of the coding process was increased (Hennink et al., 2020). When a segment did not correspond to an existing code, a new inductive code was created to capture this insight. This led to the final codebook consisting of 56 codes, derived either deductively or inductively.

The third phase focused on organising the codes into initial themes or groups. Braun & Clarke (2023) distinguish between two types of themes. Themes can be either "shared topics" or "shared meanings". A *shared topic* is a summary of the subject of the codes, while a *shared meaning* provides deeper insights into the underlying meaning of the information. Codebook thematic analysis allows for the application of both *shared topic* and *shared meaning* themes. In this study, themes were primarily developed as shared topics, representing the main subjects discussed by participants rather than their deeper interpretations. Themes were formed by grouping codes together that were related to each other or represented different aspects of a broader concept. For example, codes such as "growing attention to stalking", "improved offender treatment" and "improved victim position" reflected strengths of the approach and were grouped together under the subtheme "perceived strengths of the approach". The themes were derived deductively from the

theoretical framework and the interview guide. An initial codebook was formed to create an overview of the themes and corresponding codes. This included defining and giving descriptions to the codes.

After creating these initial themes, the next step was to consider how well these themes represent the data. This included making sure that themes represented different concepts and thus did not overlap. Some themes included a broad range of information. Therefore, these themes were divided into subthemes to better categorize the data. For example, the theme *experiences with the approach* was divided into the subthemes *challenges* and *perceived strengths of the approach*. The theme *existing policies* was divided into the subthemes *changes in involved collaborations* and *developments towards a victim-centred approach.* In addition, some codes were changed or deleted from the data. For example, the deductive code "defining stalking" did not appear as much in the interviews as expected beforehand, and was therefore deleted from the codebook.

The next phase involved creating the final themes as presented in the codebook. A few changes were made to the names of codes, in order to better represent the data. For example, the code "problems with systems" was changed into "technical difficulties", as this better represented the broader issues mentioned with technology. This phase also included organising the codebook. The transcripts were reread to verify whether the identified themes accurately reflected the content of the data. The four final themes were: (1) *existing policies*, (2) *experiences with the approach*, (3) *reasons for policy changes* and (4) *policy recommendations*. The codebook with the final (sub)themes, codes and example quotes can be found in Appendix H.

The final step in the data analysis involved reporting the findings according to the themes identified in the finalized codebook. Each theme corresponds to one of the three sub-questions, thereby offering a structured overview of how the main topics emerging from the data relate to the research question. All findings relevant to addressing the research question are presented and discussed. To illustrate the meaning of specific codes and to support the interpretations, relevant quotations from the interviews were included. These quotations were translated from Dutch to English, which is shown in Appendix G. Potentially noteworthy or unexpected findings were also considered, although none were identified in this study. Finally, the themes formed the basis for addressing the research question in the conclusion and discussion chapter.

3.4   Trustworthiness

There are four elements that assure the trustworthiness of research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Here I will outline how each of these criteria was taken into account in this study.

3.4.1 Credibility

Credibility can be ensured when the research reflects the reality (Ahmed, 2024; Shenton, 2004). One way to enhance credibility is by getting familiar with the organisations before conducting the interviews (Shenton, 2004). This was achieved by studying relevant policy documents and thoroughly examining the roles of organisations within the context of stalking. To further ensure the credibility of findings, triangulation was applied (Ahmed, 2024; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). By including participants from different organisations and thus capturing potentially diverse perspectives, site triangulation was achieved (Shenton, 2004). This was visible in the data as participants from different organisations highlighted the same challenges, while also mentioning organisation-specific experiences. This organisational variation reduces the risk of bias associated with one organisation or culture and enhances the overall credibility and generalisability of the study. I did not make use of member checking, which is a way to confirm interpretations of what the participant shared (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

Peer debriefing can also enhance the credibility of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research, discussions with peer researchers were held regarding the development and refinement of the interview guide. These discussions focused on ensuring that the questions were structured, non-leading and effectively addressing the research topic. This input also helped to develop a timeline prior to the interviews, which was used with participants to construct a timeline of policy changes.

3.4.2 Transferability

The transferability of qualitative research allows the findings to be applied to a different context (Ahmed, 2024; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). This study explained the participant selection and recruitment process in a transparent manner in order to enhance transferability to other contexts. In addition to clarifying how and why participants were approached, information was provided about participants' organisational backgrounds.

Furthermore, the timeline of conducting the interviews was outlined, to indicate when data collection took place and how long this process lasted. In addition, the data collection methods were outlined, for example by describing the settings in which the interviews took place, thereby enhancing transferability. Lastly, the quantity and duration of the interviews were described to further provide context (Shenton, 2004).

3.4.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to obtaining the same results when the study is conducted again in the same way and in the same context (Shenton, 2004). To allow other researchers to repeat the study, transparency is required (Shenton, 2004). This can be ensured by providing detailed information about the methods used and the choices made during the execution of the research. In this chapter, this is addressed by explaining why this particular method of data collection and data analysis was chosen, and how they were carried out. In addition, background information regarding the recruitment process, interview settings and the final sample was provided. This also involved explaining why these choices were made. By documenting these procedures and the methodological choices made, the dependability of the research can be assessed and judged by readers (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.4.4 Confirmability

 Confirmability refers to the extent to which researcher bias may have influenced the findings (Ahmed, 2024). To enhance confirmability, several actions were undertaken. The study discussed methodological choices related to the data collection and analysis. To further enhance confirmability, both the original Dutch quotes and their translations were included in Appendix G. This allows readers to assess the accuracy of the translations and their interpretations, thereby increasing transparency of the analysis and addressing potential bias.

 During the in-depth interviews, the researcher aimed to maintain a neutral approach, refraining from steering participants' responses to ensure they could share their stories as freely as possible. To further ensure neutrality, probing questions from the interview guide were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their answers without guiding their responses. Additionally, the researcher made a conscious effort to avoid expressing personal opinions, in order not to affect participant's stories.

 Further feedback from my supervisor on the results and conclusion helped minimizing the risk of potential bias (Ahmed, 2024). Reflexivity plays a key role in this process, as it helps to

identify and address potential bias (Guba, 1981). The researcher's reflexivity will be addressed in the discussion chapter, alongside the study's limitations.

3.5   Ethics

In addition to ensuring trustworthiness, ethical considerations are an essential part of conducting qualitative research. The following section outlines how ethical principles were applied during each stage of the qualitative research process, based on the framework of Hennink et al. (2020).

In the design phase a key consideration is whether the research offers any benefit to the participants (Hennink et al., 2020). The study addressed this by aiming to provide an overview of policy changes and to contribute to improving collaborative practices between the organisations involved. To further acknowledge participants' contributions and to promote transparency, a summary of the results will be shared with them (Hennink et al., 2020).

Before participants take part in a study, they should be informed about what the study involves and what the purpose of the study is, allowing them to make a well-considered decision about participation (Roose & Meuleman, 2021). This was achieved through an informed consent form (Roose & Meuleman, 2021). Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time, without a reason. Participants were informed that the recorded interviews and transcripts would be securely stored in a protected database and would not be shared with external organisations. The form also included information about how personal data would be handled and when the data would be destroyed. These processes ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. For the informed consent form, see Appendix E.

Before each interview, participants were asked whether they had reviewed the informed consent form and if it was clear to them how their data would be handled. In cases where participants had not received the informed consent form beforehand, such as when initial contact occurred by phone, the interviewer went through the full form with them prior to the interview. The interviewer explained what would happen with the data analysis and storage, and emphasised that the interview was entirely confidential. Before the introductory questions were posed, the participants were asked to provide consent to participate and for permission to record the interview, and then the anonymous consent form was signed by the interviewer (see Appendix F). By letting the interviewer sign the consent form for them, anonymity of participants was ensured.

All interviews conducted in this study were audio-recorded after participants provided consent. The interviews were transcribed, ensuring anonymity by removing all possible identifiers, such as names or locations, from the transcripts. The same precautions were taken when reporting the results, ensuring that the data could not be traced back to individual participants.

4. Results

The results present the perspectives of the interviewed professionals on the approach to stalking taken by the city of Groningen. The results, presented based on the identified themes that relate to the sub-questions, create a basis for forming an answer to the research question: *"How has the approach to stalking developed in the city of Groningen, considering the policies of involved organisations, and what factors played a role in the changes of the approach?"*. The themes were formed deductively, as grounded in the theoretical framework or the interview guide.

4.1   Existing policies

During the in-depth interviews, participants were asked about their organisations' role in tackling stalking. The theme *existing policies* gives insight into how organisations' current policies are shaped and what roles they play in the existing approach towards tackling stalking. This theme also includes current developments and pilot programmes in the approach, as well as highlighting regional differences in the design between Groningen and other areas in the Netherlands. This contributes to our current understanding of how the existing approach to stalking has been designed and implemented in Groningen.

The interviews show that while most organisations have their own policy and methods towards tackling stalking, there are also several cross-organisational policies that facilitate a collaborative approach between organisations. One frequently mentioned approach is the victim device, which monitors the distance between the victim and offender and warns the victim when they approach one another. Another cross-organisational policy is the SASH form, which is a risk assessment tool designed for stalking cases. A third cross-organisational approach is the *stalking table* that's currently developing in Groningen, which aims to facilitate discussion of high-risk cases between organisations.

The police primarily describe their policy in terms of the use of the SASH form. They assess each case to determine whether it is low, medium, or high risk. This classification plays a crucial role in guiding how other organisations, such as *Veilig Thuis*, proceed with the case. In addition, the police have introduced the role of designated officers for specific areas of concern, referred to as *aandachtsfunctionarissen.* Furthermore, the police make use of designated contact persons for victims, typically the neighbourhood police officer or someone with an affiliation to the topic.

The Public Prosecution Service (*OM*) was not interviewed for this study but plays a significant role in the approach to stalking. Other organisations frequently referred to the *OM*, making it possible to outline its role in addressing stalking. The Public Prosecution Service (*OM*) is responsible for conducting the criminal investigation. In addition, a dedicated public prosecutor has been appointed who specialises in stalking, as well as issues concerning intimate partner violence and femicide.

The municipality has a broad range of responsibilities. For example, it is responsible for arranging accommodation services and provides funding to organisations such as *Filomena* and *Veilig Thuis*. One municipal representative illustrated the municipality's broad role in the approach as follows:

> "*We also need to look at, you know, what does our municipality have, what do we, our citizens, have, and what do we actually need to do for that? Well, that includes, among other things, offering training, providing expertise, opening a centre like Filomena, taking part in collaboration networks, but also, indeed, public campaigns. So, in that sense, as a municipality, you have the duty, I think, to take quite a broad approach.*" - P7

The interviews revealed that the municipality's actions are informed by research, developments in society, and the needs of its residents. Based on this, the municipality aims to define its role. For instance, it runs public awareness campaigns and participates in collaborative networks. Since 2016, the municipality has employed intensive case management in situations involving domestic exclusion orders. This approach engages all relevant stakeholders within the system and ensures the development of a coordinated action plan. The Municipality of Groningen works with an Action Plan that outlines the approach towards domestic abuse, under which stalking is categorised. This action plan includes the concrete actions to be taken.

Veilig Thuis only handles cases that fall within the context of relational dynamics. The organisation maintains contact with both victims and perpetrators of stalking, with its primary role focused on supporting the victim. In addition, *Veilig Thuis* works closely with the police, for instance, to coordinate actions directed at the perpetrator.

Slachtofferhulp Nederland provides both emotional and legal support to victims, with a dedicated legal department established for this purpose. One of the organisation's key responsibilities is ensuring the victim's safety. Its approach focuses on recognising signs of

stalking and offering tailored advice based on the victim's specific situation. Furthermore, the organisation has set up internal consultation structures to enable discussion of stalking cases.

Wender provides shelter for women and always works with the development of a safety plan, often in collaboration with partner organisations and the woman herself. This approach places a strong focus on safeguarding the victim's safety, as reflected in the following quote:

"Look, we always work with safety plans, right. So for every woman who comes here, we make a safety plan. When it comes to stalking, yes, we always make sure to create a more comprehensive safety plan. But in those cases, you also focus much more on how you can protect a victim." – P11

Additionally, *Wender* makes use of the 112 app, which enables women to contact the police quickly in case of an emergency. *Filomena*, which operates as part of *Wender*, offers low-threshold support for high-risk domestic violence cases, including those in which stalking is involved. The number of applications at Filomena had become so high that the organisation had to temporarily take a step back.

The probation services primarily provide supervision and advice in cases. They are also responsible for coordinating electronic monitoring. In addition, the probation services monitor both the ankle bracelet and the victim device, tracking situations in which the offender and the victim might approach each other. In cases involving the victim device, it is the probation service that contacts the victim and guides them out of the situation when necessary. While these tasks indicate a clear operational role for the probation services in managing and responding to risks in stalking cases, internal coordination around stalking appears to be less clearly defined. One professional from the probation services reflects on this lack of clarity, raising questions about the internal allocation of responsibilities:

"I wonder, for example, whether we have someone within VNN who holds the portfolio for stalking within probation services. You see that everything is divided. There's someone responsible for repeat offenders and someone for electronic monitoring. I actually don't know whether there is one for stalking as well." – P4

The probation services can only impose measures such as an ankle bracelet after a conviction has been issued by the Public Prosecution Service (*OM*). A representative from probation services described how frictions can arise when the Public Prosecution Service is unable to impose measures because no offence has yet taken place, while the probation services want to take action as they consider the risk to be high.

The Care and Safety House brings together all relevant organisations to address complex cases. An organisation can refer a case to the Care and Safety House when both care and judicial partners are needed to resolve the situation. The Care and Safety House then identifies the parties involved and organises a meeting in which a shared objective is defined. This process facilitates cooperation and information sharing, and based on the joint approach, concrete actions can then be implemented.

4.1.1 Changes in involved organisations

The participants indicated that there is a standard group of partner organisations who collaborate when it comes to stalking. The involved parties have remained largely unchanged. However, a few relatively new parties have joined, including the municipality of Groningen, which previously did not play a prominent role in addressing stalking. In addition, the recently established organisation *Filomena* is a new partner when it comes to stalking. The interviews indicated that its establishment has been very successful and that there is a high demand for such services. Furthermore, the role of the Care and Safety House has become much more prominent. A police representative outlined the organisations involved:

> *"It varies per case. It's not specific; it depends on the case which parties are involved. Of course, the Public Prosecution Service is always involved because they conduct a criminal investigation. So there is always a public prosecutor involved. And because it's a dependency relationship, Veilig Thuis is involved as well. Beyond that, it varies per case who else is involved. It can indeed be anything. And I think this is a good basis. Then, for each case, you look at who else should be involved." –* P5

In recent years, there has been a notable shift towards multi-agency approaches in tackling stalking. Organisations now align their actions more closely and increasingly seek

collaboration with one another, for instance when planning how to approach an offender. Especially victim support services and the police are now better able to reach out to each other and maintain contact. One participant emphasised this shift, noting that people are increasingly recognising the importance of collaboration, as reflected in the following example:

> *"Yes, so then they do benefit from it after all. That it still... Well, and I also think the insight that earlier, you know, you think you can do your work well without that information. And then gradually you realise that you've missed all sorts of things." –* P9

However, participants from probation services and the police noted that the actions they wish to take in stalking cases do not always align with the perspective of the Public Prosecution Service, which creates frustrations and affects their perceived effectiveness of the approach. As mentioned previously, probation services and the police are required to wait for a conviction, thereby making them dependent on the Public Prosecution Service. The lack of coordination between these parties was identified as a recurring issue. This indicates that the alignment of actions between organisations varies across different types of organisations.

4.1.2 Developments towards a victim-centred approach

In Groningen, there is currently significant work underway to establish *stalking tables* within the Care and Safety House, also referred to as *high-risk tables*. Such a table has already been in place for some time in Drenthe, and Friesland has also set up a similar structure. The idea behind these stalking tables is to enable collaborative consultations on complex cases, thereby facilitating inter-organisational collaboration. In this example, a participant indicates the developments surrounding the *stalking table*:

> *"And the stories now are that soon in Groningen it will also become like that. And Groningen, I think, will be somewhere around October, November." –* P1

In addition, another development that most participants mentioned is a pilot project that is currently being run in the Northern Netherlands involving the *victim device*. This device, which is carried by the victim, is linked to the offender's ankle bracelet in order to monitor the distance between the two. Another development that has emerged is the restructuring of the *action consultation process* (actieoverleg). Until now, the Northern Netherlands has operated with an *action consultation* for ages 0 to 18, primarily focused on child abuse. Two participants mentioned that the aim is to transition this to a *0 to 100 action consultation* model, thereby creating space to address a wider range of cases, including stalking.

4.2 Experiences with the approach

The theme *experiences with the approach* explores how the existing approach to stalking is perceived by professionals. It begins by addressing the perceived strengths, followed by a discussion of the challenges within the current approach. These challenges relate to topics such as inter-organisational collaboration, the availability of knowledge, and risk assessment of stalking cases.

4.2.1 Perceived strengths of the approach

The interviews revealed that most professionals identify the same strengths within the existing approach towards stalking, and that the range of perceived strengths is relatively limited. Overall, most professionals perceived the current approach to stalking as effective and are positive towards recent developments. The most frequently mentioned perceived strength was the improvement of coordination or collaboration with other involved organisations. Participants reported that working with other organisations is effective, noting a growing willingness among individuals to work together and to proactively seek contact with one another. One participant described this as follows:

> *"Much better. With certain parties, definitely. Police. We now know where to turn to when things aren't going well. That's all going much more smoothly now."* – P2

Another positive aspect that multiple participants mentioned is the increased attention towards stalking and the expanded knowledge on the topic. Professionals indicated that the increased attention to the subject is accompanied by greater awareness and a shift in how stalking is perceived. Their experience is that stalking is now taken more seriously than in the past. The increased knowledge has helped them to take a different perspective on stalking. Two participants also noted that their understanding of stalking has improved considerably through training they received, which has enhanced the sense of effectiveness of their work. The following two examples illustrate the increased attention and knowledge:

"I don't think there has been much attention to the issue of stalking until recently." – P4

"Yes, those were terms that, well, about a year ago, yes, we had heard of them at some point. But we hadn't developed an approach for them. We didn't really have any real knowledge about them. Yes, and that has changed since then." – P11

However, as will be discussed in the section on challenges, participants also described an ongoing need for improved knowledge on the topic.

Alongside this increased attention and knowledge, participants also highlighted the improved support or treatment for both offenders and victims as a positive aspect of the approach. Particular value was placed on the improved position of stalking victims. As previously mentioned in the subtheme *Changes in involved organisations,* one such example is the establishment of the new organisation *Filomena*, which provides accessible support and shelter for victims, which was not available before. Furthermore, it was noted that there is an increasing focus on a victim-centred approach, where the victim has a central role in the provision of support. For example, the victims' right to speak has been expanded, and a victim advocate can be appointed immediately. The following perspective was shared by a participant:

"Well, raising more awareness about victims of stalking is definitely a positive, positive thing." – P6

However, professionals from victim support services and the municipality also reported ongoing concerns about victim safety, for example when the victim does not want to file a report to the police. This can restrict the protective measures that professionals are able to take to safeguard the victim. In addition, two professionals working in victim support services highlighted the unfairness of the victim's freedom being restricted, as they are advised to stay at home or even move houses to avoid the stalker. One participant described this victim role as follows:

"Yeah, well, you know, it's sometimes really frustrating that a victim is truly a victim of a stalker. The stalker is out and about, and the victim is stuck at home and doesn't dare to go anywhere. Yeah, and sometimes it's like the world's upside down, that you end up saying the person being stalked has to move, right, to a secret address. Yeah. Well, that doesn't feel right." – P2

4.2.2 Challenges

Compared to the perceived strengths, participants identified significantly more challenges. While the approach was perceived as effective, some participants also emphasised that there is still need for improvement.

The most frequently cited issue concerns collaboration between different organisations. Organisations often struggle to connect with one another or engage the wrong stakeholders. Participants describe how, in some cases, key organisations fail to attend meetings, creating obstacles for others trying to work together effectively. Participant 2 stated that this can also hinder the ability to provide adequate support to the victim. The following quote illustrates an example of such challenges in collaboration:

"But yes, then it also immediately stops, or something, then the probation service can't do anything anymore. But it's nice, isn't it, how that collaboration is now being

> *sought, but that due to the limitations of how it's currently arranged, it can't always be done. And so, well, that still needs to be further developed." -* P12

A major related issue is the sharing of information between organisations, thereby hindering collaboration. The interviews indicated that this challenge largely stems from the fact that the information involved is often sensitive and subject to privacy regulations, which limits the ability to share it freely. Despite the existence of formal agreements on information sharing, many professionals are still hesitant to share information. In particular, professionals working in victim support services tend to be cautious about sharing case information. In contrast, professionals from probation services indicated that they are more open to sharing information. As a result, participants reported that working together on cases becomes particularly complex. The following example illustrates this challenge:

> *"So that sometimes holds back developments as well. When we work together in the chain, well, people can't access the police system. So sharing information is also sometimes a complicated matter. So things like agreements or cooperation, and what you can and can't share. Yes, that, well, that is quite a tricky point." –* P3

The interviews indicated that another barrier to effectively addressing stalking is the issue of capacity, which affects various organisations but is particularly evident within the police force. This results in cases not being followed up or, for example, certain parties failing to participate in meetings. Two participants also noted that capacity issues limit opportunities for collaboration or the use of certain resources, due to a staff shortage. The following quote illustrates this:

> *"And it's not just a button, but you also need to have the guidance and follow-up in place. Well, the police don't have an overflow of manpower. We don't either, right? We're also constantly under pressure. So, it has mainly been a financial reason not to do it." –* P11

In addition to these cooperation-related challenges, many professionals expressed a need for greater knowledge about stalking. This primarily concerns the knowledge held by professionals, although Participant 7 also emphasised the importance of raising public awareness and sharing knowledge more broadly across society, to improve the recognition of stalking. One issue frequently mentioned in relation to knowledge is the high turnover of staff within organisations, which results in a significant loss of valuable expertise. This gap in knowledge and capacity is strongly felt by those working in the field. As Participant 4 explained:

> *"Because we are very vulnerable. If I look at stalking now, the only person I can think of is myself. And that's not to make myself seem important. But there just needs to be a lot more of them. That's what we keep asking for."* – P4

Finally, the outcomes of risk assessments are not always perceived as accurate when compared to the actual severity of a situation. Some organisations use risk assessment tools other than the SASH form, which can lead to different outcomes. Participants explained that this makes their work more difficult, for instance when the SASH categorises a case as a crisis, while their own assessment suggests otherwise. One participant noted that this may result in working on a case that does not require immediate priority. A participant from victim support services stated the following on risk assessment:

> *"And that's not, that doesn't always align with what the police associates with the SASH."* – P6

Another issue in the risk assessment process concerns the follow-up actions that should be taken when a case scores high on the SASH form. In practice, appropriate follow-up is not always ensured. For instance, one participant noted that high-risk cases should be referred to the Care and Safety House, but this does not consistently happen. Additionally, certain actions are recommended based on the SASH outcome, but in practice these measures appear

to be ineffective, for example when different types of offenders are taken into consideration. A police representative commented as follows:

> *"For example, the SASH often leads to a stop conversation. (...) There are certain types of offenders for whom the stop conversation actually has the opposite effect." –* P3

Three participants, from either victim support services or probation services, emphasised the implementation of the SASH at the police as a key development in effectively addressing stalking, as it helps determine the urgency of a case and guides the subsequent approach for all organisations involved in the case. However, a police representative pointed out that improvements are needed to enhance the accuracy of the SASH. This suggests that views on the effectiveness of the SASH vary across organisations.

4.3   Reasons for policy changes

During the in-depth interviews, participants were asked to elaborate on the underlying factors behind policy changes. Participants identified various factors that have contributed to policy changes in the past. This helps to understand how policy shifts occur and may even support the prediction of future changes. The most frequently mentioned underlying reason for policy changes is the need for improved collaboration between organisations, or for organisations to become more familiar with each other. This relates to the theme *experiences*, as the most frequent mentioned barrier was the collaboration between organisations. For this reason, certain pilot projects were also initiated to improve collaboration between the various stakeholders. The following example illustrates this:

> *"Yes, I think that's really about better cooperation from the start. Also, the need to have a place where you can discuss complicated situations together." –* P6

Additionally, several participants indicated that another important driver for policy development is the influence of prior experience with stalking, as well as the impact of specific stalking cases or incidents. These often receive significant media attention, which in

turn creates pressure to take action. One case that had a particularly strong influence on policies was the 2018 case of Hümeyra in Rotterdam. In 2019, the inspection report emerged as a result of this case, and many participants described the report as confronting. The report clearly revealed where existing practices were lacking and highlighted the gaps in the current system. In every conducted interview for this study, this case or the resulting inspection report was mentioned as one of the main driving forces behind policy changes. It raised significant awareness and led stakeholders to realise that their approach required substantial improvement. Following the publication of this inspection report, significant changes were made to the procedures surrounding stalking. For example, the *kenniskring stalking* was established, and the procedures for completing the SASH form by the police were refined. The following example illustrates the influence of stalking cases on policies:

> *"We've had well-known Dutch people who have experienced stalking. Yes, that gets into the media, there's some publicity. So that also changes the way it's viewed. So I think that has definitely played a role in where we are now. Are we there together? No, not by a long shot."* – P11

As discussed under the theme *perceived strengths of the approach*, one notable improvement is the enhanced position of victims of stalking. This improvement reflects a broader motivation behind many policy changes. The main aim is to better meet the needs of victims and to enhance their safety. Often, there is no single specific reason for a development; rather, the central objective is to provide better support to victims, as expressed by one of the participants:

> *"I think from the victim's point of view, that's why that law was introduced. There was, of course, stalking, but it wasn't called that. It didn't have a name back then, yes. And many victims fell victim to that. So I think from the victim's perspective, that's why that law came about. And that you have something in hand to tackle those who stalk."* – P2

Other reasons participants mentioned mostly relate to practical considerations such as financial resources or the geographical layout of the northern Netherlands. For example, the different infrastructure in this region compared to more urban areas was cited as a reason for

launching the victim device pilot in the northern Netherlands. A participant suggested this as follows:

> *"They started that pilot there and they found that it works very well. And then they want to see if we can also test it in other regions. And look, Rotterdam has a different infrastructure, so that's why we're doing it at the Northern Netherlands level. Because the victim and the person with the ankle monitor must live in the same region. And then you have quite a large area in the Northern Netherlands. Because you need case material."* – P9

4.4 Policy recommendations

As participants discussed the challenges they encountered in the current approach, they were also asked for recommendations for the approach towards tackling stalking. Most of these proposals align with the issues they previously identified. One area that was not often mentioned as a challenge, but was highlighted as needing improvement, is the approach towards offenders. The recommendations to improve the approach towards offenders differ considerably among participants. For example, one participant suggested imposing harsher penalties to make the consequences more severe. Another participant pointed out the need to speed up the sentencing process to deliver justice more quickly. Additionally, two participants recommended improving the way offenders and cases are assessed. For example, they suggested distinguishing between different types of offenders, so that responses can be better tailored to the situation. A quote from a policymaker illustrates this proposal:

> *"I think it's good to really look specifically at what the motives actually are. So that you can properly give shape to offender support and the approach to offenders. That you look at what exactly is needed for that. So yes, that would be something which I think, is really good."* – P7

A recurring proposal is to strengthen the expertise of professionals who work on stalking cases. This relates to the subtheme *challenges*, where the lack of knowledge among professionals was frequently mentioned as a barrier to effectively addressing stalking. Many participants expressed a need to improve this knowledge in order to enhance the overall response to stalking. Professionals specifically recommended introducing training sessions or

holding more workshops in the field to improve expertise and understanding of the topic. Another related recommendation is to designate a single specialist within an organisation, to whom colleagues can turn to for consultation as this seems more feasible than requiring all professionals to develop specialist expertise in the field of stalking. One participant addressed the need for expertise as follows:

> *"Yes, I think improving expertise plays an important role at the municipality, but from every organisation, improving expertise and, in my opinion, also very clearly making sure that their own systems are well organised."* – P1

Reflecting the most commonly mentioned challenges under the theme *experiences*, participants made several recommendations to improve information sharing and overall collaboration between organisations. Some participants expressed the view that professionals should not always be strictly guided by privacy regulations when such rules hinder the provision of appropriate support to the victim. In their opinion, the victim's best interests should, in certain situations, outweigh formal regulations. By sharing information in a timely manner, a joint plan can be developed to address the situation. One participant recommended that all organisations work within the same system in order to promote information-sharing and, consequently, improve collaboration. This is illustrated in the following example:

> *"Yes, I think it would sometimes be easier if we could all work with the same system. Yes, but I also understand that there are some issues, in terms of privacy, but it would be really nice. Yes, it would save a lot of time, and I think, for the victim, it would be really good. That we are not all, well, so many parties involved, and if they have to tell the same story."* – P2

Participants also recommended implementing the pilot for the victim device, the *stalking table*, or the imposition of a restraining order, as these are experienced as effective developments. These pilots are not seen as just effective in enhancing the victim's safety, but also in facilitating improved collaboration between organisations. None of the participants expressed opposition to the implementation or continuation of these pilots. Reflecting this support, one policymaker suggested the implementation of the victim device:

> *"Well, like I said, the victim device also helps offenders, you know. To keep track of the restraining order. So that some time can pass, which hopefully cools down emotions and wounded pride and, well, those kinds of things. Well, you hope that decreases. So yes, I hope we can at least continue with the victim device."* – P8

In addition, professionals from victim support services, police, and policymakers all expressed the wish for victim support services to be involved earlier in the handling of a case. This is seen as a way to enable more preventive action, allowing for the early development of plans to ensure a timely response when needed. One participant also suggested to have victim support services get more involved in the offenders' approach, for example by playing a bigger role in the pilot of the victim device. However, a professional from a victim support service stated that they do not maintain long-term contact with offenders, and therefore do not consider this to be feasible. This perspective differs from that of a police representative, who suggested the earlier involvement of victim support services, as highlighted by the following quote:

> *"The collaboration regarding the entire approach to imposing restraining orders. Getting more involved at an earlier stage. So also having the victim support services work more at the front end; that's one."* – P3

5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this research was to gain insights into how the approach to stalking has developed in the city of Groningen and to understand what factors have influenced these developments. This study shows that the approach has shifted toward a more victim-centred approach, with policies more focused on providing support and enhancing victim safety. These changes appear to have been driven by experiences with stalking incidents and a growing recognition for the need of collaboration in responding to stalking. However, the results also indicate that further steps are needed to enhance inter-organisational collaboration and improve the overall response to stalking. Particular attention is given to challenges in information sharing, professional capacity and knowledge, and the use of different risk assessment tools. For each of these challenges, practical recommendations are presented to help strengthen the collaboration between organisations. The limitations of the study will then be discussed, which is followed by a discussion of the researcher's reflexivity. Finally, recommendations for future research are presented.

5.1 Groningen's current approach

The findings on the theme *Existing policies* show that while most policies largely align with national frameworks, Groningen also adapts practices to address regional needs. For example, the establishment of an organisation such as *Filomena* illustrates local initiative and flexibility in implementing frameworks into practical low-threshold support services. Whereas previous research has mainly focused on evaluations of national policies, this study adds new insights into how regional adaptations can contribute to meeting victims' needs. The large number of applications received by *Filomena* found in this study, illustrates the high demand for such services, suggesting that similar support services could be beneficial in other regions across the Netherlands.

  The in-depth interviews further indicated that each organisation is responsible for implementing its own policies on stalking. This could explain the lack of coordination in practices and actions across organisations in addressing stalking, which was experienced throughout all organisational types. For policies to effectively tackle a social problem, it is however crucial that these organisational work processes align with each other (Van Alphen et al., 2019). The increasing role of the *Zorg- en Veiligheidshuis* (Care and Safety house) highlights the need for coordination in addressing stalking. By ensuring that the involved

parties gain a better understanding of each other and are familiar with each other's practices and policies, the *Zorg- en Veiligheidshuis* facilitates better coordination. This coordination is important as it helps to ensure that the needed organisations are involved at the right time, avoiding delays in intervening and ensuring that crucial information is not overlooked. This growing recognition of the importance of coordination indicates that addressing stalking collaboratively is increasingly valued in Groningen. This finding aligns with existing literature on inter-organisational collaboration, which highlights that this collaboration is essential for addressing complex social problems (Van Alphen et al., 2019).

Alongside these issues in coordination, some organisations also face challenges in their internal policies. One representative from the probation services noted the absence of clear policy on stalking within their organisation. This concern may explain their low perceived effectiveness of the current approach. Furthermore, a lack of role clarity can hinder collaboration with other organisations, as it is not clear what is expected from each organisation (Raišienė et al., 2019). This finding highlights how the lack of well-informed guidelines can create uncertainty about organisational roles and gives implications for making sure internal policies are in order.

5.2 Mixed perceptions of the approach

While most professionals expressed a generally positive view of the current approach, several interviews also indicated that there is still considerable progress to be made. The variations in perceptions suggest that the implementation and perceived effectiveness of policies differ between organisations. Professionals from victim support services highlighted notable improvements in the support available to victims, whereas a representative from the probation services questioned the overall effectiveness of the approach. These findings may suggest that the victim-oriented responses have developed more substantially as opposed to interventions targeting offenders, thereby exploring a potential gap in policy and literature. This imbalance may reduce the overall coherence of the approach, as offender interventions are needed to prevent harm and recidivism. Overall, these mixed perceptions indicate that while significant improvement has been made, further development is needed to strengthen the consistency and perceived effectiveness among all organisations. The barriers outlined below may help explain these differences in perceived effectiveness across organisations.

5.3 Barriers in inter-organisational collaboration

Privacy concerns in information sharing

The in-depth interviews showed that professionals from all organisational types experience issues with inter-organisational collaboration. An often-mentioned barrier in collaboration between organisations is the issue of information sharing, which is a challenge frequently highlighted in literature when it comes to inter-organisational collaboration (Cleaver et al., 2019). Stalking cases often involve highly sensitive information, making the protection of the victim's privacy a very important aspect. Ensuring this privacy can, however, sometimes hinder the information sharing between organisations, because professionals have to follow certain guidelines or policies (Yang & Maxwell, 2011). This makes professionals cautious about oversharing, and they therefore limit the amount of information they share. This finding aligns with literature that similarly highlights how confidentially concerns hinder information exchange (Hill, 2001). This barrier should, however, not be necessary, as the interviews indicated that new regulations should ensure that professionals can share more case-related data with each other. This carefulness in information sharing may reflect uncertainty in role distribution, as suggested in the literature, where role definitions are considered crucial for effective inter-organisational collaboration (Gil-Garcia et al., 2019; Raišienė et al., 2019). Professionals may thus be unsure about what information should be shared with which organisation, highlighting the importance of clarifying role distribution.

As these problems with information sharing were felt in almost every organisation, many professionals recommended improving the information sharing and overall collaboration between organisations. One participant specifically suggested implementing one digital system across all organisations to ensure that case information is accessible to all involved organisations. This aligns with existing literature, which suggests that implementing a shared digital system can facilitate information sharing across organisations (Atkinson et al., 2002; Casey et al., 2016). However, implementing such a system would require strict regulations in order to ensure protection of personal data, and all organisations would need to reach consensus.

Capacity and knowledge gaps

While information sharing remains a barrier, the findings also indicate that many professionals have limited knowledge of stalking, and several interviews indicated a desire

for more training and expertise on the topic. It is not just the knowledge that professionals possess but also the availability of sufficient personnel that appears to hinder responses to stalking. Capacity issues at the Public Prosecution service, the court and the police are a known constraint in addressing stalking (Van der Aa, 2010). Findings from this study indicate that personnel shortages affect all types of organisations involved, but are most evident within the police. Limited knowledge and capacity issues can, for example, affect the recognition of stalking cases and delay the delivery of adequate support. From an organisational capacity view, training professionals on stalking can strengthen the implementation of stalking policies through improved knowledge and skills (Krishnaveni & Sujatha, 2013). This not only improves internal processes, but also has broader effects on the services provided to victims. These findings thus highlight that stalking policies alone are not sufficient; organisations also require the availability of personnel and knowledge to implement them effectively. Several professionals made the recommendation to invest in training sessions or workshops on the topic of stalking, with the goal of increasing knowledge under professionals. Research showed that specifically the police and victim support services require more training to better address stalking (Dreke et al., 2020). Existing literature identifies a lack of knowledge within the police force in connecting separate incidents to identify a stalking case, which could be addressed through training (Dreke et al., 2020). However, this issue did not emerge in this study, which may suggest an improvement in the recognition of stalking cases within the police force. Among victim support services, there is a lack of knowledge identified in recognizing stalking as a standalone crime, rather than as a part of domestic abuse (Dreke et al., 2020). This is consistent with this study's findings, which indicate that a lack of knowledge on recognising stalking remains a challenge within victim support services. By training professionals on the identification of stalking behaviours, more appropriate follow-up measures can be taken to ensure the victim's safety. Therefore, implementing such training sessions across organisations, and potentially nationwide, could ensure a more consistent and effective approach to addressing stalking cases.

Inconsistencies in risk assessment

The in-depth interviews also showed difficulties in risk assessment of stalking cases, as the tools used for risk assessment vary for some organisations. The findings show that the police make use of the SASH to determine the risk level, which is consistent with national policies on risk assessment (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). However, the probation services

and some victim support services apply their own tools to determine the level of risk for a specific stalking case. As a result, professionals from different organisations encounter inconsistencies in risk assessments. Having a well-structured risk assessment process is crucial, as the consequences of inadequate risk assessment can have serious consequences (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2019). This implies that there is a need to ensure compatibility between the tools used by different organisations to help ensure that risk levels are assessed consistently. Participants did not make any specific recommendations for aligning these risk assessment tools, which may reflect the difficulty in aligning different organisational practices. However, ensuring compatibility can reduce inconsistencies across organisations and ensure that the right follow-up steps are taken consistent with the correct risk level, thereby improving efficiency and coordination in addressing stalking cases. To ensure such compatibility, organisations could collaborate to develop a shared framework for a risk assessment tool.

5.4 Policy responses to challenges and incidents

The interviews indicated that the need for improved collaboration is an important trigger for policy changes in the approach. This implies that the involved parties acknowledge the importance of collaboration in addressing stalking, which is consistent with the findings under the theme *Existing policies,* which also reflected policies increasingly relying on collaboration. This finding is consistent with literature, which emphasises that inter-organisational collaboration is a crucial component in effectively addressing stalking (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024; Raišienė et al., 2019). This finding not only shows that collaboration is valued by professionals, but also serves as a key trigger for policy changes, highlighting the influences from everyday practices on policy development.

In addition, experiences with stalking cases or incidents also seem to have a significant influence on policy development. Every interview mentioned the 2019 Inspection report following the case of Hümeyra, illustrating how high-impact incidents can drive change when existing measures prove inadequate to protect those affected. These findings highlight the reactive nature of the current policy responses, and also underscore the potential benefits of more preventive approaches. By implementing more measures at earlier stages, risks can be reduced and fatal outcomes can potentially be avoided.

5.5 General conclusion

Although professionals were generally positive about the current approach, several concrete aspects can be further improved to further strengthen it. These improvements include both internal processes within organisations, and foremost, the collaboration between them. There is a strong need for enhanced information exchange and improved communication between organisations, ensuring that necessary information is available for each case and that organisations can better complement one another.

5.6 Limitations

When interpreting the results, it is important to note that this study has several limitations. The first limitation considers the heterogeneity of the study population. This study offers a broad range of perspectives by including professionals from many different organisations, which allows for a broad range of information (Guba, 1981). However, in most cases only one person was interviewed per organisation, and the findings may reflect individual experiences that are not necessarily shared by colleagues within the same organisation. Due to time constraints, participants' colleagues were not interviewed or consulted to verify whether they shared these views. This can reduce the transferability of results (Guba, 1981). For the results to better represent the organisations, interviewing multiple professionals at each organisation would contribute to gaining a broader view of how stalking policies are experienced at each organisation and increase the study's credibility.

Alongside this limited transferability, it is difficult to compare how the city of Groningen has implemented its policies compared to other cities. As most of the policies are based on national frameworks, the differences mainly lie in the practical implementation of these policies. Whereas this study explores how the city of Groningen addresses stalking, more research is needed on other cities' policies to be able to compare these practices and draw conclusions on differences or similarities.

Another limitation of this study is that I had very limited experience conducting interviews. I noticed that I was nervous at the beginning of the interviews, which made it difficult to fully absorb the answers and ask relevant follow-up questions. I also found it difficult at times to steer the interviews in the right direction. However, I believe that as the data collection phase progressed, I improved my interviewing skills and I was able to ask more critical and in-depth questions. For instance, I noticed that the interviews started to flow

more naturally and the data included deeper discussions of the key themes. As a result, I feel that the later interviews resulted in richer data for this study than the first interviews I conducted (Olson & Peytchev, 2007). This may have biased the findings as my increasing experience as an interviewer may have led to more in-depth data in the later interviews, while the earlier ones may have underrepresented certain aspects of the data. As a result, the findings may not represent all participants consistently, which should be considered when interpreting the results.

The last limitation of this study is that there was only one method of data collection used, which were in-depth interviews. As a result, no methodological triangulation could be applied, meaning that no additional data sources or methods were applied to verify the data (Guba, 1981). Moreover, no combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to enhance credibility (Morse, 1991). This means that the results of this study are solely based on the conducted in-depth interviews and therefore rely on the participants' experiences. Additionally, due to time constraints, member checking was not conducted in this study, which means participants were not able to verify transcripts or interpretations. This may have limited the study's credibility, as the researcher's interpretations of the data have not been verified by the study population (Guba, 1981). This may bias findings as the researcher's interpretation could differ from the participants' interpretation of their experiences. Therefore, for future research a recommendation would be to conduct member checking, in order to increase credibility (Guba, 1981).

5.6.1 Researcher's reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the researcher's critical awareness of their position and how it may influence the research (Berger, 2013). It is important to reflect on this in order to minimise potential bias. I conducted all interviews myself and was also responsible for coding and interpreting the data, considering my influence on the research process. However, all the chapters were reviewed and provided with feedback by my supervisor. As I had no personal experience with the topic, the research could be approached with an open attitude, without prior expectations or preconceptions. This reflexive awareness shaped the way I carried out the interviews and interacted with participants.

Prior to the interviews, I used small talk to create an open and comfortable atmosphere for the participants. In order to maintain as neutral a stance as possible during the interviews, I refrained from expressing personal opinions and limited my reactions to

participants' stories. After each interview, I asked the participants how they experienced the questions that they were asked. Several participants indicated that they enjoyed talking about their work and appreciated the opportunity to reflect on it from a different perspective.

5.7 Recommendations for future research

In addition to the recommendations made by participants, several recommendations for future research are proposed. Given the insights of this study, it is recommended that future research includes in-depth interviews with the Public Prosecution Service (*Openbaar Ministerie*). Several participants suggested involving the Public Prosecution Service, but it was unfortunately not possible to conduct an interview with them in the current study. Although the research question could largely be addressed with the perspectives of other professionals, the absence of the Public Prosecution Service's input represents a limitation. The Public Prosecution Service plays a crucial role in coordinating the criminal justice response to stalking, assessing risk, and maintaining contact with multiple chain partners. Without their perspective, certain aspects of decision-making, the approach towards offenders, and inter-organisational collaboration may be underrepresented. Moreover, including the Public Prosecution Service could offer a national perspective, showing how Groningen's local practices and policies fit within the broader Dutch policy framework. Incorporating this perspective in future studies would therefore offer a more comprehensive understanding of both local and national factors influencing the response to stalking.

Another recommendation for future research is to include victims' perspectives on the approach towards stalking. For this study only professionals were interviewed, which causes this study to only present professionals' views on the policies. In future research, conducting in-depth interviews with victims could provide valuable insight into how stalking victims experience current policies. Other challenges or recommendations might emerge from their perspectives, as compared to those mentioned by professionals. In addition, future research could benefit from including document analysis, for example, of organisational protocols on stalking. This type of documentation could complement the interview data and provide a more comprehensive understanding of Groningen's stalking policies.

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Appendix A: Use of AI

In this study, I made use of ChatGPT to assist with writing processes. This form of Artificial Intelligence was used solely for translating text from Dutch into English and to address grammatical issues. Most sections were composed directly in English, while others required assistance from ChatGPT to achieve a formal and representative English translation. I also consulted ChatGPT for suggestions for a title, which I then used as inspiration. However, I ultimately developed the final title myself, as I felt that the suggested titles did not adequately reflect the content of the thesis. I'm aware of the environmental impact the use of AI has and therefore tried to limit my use as much as I could. No theoretical or analytic work was outsourced to AI. All interpretation and argumentation were done by the researcher, thereby ensuring that critical thinking processes were not outsourced to AI.

Appendix B: Chronological overview of policy changes

2000-2010

Introduction of the stalking law

On July 12, 2000, the Dutch stalking law was introduced. Under this law, a stalker can be sentenced to a maximum prison term of three years. Additionally, a fine of up to 22,500 euros can be imposed. If the stalker has psychological disorders, compulsory treatment (TBS) can be mandatory. However, in most cases, the stalkers are given a restraining order or a community service sentence (Malsch, 2020).

Article 285b of the Dutch Criminal Code consists of two paragraphs and it reads as follows:

1. He who unlawfully, systematically, intentionally intrudes upon another person's privacy with the aim of forcing that person to do something, to refrain from doing something, to tolerate something or to instil fear in that person, is liable, as guilty of stalking, to a prison term with a maximum of three years or a fine of the fourth category.

2. Prosecution can only occur on the complaint of the person against whom the crime was committed.

In order to prosecute stalkers, the victim must file a report with the police. Statistics from the CBS show that only 22 percent of all victims reported the stalking to the police (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2024). This means that in most cases the stalkers cannot be prosecuted. For most victims, the primary reasons for not reporting the stalker are either the belief that it wouldn't help (33%) or that they didn't consider it important enough to report or didn't think about reporting at all (23%) (Adfor, n.d.). Victims who do report their stalker to the police, mostly aim to stop the stalking or to prevent further victims (Adfor, n.d.).

Legislative Purpose and Background

Before the introduction of the law, stalking was not yet considered a criminal offense. Several incidents had occurred where the police were unable to intervene under the existing legal framework, as the behaviour was not yet classified as a criminal act (*Kamerstuk 1997-1998, 25768 Nr. 5: Voorstel van Wet Dittrich e.a. Tot Wijz. Wetb.v.Strafrecht en Wetb.v. Strafvordering (Strafbaarstelling van Belaging); Gewijzigde Memorie van Toelichting*, z.d.). This made it difficult to provide adequate protection and support to the victims. Another motive for the introduction of the law was a series of high-profile incidents that had received significant media attention beforehand.

The Anti-Stalking Foundation (*Stichting Anti Stalking*), founded in 1996, has actively worked to raise more public awareness about stalking (*Initiatiefvoorstel-Dittrich, Swildens-Rozendaal en O.P.G. Vos Inzake Strafbaarstelling van Belaging (25.768)*, n.d.). In 1997, the foundation organised a symposium emphasizing the importance of criminal prosecution of

stalking (*Kamerstuk 1997-1998, 25768 Nr. 5: Voorstel van Wet Dittrich e.a. Tot Wijz. Wetb.v.Strafrecht en Wetb.v. Strafvordering (Strafbaarstelling van Belaging); Gewijzigde Memorie van Toelichting*, z.d.). Three members of the Dutch House of Representatives submitted a legislative proposal, with the goal to address perpetrator's behaviour and enhance the protection of victims. This proposal ultimately led to the enactment of the anti-stalking law.

Early Police Programs Addressing Domestic Violence

The national program *"Domestic Violence and the Role of the Police – United by Ambition* ('Huiselijk Geweld en de Politietaak, Ambitie verbindt')*"* ran from 2003 to 2007. It was followed by a second phase from 2008 to 2011, titled *"A Matter of Perseverance."*('Een kwestie van lange adem'). Both initiatives focused primarily on prevention and aimed to strengthen the police's role in addressing domestic violence in a proactive and coordinated way.

In the 2003 policy agreement 'Participation, more work and fewer rules' ('Meedoen, meer werk en minder regels') of May 16, 2003, the government expressed its commitment to effectively addressing domestic violence (*Kamerstuk 28637, Nr. 19 | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2003). This agreement was mostly focused on repression, specifically harsher penalties for repeat offenders and increased prison capacity.

Informatieknooppunt Huiselijk Geweld (IHG)

The Informatieknooppunt Huiselijk Geweld (IHG), or Domestic Violence Information Hub, was established to create an efficient and effective way of collaboration for professionals working on domestic violence cases. In 2007, the IHG was tested in various regions, including Groningen. However, it turned out that it did not result in the desired cooperation. Many professionals did not use it, due to implementation issues and the fact that it created additional work. As a result, the IHG was considered ineffective and was never fully put into operation.

Temporary domestic exclusion order (*Wet tijdelijk huisverbod*)

As of January 1, 2009, this law allows a mayor to issue a temporary ban preventing someone from entering their home if there is a threat or risk of domestic violence. The order lasts for ten days and is intended to offer immediate protection to potential victims by removing the potential perpetrator from the shared living space.

Purpose and background

The main aim of the Dutch measure is to prevent domestic violence and protect the safety of individuals involved. Countries like Austria and Germany had already implemented similar laws, and their experiences showed generally positive outcomes—victims, in particular,

reported feeling safer (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2019a). Importantly, this law enables authorities to intervene preventively in high-risk situations, even when no crime has yet occurred, with the aim of protecting the well-being and safety of those at risk.

2010-2015

Domestic Violence Action Plan up to 2011 – The Next Phase
In 2008, the "Domestic Violence Action Plan up to 2011 – The Next Phase" (*Plan van aanpak Huiselijk Geweld tot 2011 – De volgende fase*) introduced a three-year program with concrete actions to address domestic violence. The plan was developed in response to the large scale of the problem: each year, a significant number of people in the Netherlands become victims of domestic violence, sometimes with fatal consequences. Only a small percentage of these victims report the abuse to the police.

One key measure included in the plan is that the Public Prosecution Service will include a specific registration code for cases of domestic abuse in its new GPS system, which is gradually replacing the current Kompas system. This is to ensure that domestic violence cases are clearly marked and trackable within the criminal justice system.

Victim Rights Strengthening Act (Wet versterking positie slachtoffers)

The Victim Rights Strengthening Act (*Wet versterking positie slachtoffers)*, which came into effect on January 1, 2011, also applied to victims of domestic violence, including stalking. It granted victims an extended right to speak during court proceedings, as well as the right to information and compensation. The law reflected a growing recognition of victims' rights and the need for emotional processing and recovery among victims.

Rechterlijk gebieds- of contactverbod

The court may impose an area ban, contact ban, or reporting obligation on the defendant for a maximum duration of two years (*Kamerstuk 32551, Nr. 2 | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2010). If the imposed measure is violated, the court may impose substitute imprisonment for a maximum of six months (*Kamerstuk 32551, Nr. 2 | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2010). The purpose of this law is to protect public safety and contribute to crime reduction (*Kamerstuk 32551, Nr. 4 | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2010).

2015-2020

Establishment of Veilig Thuis

Since 2015, the Domestic Violence Support Centers (Steunpunten Huiselijk Geweld) and the Reporting Centers for Child Abuse (Meldpunten Kindermishandeling) have merged to form Veilig Thuis. The purpose of this merger was to create a stronger organisation by bringing together resources in one central location.

Municipal coordination role

Since the Social Support Act (Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning) came into effect in 2015, municipalities have held the coordination role when it comes to organising and coordinating care and support services in cases of domestic violence. They are responsible for arranging emergency shelters and for the establishment of Veilig Thuis locations within their region.

Unlimited speaking rights for victims

Since July 1, 2016, victims of serious crimes, including stalking, have been granted unlimited speaking rights in court (De Rechtspraak, 2016). This change followed a recommendation by the Council for the Judiciary (Dutch: *Raad voor de rechtspraak*), aimed at strengthening the position of victims during criminal proceedings (De Rechtspraak, 2016). Evaluations of the existing form of speaking rights revealed that it was insufficient for certain victims (Kragting et al., 2022). In addition, there were notable inconsistencies between different courts in how the speaking right was applied. While some courts allowed victims to speak more freely, others imposed stricter limitations, leading to unequal treatment between victims (Kragting et al., 2022).

Improving cooperation between justice organisations and Veilig Thuis

In 2016, the National Care/Justice Network on Domestic Violence and Child Abuse (*Landelijk Netwerk zorg/straf Huiselijk Geweld en Kindermishandeling*) was established with the aim of improving cooperation between judicial organisations and Veilig Thuis. In 2018, the Safety First Approach (*Aanpak Veiligheid Voorop!*) was introduced. This approach is a collaboration between the Public Prosecution Service, the police, *3RO* (three Probation Services), the Child Protection Board (*Raad voor de Kinderbescherming)*, and *Veilig Thuis*. This approach was introduced because experience and research have shown that criminal prosecution alone often does not effectively end the cycle of violence (*Kamerstuk 28345, Nr. 269 | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2023). Likewise, offering support only to victims and those directly around them typically falls short (*Kamerstuk 28345, Nr. 269 | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2023). Therefore, they have introduced the 'Safety First Approach' to establish a coordinated strategy aimed at all parties involved, with the goal of minimizing harm.

Opening of Women's shelter Het Kopland in Groningen (Wender)

The shelter was opened in March 2018. In addition to providing accommodation, it also offers guidance and support for the women staying there. In 2021, it continued together with the organisation Zienn under the name Wender.

Program *Geweld hoort nergens thuis* (2018-2021)

The program "Violence has no place at home" was focused on reducing domestic abuse and child abuse. This program included several concrete developments for stalking within the police force. For instance, police officers can take part in an e-learning course, and knowledge clips on ex-partner stalking and conducting intervention conversations ("stopgesprek") have been made available.

Enhancing identification of stalking cases

In 2019, the Ministry of Justice and Security publicly responded to the inspection report on the stalking by Bekir E., who murdered 16-year-old Hümeyra. This tragic case served as a catalyst for policy change. In its response, the Ministry outlined a number of concrete measures aimed at improving the approach to stalking and other forms of domestic violence. To enhance the identification of stalking cases, the following actions were proposed (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2019):

- When stalking is reported, the SASH must always be completed.

- Since 2019, all police personnel have been trained in the use of the SASH instrument.

- A single, uniform working method has been developed and shared with all Zorg- en Veiligheidshuizen and Veilig Thuis organisations.

In addition, the police are required to appoint a case coordinator (*casusregisseur*) for each case, ensuring that one person is responsible for managing the case and gathering information (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2019).

In 2021, a parliamentary letter was published reflecting on the development of these measures (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2021). This reflection revealed that not all Care and Safety Houses and Veilig Thuis organisations are yet applying the prescribed approach.

2020-2025

Enhanced recidivism policy

On March 1, 2021, a new sentencing guideline for stalking was introduced. This guideline includes harsher penalties in cases of recidivism (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2022). If someone has previously been convicted of stalking, any subsequent offense will result in a more severe sentence. For example, for a period of up to three months of repeated calling, texting, or emailing, the guideline prescribes a community service sentence of 80 to 120

hours, along with a one-month suspended prison sentence. If the offender has one prior conviction for stalking, the punishment increases to one to two months of imprisonment, with one month suspended (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2022).

Expanding victim's rights act (Wus)

In 2024, the Victims' Rights Expansion Act was introduced, strengthening the position of victims during the criminal justice process. The law ensures that victims have the right to speak during various types of court hearings. It also requires suspects of serious crimes — including stalking — to appear in court. Some exceptions to this obligation may apply, for instance, when the victim is severely traumatized (Slachtofferhulp Nederland, n.d.).

Legislation Raising the Maximum Penalty for Manslaughter (*Wet verhoging wettelijk maximum doodslag*)

In 2023, this law came into effect, increasing the maximum sentence for manslaughter from 15 to 25 years. Among other developments, a bill to raise the penalty for manslaughter had already been proposed in 2022. The 2019 case of Hümeyra sparked widespread public concern, as many felt that the previous 15-year maximum sentence was inadequate given the severity of the crime.

However, this law was not introduced solely in response to that case. A broader motivation was the significant gap between the sentences for murder and manslaughter (*Kamerstuk 35871, Nr. B | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2022). In addition, judges had indicated that the previous maximum sentence left them with too little room to impose a punishment proportionate to the severity of the offense (*Kamerstuk 35871, Nr. B | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2022). By raising the maximum sentence, the law gives judges more flexibility to issue harsher penalties — a development that had already been emerging in recent years, thus reflecting an ongoing shift in judicial sentencing practices.

"In Groningen is iedereen veilig thuis"

In 2023, the Municipality of Groningen published the action plan *"Everyone Is Safe at Home in Groningen."* With regard to stalking, the plan specifically focuses on enhancing the expertise of professionals (Gemeente Groningen, 2023). In addition, it aims to raise awareness among potential victims and those close to them (Gemeente Groningen, 2023). Groningen aims to achieve this in collaboration with local organisations.

A dedicated knowledge network on stalking (*kenniskring*) has already been established, bringing together various organisations to share expertise on the subject. Furthermore, a roadmap for stalking has been developed, outlining the roles and responsibilities of different organisations in the Northern Netherlands.

Inspection report "Gestalkt. Gezien. Gehoord?"

In 2024, a follow-up report was published in response to the earlier inspection report concerning the stalking case of Bekir E. and the murder of Hümeyra. This new report evaluates the steps that were supposed to have been taken since 2019. Several clear issues were identified:

- There is a lack of communication with victims. Both the Public Prosecution Service and the police need to provide victims with a fixed point of contact. That said, there has been increased attention to victim-centred approaches.

- The SASH form is not always completed properly, which results in inaccurate risk assessments.

- There is a need for more training and increased knowledge among staff.

Opening of Filomena Groningen

In November 2024, the Filomena support center was opened in Groningen (Oterdoom, 2024). This support center is part of the Municipality of Groningen's approach to tackling femicide. Filomena provides approachable and accessible support to female victims of stalking or other forms of coercive control.

Regionally embedding the Safety First Approach (*Aanpak Veiligheid Voorop!*)

In 2025, the Work Plan *"Aanpak Veiligheid Voorop!"* was published. This work plan provides recommendations for improving the implementation of the Safety First Approach. The primary focus is on supporting regional networks in implementing the approach (Landelijk Netwerk Zorg-Straf, 2025). There are clear signs that embedding the core activities of Safety First into daily operations still varies significantly across region. (Landelijk Netwerk Zorg-Straf, 2025). In some areas, operational activities are under strain (Landelijk Netwerk Zorg-Straf, 2025). This shows the importance of improved coordination and support for all regions.

Appendix C: Overview of involved organisations

Approach by the national police

After the victim recognizes stalking, the police are usually the first organisation that becomes involved in the stalking case. The police use different methods to determine what action needs to be undertaken to stop the stalking.

SASH form

Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment, better known as SASH, is a form used by the police and *Veilig Thuis* to determine the level of risk the victim is facing. *Veilig Thuis* is an organisation that provides support for victims, offenders and others involved in domestic abuse. In addition, they investigate possible situations of domestic abuse and take the necessary follow-up actions (*Hoe Werkt Veilig Thuis?,* 2022).

The SASH form consists of thirteen questions about topics like psychopathy, violence towards the victim and violation of (court) orders. There are three additional questions for cases of ex-partner stalking. Since 2019, it is possible to register the SASH forms in the police's registration system (*Kamervragen (Aanhangsel) 2020-2021, Nr. 1457 | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2021). In 2020, the police made it mandatory to fill in a SASH form with every report of stalking (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). A difficulty for the police is to connect different incidents and to realize it is a stalking case (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024). This leads to stalking cases often not being recognized as stalking.

"Stopgesprek"

A stopgesprek, which translates to "stop conversation", is a conversation between the police and the stalker, where the police try to raise the offender's awareness of the fact that stalking is a serious crime. The police explain to the stalker the effect that stalking has on the victim. The goal of this conversation is to get the stalker to stop. If not, other consequences may follow. The police inform the stalker that a report will be filed otherwise.

AWARE

AWARE, which stands for Abused Women's Active Response Emergency, is an electronic alarm system which is used in the entire Netherlands (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2019b). AWARE is an alarm button that, when pressed, notifies various authorities, including the police. The victim carries the button with them, which contributes to a greater sense of safety and gives the victim more freedom to live their everyday life.. AWARE was first introduced in Rotterdam in 1997 (*Kamerstuk 1997-1998, 25768 Nr. 5: Voorstel van Wet Dittrich e.a. Tot Wijz. Wetb.v.Strafrecht en Wetb.v. Strafvordering (Strafbaarstelling van Belaging); Gewijzigde Memorie van Toelichting*, z.d.).

In 2020, members of the Dutch House of Representatives Buitenweg and Kuiken submitted a motion to make the AWARE system available to all victims of stalking or threats who have been identified as high-risk cases (*Kamerstuk 28345, Nr. 234 | Overheid.nl > Officiële Bekendmakingen*, 2020). The AWARE system was previously not equally accessible throughout the Netherlands (Verbeek et al., 2021). By making the system nationally available to all victims, more individuals can be protected.

ZSM-aanpak

In cases that require immediate action, including threatening or high-risk situations, the Police, the Public Prosecution Service, Probation Service, Child Protection Board, Victim Support, and Halt join forces to resolve the case (*Dit gebeurt er met ZSM-zaken*, n.d.). This is called the ZSM-aanpak, which stands for "Zorgvuldig, Snel en op Maat" (Reclassering Nederland, n.d.).

Action meeting (*Actieoverleg*)

In the early stages of a stalking case, the police, the Public Prosecution Service (OM), and Veilig Thuis come together to discuss the most effective approach. According to the inspection report "*Gestalkt. Gezien. Gehoord*", this is a good example of effective chain collaboration that functions well in practice.

Dutch Public Prosecution Service

The Public Prosecution Service decides whether there is enough evidence to prosecute the stalker and determines whether a case will be submitted to the court. The Public Prosecution Service can also impose measures such as restraining orders or a location ban, with the goal to protect the victim. Thus, the Public Prosecution Service focuses both on sentencing the offender and protecting the victim.

Reclassering Nederland (Probation service)

The probation service focuses on changing the offender's behaviour. An important aspect of this is raising the offender's awareness, for example by engaging in conversations about their actions. This approach can help reduce recidivism. In addition, the probation service also places a strong emphasis on the needs of the victim. They use various methods to support the victim's recovery in the best possible way. These include mediation, the use of the victim device, and facilitating conversations between the offender and the victim (*Slachtofferbewust en Herstelgericht Werken,* 2025).

Municipality of Groningen

Since the introduction of *Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning 2015* and the *Jeugdwet*, municipalities are financially and organisationally responsible for addressing domestic violence and child abuse and to provide care for the victims. In situations of (threatened) domestic violence, the mayor may impose a temporary restraining order on the perpetrator (*Huiselijk Geweld*, n.d.).

Veilig Thuis

Veilig Thuis is a national organisation that provides support to victims of domestic violence, which includes stalking victims. Stalking reports at Veilig Thuis usually involve ex-partner stalking. Veilig Thuis also makes use of the SASH form, to assess the danger that the victim is in.

"Meldcode Huiselijk Geweld"

"Meldcode Huiselijk Geweld" translates to "Report Code Domestic Abuse", and it refers to a five-step process to help professionals recognize and respond to signs of domestic abuse (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2025). If there is a serious concern for a person's safety or well-being, a report can be made directly to Veilig Thuis,.

MDA++

MDA++ stands for Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Domestic Violence and Child Abuse. In Groningen, MDA++ represents a collaborative effort between professionals from various sectors to address complex situations where standard interventions are no longer effective (Schepers, 2021). By combining expertise across disciplines, the approach aims to improve safety and break long-standing patterns of domestic violence and child abuse (Schepers, 2021). This intensive collaboration leads to more effective interventions and lasting improvements in family safety and well-being.

Slachtofferhulp

Slachtofferhulp Nederland (translates to: Victim Support Netherlands) was established in 1984 with the goal to provide advice and legal or emotional support to victims of accidents and / or crimes. They guide victims through the criminal justice process.

Filomena

Filomena is an organisation located in the city of Groningen that supports women experiencing domestic abuse, coercive control or stalking (Filomena Groningen, n.d.). Filomena offers a space for women to find support, information or provide help to find shelter. It is a collaboration between the municipality of Groningen and the organisation Wender.

Leger des Heils

Leger des Heils is an organisation that offers shelter to victims of domestic abuse and stalking. In addition, they offer support and can refer individuals to specialised services when needed.

Zorg- en Veiligheidshuis

The Zorg- en Veiligheidshuis Groningen (translates to: Care and Safety House) is a regional collaboration that brings together professionals from the municipality, The Public Prosecution Service, and healthcare. They work together to address complex social and safety issues, particularly when individuals present a risk to themselves or others (Zorg- en Veiligheidshuis Groningen, n.d.).

Appendix D: Interview guide

Introductie

- Bedanken voor deelname
- Doel van het onderzoek uitleggen: 1) **geschiedenisperspectief** bieden van de aanpak en 2) inzicht verkrijgen in welke **factoren** er achter de **beleidswijzigingen** liggen. Het grotere doel is bijdragen aan een **effectieve integrale ketenaanpak.**
- Informed consent doornemen
- Toestemmingsformulier ondertekenen

Algemene vragen

- Kunt u iets vertellen over uw huidige functie?
  - ➢ Probes: Verantwoordelijkheden, werkzaamheden
- Hoe lang is er vanuit deze functie al sprake van betrokkenheid bij stalking?
- Hoe zou u uw rol in de aanpak van stalking omschrijven?
  - ➢ Probes: Rol organisatie

Beleidsvragen

- Hoe is de aanpak van stalking in Groningen volgens u in de afgelopen jaren veranderd?
  - ➢ Probes: Binnen de eigen organisatie, in samenwerking met OM, in samenwerking met andere ketenpartners

- In hoeverre hebben bepaalde ontwikkelingen of contexten, zowel landelijk als lokaal, geleid tot deze veranderingen in het beleid in Groningen?
  - ➢ Probes: stalkingszaken, opkomst cyberstalking, media-aandacht, politiek, evaluaties van beleid, Inspectierapporten 2019 en 2024

- Wat ligt er ten grondslag aan het beleid rond stalking?
  - ➢ Probes: kennisbronnen zoals wetenschappelijk onderzoek, vergelijkingen van beleid (bijvoorbeeld andere landen), provinciale bijeenkomsten, gebruik typologieën stalkers, slachtofferkenmerken

- Hoe ervaart u de huidige aanpak van stalking in Groningen?
  - ➢ Probes: effectiviteit, zicht op de veranderingen, behoeften slachtoffers / aanpak daders, knelpunten, positieve punten

- Hoe verschilt het beleid van Groningen met andere regio's of landelijk beleid?
  - ➢ Probes: vormgeving proces, implementatie

Ketenpartners

- Kunt u wat vertellen over de samenwerking met andere organisaties met betrekking tot de aanpak van stalking?
  - ➢ Probes: huidige betrokken partijen, welke vroeger, waarom deelname of terugtrekking, verloop contact, verantwoordelijkheden, welke knelpunten en goede punten

Tijdslijn

- Wat zijn volgens u de belangrijkste ontwikkelingen geweest in de aanpak van stalking?
  - ➢ Probes: tijdslijn invullen, periode, aanleiding

Afsluiting

- Wat zijn volgens u bepaalde stappen die ondernomen moeten worden in de aanpak van stalking?
  - ➢ Toevoegingen, schrappingen, herzieningen
- Wat vond u van de gestelde vragen?
- Wie moet ik absoluut nog spreken voor mijn onderzoek?
- Wilt u verder nog iets kwijt wat we nog niet hebben besproken?

Ontwikkelingen in de aanpak van stalking

Periode

Ontwikkeling + aanleiding
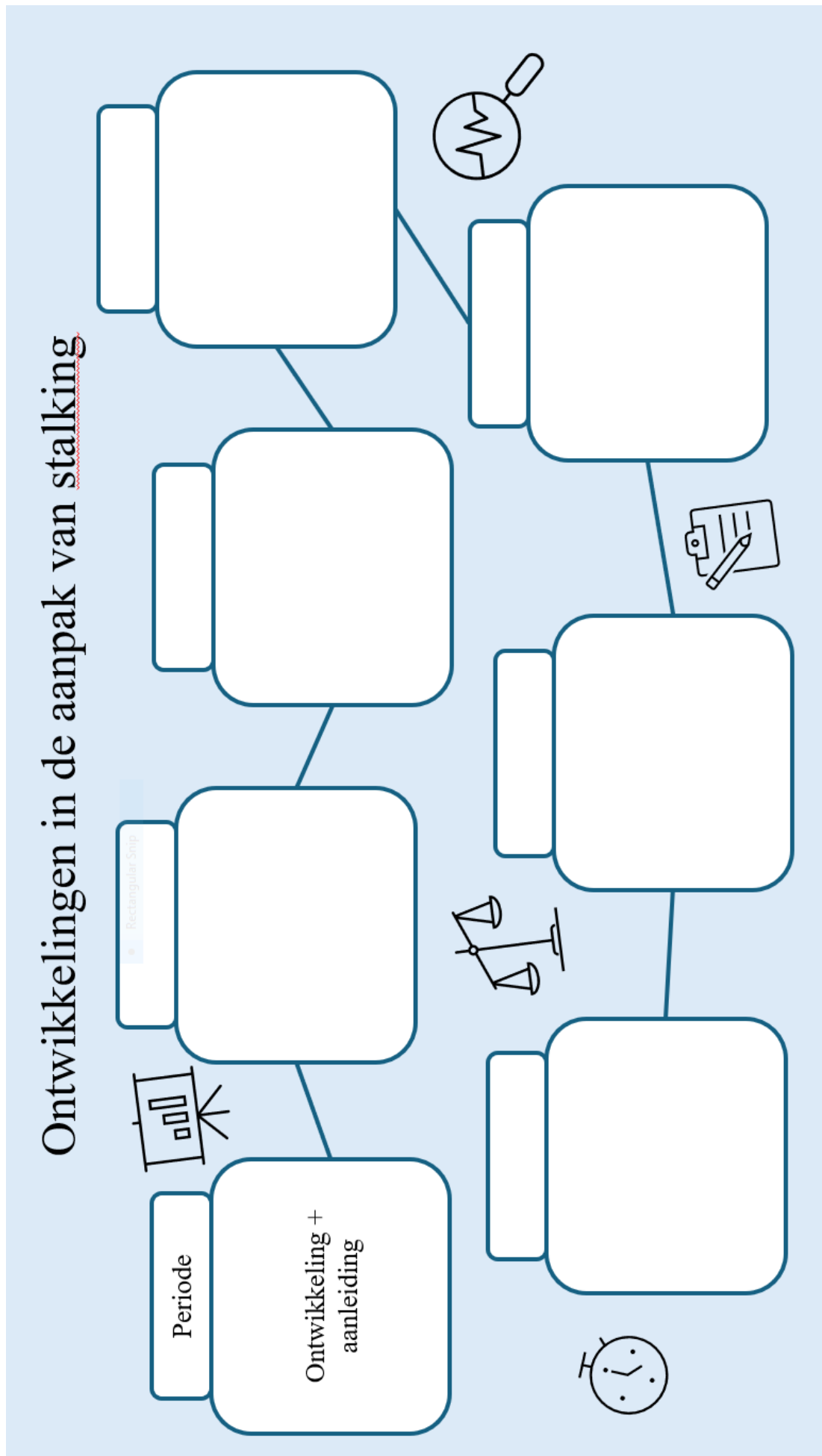
Appendix E: Informed consent

Onderzoek naar de aanpak van stalking

Mijn onderzoek focust zich op hoe het beleid rondom stalking in de stad Groningen momenteel is vormgegeven en hoe deze aanpak zich in de afgelopen 25 jaar heeft ontwikkeld. Daarbij onderzoek ik ook de achterliggende factoren die deze veranderingen mogelijk hebben beïnvloed en de ervaringen van professionals met de (beleids)wijzigingen. Uw ervaring en betrokkenheid bij het onderwerp zijn dan ook van groot belang.

Doel van het onderzoek

Het doel van dit onderzoek is bij te dragen aan de effectiviteit van de aanpak van stalking, door middel van: 1) het bieden van een geschiedenisperspectief van de aanpak, en 2) het leveren van een voorspellende bijdrage aan toekomstig beleid. In een breder perspectief beoogt het onderzoek tevens bij te dragen aan het optimaliseren van de integrale ketenaanpak van stalking.

Het onderzoek maakt deel uit van een groter onderzoek van de Innovatiewerkplaats Zorg en Veiligheid van de Hanzehogeschool Groningen naar stalking en huiselijk geweld. Het doel van dit grotere onderzoek is om op zoek te gaan naar manieren om de aanpak van huiselijk geweld en stalking te kunnen optimaliseren en betere bescherming te bieden aan slachtoffers hiervan.

Wat betekent meedoen aan het onderzoek?

Tijdens dit interview stel ik vragen over het beleid met betrekking tot de aanpak van stalking. Het gesprek duurt maximaal een uur. Meedoen aan het onderzoek is geheel vrijwillig. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden. U kunt uw medewerking aan het onderzoek op elk moment stoppen of deelname weigeren zonder reden. U hoeft geen antwoord te geven op vragen die u liever niet wilt beantwoorden. U kunt de tijd nemen om erover na te denken of u wilt meedoen of niet. Er zijn geen fysieke, juridische of economische risico's verbonden aan uw deelname aan het onderzoek.

Wat gebeurt er met uw antwoorden?

Uw privacy wordt maximaal beschermd. Er wordt geen vertrouwelijke informatie of persoonsgegevens van of over u naar buiten gebracht. Het onderzoek is anoniem. De antwoorden die u geeft zijn niet terug te herleiden naar u als persoon. De gegevens worden alleen gebruikt voor onderzoek. Uw gegevens worden opgeslagen op een beveiligde digitale omgeving van de Hanzehogeschool Groningen. Uw gegevens worden niet gedeeld met

andere organisaties, alleen de onderzoekers van ons onderzoeksteam hebben toegang tot uw antwoorden. Na 10 jaar worden de gegevens vernietigd.

Tijdens het interview worden audio-opnames gemaakt. Dit doen we alleen als u hier toestemming voor geeft. Dit zullen we tijdens het interview nog eens vragen. De audio-opnames gebruiken we alleen om het interview uit te werken.

Het interview zal verwerkt worden in mijn scriptie. Er zal geen enkele informatie naar u te herleiden zijn. Uw naam en andere persoonlijke gegevens worden niet verwerkt in de scriptie. Tot slot kunnen er citaten uit het interview voor mijn scriptie worden gebruikt, mits u daar toestemming voor geeft. Ook de citaten zullen niet naar u te herleiden zijn.

Heeft u vragen over het onderzoek?

Neem contact op met Petrick Glasbergen, projectleider Innovatiewerkplaats Zorg & Veiligheid.

P.p.j.n.m.glasbergen@pl.hanze.nl

06-20936228

Appendix F: Anonymous consent form

Toestemmingsformulier

Wilt u meedoen aan het onderzoek?

☐ Ja, ik geef toestemming om mee te doen aan het onderzoek.
Ik ben voldoende geïnformeerd over het onderzoek en heb geen verdere vragen.

☐ Nee, ik doe niet mee aan het onderzoek.

> **Als u niet meedoet aan het onderzoek, zou u dan aan willen geven waarom u niet meedoet?**
> *Dit is niet verplicht, maar helpt ons wel om het onderzoek te verbeteren.*

Gaat u akkoord dat we audio-opnames maken tijdens het interview? *Deze opnamen worden alleen voor onderzoek gebruikt en worden nooit gedeeld met andere partijen.*

☐ Ja
☐ Nee

De onderzoeker verklaart door het ondertekenen van dit formulier dat het toestemmingsformulier naar waarheid is ingevuld:

Naam onderzoeker: _____

Datum: _____

Handtekening onderzoeker: _____

Interview ID:

☐ (noteer het interview ID hier zodat we de vragenlijst kunnen linken aan het interview)

Appendix G: Original quotes and translations

Theme: Existing Policies

Original (Dutch)	Translation
We moeten ook kijken van, wat heeft onze gemeente, wat hebben wij, onze burgers, wat moeten we daar inderdaad voor doen? Nou, dat is dus onder andere het aanbieden van trainingen, van de expertise, het openen van een centrum als Filomena, het deelnemen aan de samenwerkingsnetwerken, maar ook inderdaad publiekscampagnes. Dus we zitten, in die zin als gemeente, heb je de plicht om denk ik ook heel breed in te steken. – P7	*We also need to look at, you know, what does our municipality have, what do we, our citizens, have, and what do we actually need to do for that? Well, that includes, among other things, offering training, providing expertise, opening a centre like Filomena, taking part in collaboration networks, but also, indeed, public campaigns. So, in that sense, as a municipality, you have the duty, I think, to take quite a broad approach. - P7*
Kijk, we werken sowieso met veiligheidsplannen hè. Dus iedere vrouw die hier binnenkomt, maken we een veiligheidsplan voor. Kijk, als het om stalking gaat, ja, dan zorgen we altijd voor een uitgebreider veiligheidsplan. Maar ga je ook veel meer inzetten op hoe kun je een slachtoffer beschermen. – P11	*Look, we always work with safety plans, right. So for every woman who comes here, we make a safety plan. When it comes to stalking, yes, we always make sure to create a more comprehensive safety plan. But in those cases, you also focus much more on how you can protect a victim. – P11*
Ik vraag mij bijvoorbeeld af of wij binnen de VNN een portefeuillehouder hebben, die binnen de reclassering, over stalking gaat. Je ziet dat het allemaal verdeeld is. Er is een portefeuillehouder over de veelplegers en je over elektronische monitoring. Ik weet eigenlijk niet of het over stalking ook is. – P4	*I wonder, for example, whether we have someone within VNN who holds the portfolio for stalking within probation services. You see that everything is divided. There's someone responsible for repeat offenders and someone for electronic monitoring. I actually don't know whether there is one for stalking as well. – P4*
Dat verschilt per casus. Het is niet specifiek, het verschilt per casus welke partij erbij betrokken is. Natuurlijk is het OM altijd betrokken omdat hij een strafrechtelijk onderzoek doet. Dus dan is er altijd een officier van justitie bij betrokken. En omdat het een afhankelijkheidsrelatie is, dan is Veilig Thuis erbij betrokken. En dan verschilt per casus wie er allemaal bij betrokken is. Het kan inderdaad dan ook van alles wezen. En ik denk dat dit een mooie basis is. En dan per casus bekijk je dan weer wie er verder bij hoort. – P5	*It varies per case. It's not specific; it depends on the case which parties are involved. Of course, the Public Prosecution Service is always involved because they conduct a criminal investigation. So there is always a public prosecutor involved. And because it's a dependency relationship, Veilig Thuis is involved as well. Beyond that, it varies per case who else is involved. It can indeed be anything. And I think this is a good basis. Then, for each case, you look at who else should be involved. – P5*
Ja, dus dan hebben ze er toch wel wat aan. Dat het toch... Nou ja, en ik denk ook het	*Yes, so then they do benefit from it after all. That it still... Well, and I also think the*

inzicht dat je eerder, weet je wel, denkt, ik kan mijn werk goed doen zonder die informatie. En dat je dus gaandeweg erachter komt dat je allerlei dingen hebt gemist. – P9	*insight that earlier, you know, you think you can do your work well without that information. And then gradually you realise that you've missed all sorts of things.– P9*
En de verhalen zijn nu dat binnenkort in Groningen ook zo gaat worden. En Groningen dat zal denk ik ergens oktober, november. – P1	*And the stories now are that soon in Groningen it will also become like that. And Groningen, I think, will be somewhere around October, November. – P1*

Theme: Experiences with the approach

Veel beter. Met bepaalde partijen, zeker. Politie. We weten nu ook waar we naartoe kunnen als het niet loopt. Dat loopt allemaal veel beter. – P2	*Much better. With certain parties, definitely. Police. We now know where to turn to when things aren't going well. That's all going much more smoothly now. – P2*
Ik denk dat er nog niet zo lang veel aandacht is voor het stukje stalking. – P4	*I don't think there has been much attention to the issue of stalking until recently. -P4*
Ja, dat waren begrippen die, nou, een jaar geleden, ja, die hadden we wel ooit eens ergens gehoord. Maar we hadden daar geen aanpak op ontwikkeld. We hadden daar niet echt een echt kennis van. Ja, en dat is inmiddels wel veranderd.- P11	*Yes, those were terms that, well, about a year ago, yes, we had heard of them at some point. But we hadn't developed an approach for them. We didn't really have any real knowledge about them. Yes, and that has changed since then. – P11*
Ja, nou ja, weet je, het is soms heel vervelend dat een slachtoffer echt een slachtoffer is van een stalker. De stalker loopt rond en het slachtoffer zit in huis en durft geen kant meer op. Ja, en dat is dan de omgekeerde wereld soms, dat je zegt van dan moet degene die gestalkt wordt verhuizen, hè, en naar een geheime adres. Ja. Nou, dat voelt niet goed. – P2	*Yeah, well, you know, it's sometimes really frustrating that a victim is truly a victim of a stalker. The stalker is out and about, and the victim is stuck at home and doesn't dare to go anywhere. Yeah, and sometimes it's like the world's upside down, that you end up saying the person being stalked has to move, right, to a secret address. Yeah. Well, that doesn't feel right. – P2*
Nou ja, het, het beter in beeld brengen van slachtoffers van stalking is wel echt een positieve, positief punt. – P6	*Well, raising more awareness about victims of stalking is definitely a positive, positive thing. – P6*
Maar ja, dan houdt het ook meteen alweer op ofzo, dan kan de reclassering ook niks meer. Maar het is wel mooi, hè, hoe die samenwerking dus nu opgezocht wordt, maar dat dus ook nog door beperkingen van hoe het nu geregeld is, het niet altijd kan. En dus, nou ja, en dat moet altijd nog verder ontwikkeld worden ook. – P12	*But yes, then it also immediately stops, or something, then the probation service can't do anything anymore. But it's nice, isn't it, how that collaboration is now being sought, but that due to the limitations of how it's currently arranged, it can't always be done. And so, well, that still needs to be further developed. - P12*
Dus dat houdt soms ook ontwikkelingen tegen. Als wij samenwerken in de keten, ja,	*So that sometimes holds back developments as well. When we work together in the*

mensen kunnen niet in het politie systeem. Dus het delen van informatie is ook soms een ingewikkelde. Dus convenanten of samenwerking en wat mag je wel en niet delen. Ja, dat, nou, dat is wel een lastig punt. – P3	*chain, well, people can't access the police system. So sharing information is also sometimes a complicated matter. So things like agreements or cooperation, and what you can and can't share. Yes, that, well, that is quite a tricky point. – P3*
En het is niet alleen een knop, maar je moet ook de begeleiding en de opvolging daarvan, moet je wel geregeld hebben. Nou ja, politie heeft niet een overflow aan mankracht. Bij ons ook niet, hè, wij staan ook continu onder druk. Dus het heeft met name financieel, ja, is dat een reden geweest om het niet te doen. – P11	*And it's not just a button, but you also need to have the guidance and follow-up in place. Well, the police don't have an overflow of manpower. We don't either, right? We're also constantly under pressure. So, it has mainly been a financial reason not to do it. – P11*
Want we zijn erg kwetsbaar. Als ik nu kijk naar dat stalking, dan de enige die ik kan bedenken, dat ben ik. En dat is niet om mezelf belangrijk te maken. Maar er moet er gewoon veel meer zijn. Daar vragen we ook steeds naar. – P4	*Because we are very vulnerable. If I look at stalking now, the only person I can think of is myself. And that's not to make myself seem important. But there just needs to be a lot more of them. That's what we keep asking for. – P4*
En dat is niet, dat komt niet altijd overeen met wat de politie, eh, koppelt aan de SASH. – P6	*And that's not, that doesn't always align with what the police associates with the SASH. – P6*

Theme: Reasons for policy changes

Ja, dat is denk ik ook wel vanuit het oorspronkelijke beter met elkaar samenwerken. De behoefte ook om een plek te hebben om ingewikkelde situaties met elkaar te willen bespreken. – P6	*Yes, I think that's really about better cooperation from the start. Also the need to have a place where you can discuss complicated situations together. – P6*
We hebben bekende Nederlanders gehad die last hadden van stalking. Ja, dat haalt de media, daar komt wat publiciteit. Dus dat maakt ook dat er anders naar gekeken wordt. Dus ik denk dat dat vooral ook heeft meegespeeld in waar we nu staan. Zijn we er met elkaar, nee, nog lang niet. – P11	*We've had well-known Dutch people who have experienced stalking. Yes, that gets into the media, there's some publicity. So that also changes the way it's viewed. So I think that has definitely played a role in where we are now. Are we there together? No, not by a long shot. – P11*
Ik denk vanuit het oogpunt van het slachtoffer, dat daarom die wet ingevoerd is. Er was natuurlijk wel stalking, maar het heette niet zo. Het heette toen, ja, had eigenlijk geen naam. En daar zijn heel veel slachtoffers bij gevallen. Dus ik denk dat vanuit het slachtofferoogpunt dat daarom die wet gekomen is. En dat je wat in handen	*"I think from the victim's point of view, that's why that law was introduced. There was, of course, stalking, but it wasn't called that. It didn't have a name back then, yes. And many victims fell victim to that. So I think from the victim's perspective, that's why that law came about. And that you have something in hand to tackle those who stalk." – P2*

hebt om die mensen die stalken aan te pakken. – P2	
Ze zijn daar gestart met die pilot en ze hebben gemerkt dat het heel goed werkt. En ze willen dan kijken van, kunnen wij ook andere regio's het ook testen? En kijk, Rotterdam heeft natuurlijk een andere infrastructuur dan, dus daarom doen we het op Noord-Nederland niveau. Want slachtoffer en degene met de enkelband moeten in dezelfde regio wonen. En dan heb je in Noord-Nederland best een groot gebied. Want je moet casuïstiek hebben. – P9	*They started that pilot there and they found that it works very well. And then they want to see if we can also test it in other regions. And look, Rotterdam has a different infrastructure, so that's why we're doing it at the Northern Netherlands level. Because the victim and the person with the ankle monitor must live in the same region. And then you have quite a large area in the Northern Netherlands. Because you need case material. – P9*

Theme: Policy recommendations

Ik denk dat het goed is om gewoon heel specifiek te kijken naar wat inderdaad de motieven zijn. Dat je dus de plegeropvang, de plegeraanpak, goed vorm kan geven. Dat je daar gaat kijken van, goh, wat hebben we daar dan voor nodig? Dus ja, dat zou iets zijn waarvan ik denk van, dat is heel goed. – P7	*I think it's good to really look specifically at what the motives actually are. So that you can properly give shape to offender support and the approach to offenders. That you look at what exactly is needed for that. So yes, that would be something which I think, is really good. – P7*
Ja ik denk dat deskundigheidsbevordering een belangrijke rol is bij de gemeente, maar vanuit elke organisatie deskundigheidsbevordering en heel duidelijk wat mij betreft ook zorgen dat de eigen systemen goed op orde zijn. – P1	*Yes, I think improving expertise plays an important role at the municipality, but from every organisation, improving expertise and, in my opinion, also very clearly making sure that their own systems are well organised. – P1*
Ja, ik denk dat het soms wel makkelijk zou zijn als je allemaal dezelfde, hetzelfde systeem zou kunnen werken. Ja, maar ja, ik snap ook wel dat dat wat haken en ogen heeft, in het kader van privacy, maar het zou wel heel fijn zijn. Ja, het scheelt heel veel tijd, en ik denk, voor het slachtoffer zou het heel mooi zijn. Dat we niet allemaal, nou ja, zoveel partijen bij betrokken, en als ze hetzelfde verhaal moeten vertellen. – P2	*Yes, I think it would sometimes be easier if we could all work with the same system. Yes, but I also understand that there are some issues, in terms of privacy, but it would be really nice. Yes, it would save a lot of time, and I think, for the victim, it would be really good. That we are not all, well, so many parties involved, and if they have to tell the same story. – P2*
En nou ja, wat ik zei, het slachtofferdevice helpt natuurlijk ook plegers, hè. Om het licht te houden aan het contactverbod. Zodat er tijd overheen kan gaan waardoor emoties en gekrengte trots en, nou ja, dat soort dingen. Nou ja, dat je hoopt dat dat afneemt. Dus ja, ik hoop dat we dat	*Well, like I said, the victim device also helps offenders, you know. To keep track of the restraining order. So that some time can pass, which hopefully cools down emotions and wounded pride and, well, those kinds of things. Well, you hope that decreases. So yes, I hope we can at least continue with the victim device. – P8*

slachtofferdevice in ieder geval kunnen doorzetten. – P8	
De samenwerking rondom de hele manier van huisverboden opleggen. Meer aan de voorkant komen. Dus ook meer de zorginstelling meer aan de voorkant laten werken, dat is er één. – P3	*The collaboration regarding the entire approach to imposing restraining orders. Getting more involved at an earlier stage. So also having the care institution work more at the front end; that's one. – P3*

Appendix H: Codebook

Theme	Code	Type	Description	Example
Existing policies	Job description	Deductive	Participant describes their job role.	*"And my role is to make sure that all the information that exists reaches the workplace, that the employees there, and I do that together with the employees, mind you.*
	Role of organisation	Deductive	Participant describes roles played by organisations.	*"And we from probation then look at: is that already known to us? Is there already supervision, or is there a request for an advisory report, or is something coming up? And then we can also indicate: I think the victim device applies here."*
	Offender-focused developments	Inductive	Participant describes offender-oriented developments in the approach.	*"Yes and what I now see as the big advantage of the victim device is that the offender, the perpetrator, is restricted. (…) No, we make sure that the perpetrator is restricted as much as possible and I think that's also how it should be."*
	Electronic monitoring	Deductive	Participant talks about use of electronic monitoring (e.g. ankle bracelet).	*"And then we also introduced the rule that in all stalking cases EM must be considered, the ankle bracelet."*
	Implementation of SASH	Deductive	Participant discusses implementation of the SASH form.	*"Eh yes and over time that has improved a lot, hasn't it. The police have also made progress in that by implementing the SASH form."*

	Ongoing developments	Inductive	Participant describes current developments in policy or practice.	*"And here in Groningen we really are, well we have just had the second meeting in a sort of exploratory phase of how we can discuss this kind of case more together and make sure we coordinate better. So that is actually the most recent development around this topic."*
	Regional differences	Deductive	Participant describes differences between regions.	*"You do notice that per province there are some, well should we call them local differences, so it's not all set up exactly the same way. For example in Drenthe they have had a kind of stalking table for quite some time. I think that's what it's called at least. And in Groningen they have or no sorry in Friesland they have just set up a high risk table."*
	Care/Justice network	Deductive	Participant refers to national or regional Care and Justice Network.	*"Because in itself, the approach to stalking came up in the Regional Care and Justice Network."*
	Digital influence	Deductive	Participant describes how digital technology affects stalking.	*"Yes, so the standard advice is also, you know, make sure all your location services are turned off. And that people can't follow you in that way."*
	Political developments	Inductive	Participant refers to political developments.	*"Well, because the alderman also, has that high on the agenda."*
	Policy foundations	Deductive	Participant describes	*"And these kinds of things come from*

			foundation of stalking-related policy.	*the national level. They're basically imposed on us. Yes. That's not a problem. They're just procedures, you know. These kinds of things"*
Subtheme: **Changes in involved organisations**	Involved organisations	Deductive	Participant lists organisations involved in the approach.	*"Plus the Zorg en Veiligheidshuis in recent years is a new phenomenon, the Zorg en Veiligheidshuis, I don't know exactly how long they have existed, but they have taken on a very prominent role in these kinds of dangerous cases. So that is new."*
	Importance of collaboration	Inductive	Participant highlights importance of inter-organisational cooperation.	*"A project can be created here. And that also requires cooperation."*
	Reason for founding victim support services.	Inductive	Participant explains why a victim support organisation was established.	*"And that's why it has been agreed that in cases of domestic violence and child abuse, which often take place within a system, we must also bring things together within one organisation. So that we can tackle it much more in a coherent way."*
Subtheme: **Developments towards a victim-centred approach**	Victim device	Deductive	Participant talks about pilot involving the victim device.	*"With the victim device, it's the decision-making table where we then look: does this case meet the requirements for the victim device?"*
	Kenniskring	Deductive	Participant describes the kenniskring on stalking.	*"And I think it was in 2021 when we also started with the kenniskring here in the North of the Netherlands, across*

				the entire chain, also with different parties like Slachtofferhulp Nederland, the Veiligheidshuis, sitting together per province to mainly discuss what our joint approach to stalking should be."
	Stalking table	Inductive	Participant refers to upcoming stalking table in Groningen.	*"They are now working on the stalking table. I think it's a good thing that it's being set up. That we even come across each other at all and that we start discussing cases together. In the context of safety and support for victims. I think it's very good that it's coming soon. Yes. Yes."*
	Samen op in Acuut	Deductive	Participant discusses *Samen op in Acuut*	*"And then you also have Samen op in Acuut. And that is indeed to call Veilig Thuis in the middle of the night if necessary. And that is to at least make arrangements with the family. That does not mean they will come immediately at three o'clock in the night. But for example, yes, tomorrow during the day we will pick it up"*
	Severity/impact of stalking	Inductive	Participant highlights seriousness and consequences of stalking.	*"But still, in the end, the victims cost, cost the community much more money."*
Experiences with the approach				

Subtheme: **Challenges**	Staffing issues	Inductive	Participant describes shortage of personnel.	*"That has to do with the capacity problem of the police."*
	Collaborative issues	Deductive	Participant describes difficulties in collaboration between organisations.	*"That will probably be communication everywhere of course. That is generally quite an issue"*
	Information-sharing problems	Inductive	Participant describes issues with sharing information between parties.	*"There are actually some new laws just now, which should make information sharing easier. But, well, the paths aren't in place yet, so it doesn't happen."*
	Dependency on personal interest	Inductive	Participant notes that personal interest determines level of expertise.	*"Furthermore, I think it also depends a bit on the interest or the drive of the worker to look for courses and training."*
	Need for more knowledge	Deductive	Participant describes the need for more knowledge about stalking.	*"Apart from that, I see. I believe there is simply a lack of knowledge on the work floor."*
	Isolated organisations	Inductive	Participant indicates that stakeholders often work in isolation.	*"You can also see that in the inspection report. But that all chain partners mainly worked very much in silos with each other."*
	Lack of stalker typologies	Deductive	Participant notes the limited use of stalker typologies.	*"I believe there could be more knowledge about the different types of stalkers and how to act."*
	Poor timing	Inductive	Participant describes mismatches in timing of processes.	*"But the timing is often missing. And we are often waiting on each other."*
	Risk assessment issues	Deductive	Participant mentions problems with stalking risk assessment tools.	*"So I, yes, and I notice that we have based ourselves on those SASH forms.*

				And that does not always correspond with the seriousness and urgency as we determine it. So, you know, that causes some friction."
	Criticism of police	Inductive	Participant expresses criticism of police methods.	*"Gradually you saw 2,000 reports in the Netherlands, rising to 4,000. But yes, it must be many tens of thousands, so at the police there are few specialists."*
	Technical difficulties	Inductive	Participant experiences issues with systems or technology.	*"Yes, what can be improved I have actually already said. A complicated issue at the police is always the security of the system."*
	Victim needs unmet	Deductive	Participant notes unmet needs of victims.	*"So yes, I still find that difficult. How do you make it so that you indeed get that protection as high as possible?"*
	Difficulty recognising stalking	Inductive	Participant describes difficulty recognising stalking by both victims and organisations.	*"And, well, it always remains difficult, because when is stalking stalking? Because you do have a law, you have the legal article, harassment, which is stalking, but when is it..."*
Subtheme: **Perceived strengths of the approach**	Improved collaboration	Inductive	Participant describes better collaboration between organisations.	*"Yes, but well, the cooperation with the chain partners is actually going quite well, of course there is still room for improvement, but yes I think we have really made progress over the past few years."*
	Growing attention to stalking	Deductive	Participant notes increasing attention to stalking.	*"Yes, that has increasingly become a key focus, so in that we are actually*

				more and more in development."
	Improved offender treatment	Inductive	Participant states that treatment for offenders has improved.	*"Which has led to multiple organisations focusing specifically on forensic care, and the treatment programmes for offenders have also improved."*
	Improved victim position	Deductive	Participant indicates that the position of stalking victims has improved.	*"Exactly, the victim has the lead."*
	Increased knowledge	Inductive	Participant notes growth in knowledge about stalking.	*"Yes, and there is simply more awareness now. There has also been much more research into what stalking actually is."*
Reasons for policy changes	Need for collaboration	Deductive	Participant states the need for better cooperation was a trigger.	*"That's where it was said, this is what we all need, so that we can coordinate and work together better."*
	Victim needs	Deductive	Participant indicates victim-related concerns triggered developments.	*"I think the needs of the victim. Yes."*
	Financial reasons	Inductive	Participant notes financial issues triggered a change.	*"Well yes, and that really helps when money is made available and directed from politics."*
	Influence of research	Deductive	Participant states research findings influenced developments.	*"Yes, so that mindset has simply changed as a result of the research that has been done, yes."*
	Stalking cases/incidents	Deductive	Participant indicates specific incidents triggered policy development.	*"Well, I think also because of incidents, indeed, because of the events, that we all start to think for ourselves, like, maybe we should also reconsider our own part in it or*

				something, and start looking at it differently.”
	Northern Netherlands infrastructure	Inductive	Participant explains how regional infrastructure triggered local policy.	*“I do know that, yes, because of the travel distances.”*
	Meeting chain partners	Inductive	Participant mentions the need for getting to know chain partners triggered change.	*“Well, there is a strong need to know who is involved. Who is actually doing stalking? Which parties are those? And also that it's easier to reach someone... Look, if you know each other, then you make contact more easily. And then you get on the same page, share concerns.”*
	Unknown or other triggers	Inductive	Participant indicates unknown or other reasons for developments.	*“No, I don't know if there is a specific reason for that.”*
	Hümeyra case	Deductive	Participant states the Hümeyra case triggered developments.	*“That came from the original inspection report.”*
Policy recommendations	Offender approach	Deductive	Participant suggests improving offender interventions.	*“And at the front end, prosecuting stalking behaviour criminal can simply happen much quicker and faster.”*
	Decision-making authority	Inductive	Participant recommends providing clearer decision-making power.	*“And ensure decision-making authority with the people who are in joint consultation and make sure that cooperation between parties is well organised.”*
	Better risk assessment	Inductive	Participant advises improving stalking risk assessments.	*“Then looking at those forensic care cases, risk assessment can be better...”*
	Professional training	Inductive	Participant recommends	*“Well, I think what name participant*

			training or professional development.	*already indicated is definitely training for professionals."*
	Implementing pilot	Inductive	Participant suggests continuing the pilot.	*"I think it is really good that we actually try out the victim device. And see what the possibilities are."*
	Improve information-sharing	Inductive	Participant wants better information exchange between organisations.	*"So as soon as you have that information early on, you actually need to sit around the table with all parties. And share that information so you can make a plan to contain it as quickly as possible."*
	Invest in manpower	Inductive	Participant advises investing in staffing and expertise.	*"I think there still needs to be significant investment and direction regarding the responsibility of the police and Veilig Thuis to actually report."*
	Other recommendations	Inductive	Participant mentions other relevant suggestions.	*"Restraining orders and contact bans can be enforced more quickly so that their quality and enforcement can be responded to faster and better."*
	Improve collaboration	Deductive	Participant describes the need for improved collaboration.	*"Finding each other even earlier, I think that is quite an important point of attention."*
	Involve victim support services earlier	Inductive	Participant proposes involving victim support services earlier in stalking cases.	*"Ideally, you want to be involved in a stalking case as early as possible (..) Yes, you want to be there beforehand, so you can still have influence, also on the judiciary."*