

## Qualitative Research on the Dark Figure of Physical Violence

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## Abstract

One of the central objectives of the Croatian Violence Monitor/Violence Research Lab project is to empirically analyze the phenomenology, etiology, and prosecution of violence in Croatia, based on the findings from the previous Balkan Homicide Study (2016). The aim is to provide a detailed insight into the phenomenology of violence by examining its incidence, structure, geographical distribution, perpetrator and victim profiles, as well as phenomenological profiles, with special focus on qualitative exploration of the dark figure of violence. The purpose of the interviews was to collect data about the dark figure of violence, which meant violence that is neither reported nor prosecuted. For the purposes of collecting specific real-life data and feedback from experts in various domains of social and professional life dealing with potential violence victims and incidents, we developed a semi-structured interview schedule based on particular violence-related experiences different experts might encounter during their practice. We present research guidelines and experiences from implementing an interview on the dark figure of violence including phenomenological features of nonreported violent offenses via interviews with victims, perpetrators, and “gatekeepers” (i.e., professionals who might report or not report violent acts) such as police, medical doctors, social workers, teachers, psychologists and pedagogues, judges and state attorneys, priests, nightclub bouncers, and crime perpetrators.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this case, students should be able to

- Prepare a qualitative research design based on the interview method
- Understand how to address the ethical issues in research of delicate topics such as violence
- Describe the differing theoretical and methodological approaches in the research of physical violence
- Understand the concept of the dark figure of violence
- Understand how to organize and implement a semi-structured interview

## Project Overview and Context

The research on the dark figure of violence was fundamentally conceived as one of the research outcomes and activities in the Croatian Violence Monitor/Violence Research Lab project (2018), funded by the Croatian Scientific Fund and the Faculty of Law at the University in Zagreb, Croatia. The purpose of the Croatian Violence Monitor project, as a follow-up to the previous Balkan Homicide Study (Albrecht & Getoš Kalac, 2016), was to present the evolution of basic ideas, discuss challenges, develop concepts, and present solutions for criminological violence research in the context of criminal justice systems, as well as conduct empirical violence research in Croatia. One of the main conclusions from the previous Balkan Homicide Study in 2016 was that actual violence remained well hidden behind its normative construction, because the study—although extremely insightful in many ways—did not provide the desired answers about actual

violence, but rather its normative perception by the criminal justice system. To be more precise, the study provided original empirical data on offenders, offenses, victims, and the whole criminal procedure, but little (if any) data about the actual realities of violence. Therefore, the Croatian Violence Monitor/Violence Research Lab project aimed to transpose research ideas and approaches to our colleagues in various fields of criminal justice practice, ranging from police and prosecution, all the way to courts and prisons. The general goal was to investigate concepts and proposed solutions to challenges in violence research, generate constructive criticism, attract feedback and encourage a debate among experts in the field of violence research in various disciplines, both in Croatia and abroad. Our interdisciplinary project team consisted of more than 30 experts from various fields of research: criminology, criminalistics, law, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, forensic science, medicine, physics, and geography. It became obvious that in criminology, lethal violence is studied by “counting” homicides and then using homicide rates as a reasonable proxy for violent crime, or overall crime, or even as a robust indicator of levels of security. In psychology, rather than examining violence, we study aggression, assuming the same causes that instigate aggressive behavior also generate violent behavior. In evolutionary biology, we even estimate how violent humans are by looking at how violent other species are. The point is that violence research has been preoccupied with studying everything around violence, instead of centering on violence itself. Therefore, the idea has been to focus on capturing violence as a normative and social construct, to investigate the power to define and classify violence, as well as how it is used in the criminal justice system. This is an understudied topic in violence research, though its understanding has a crucial impact on many methodological decisions. It is tackling the question of how and why violent incidents are defined at police level, for example, as (attempted) homicide or serious bodily injury (with lethal consequences), and how and why such initial definitions are redefined by prosecution and courts. This is not a purely normative question about the “power to define violence” by different criminal justice agents, but also a fundamental criminological aspect of, for example, understanding “homicide drop-outs.” It is thus an extremely intriguing issue on the normative construction of violence versus its criminological reality. The idea of the Croatian Violence Monitor project was to investigate core issues of violence in a truly multidisciplinary way, with the dark figure of violence being an important focus point.

## Section Summary

- Our research strives toward developing a new classification of violent criminal acts
- The research presented is only a segment of our broad interdisciplinary project study of physical violence
- The dark figure of violence is important because it can show the prevalence and reasons behind nonreported violence

## Theoretical Background

What is violence? Not just its social or normative construction (murder or manslaughter), the violent behavior (stabbing or strangling), its consequences (death or injury), nor its immediate cause or motive (revenge or self-defense), but violence at its physical core, its essence? We stipulate that violence is a real phenomenon

and not merely a construct. The fact that violence might not be observed directly does not disprove its physical existence. That is an issue of “capturing” and “measuring” and consistency of findings across measurement methods. Just like gravity or magnetism, violence becomes apparent by its effects on other objects, for instance, the human body. If we discover what violence is, we ought to find the instruments and techniques for capturing it. And if we can capture it, we ought to find a way to measure it. And if we can measure it, we ought to analyze, classify, and study it, to understand its “how” as a precondition to tackle its “why” (Getoš-Kalac & Bezić, 2018). There are substantial differences in what is considered key for the definition of violence (Tolan et al., 2006). Depending on what kind of definitional feature is emphasized—aspects of action, motivation, and impact, or social, psychological, and political meaning—quite a different definition emerges (Tolan, 2007, p. 5). In addition to the challenge of defining violence, the definition of delinquent violence changes over time. Both the scientific and popular understanding of what violence is largely depends on the cultural and social perception and construction of violence and associated factors in a given era (Aebi & Linde, 2016). Currently, there is a trend toward indefinitely broadening the violence terminology and typology (e.g., psychological, verbal, economic, structural, symbolic, medial, object-related, institutional), up to the point where almost everything can be labeled as violence and therefore, where almost nothing presents itself as violence (Meyer, 2002).

Criminological research commonly sticks to the normative classification of violence and departs from there, although this eventually makes as much criminological sense as comparing apples to pears. Instead of further adhering to such a teleological classification, a development of a genuine violence classification system is needed, as well as an adequate methodological framework. This is Croatian Violence Monitor’s basic task and should eventually enable us to address the main research questions: What constitutes the physical core of violence? What is a normal level of violence in one person killing another? Where does violence stop and cruelty start? What happens if we “overlap” the normative with a genuine violence classification? Could new discoveries, such as sentencing prediction based purely on the physics of violence, innovate criminal law? Thus, initially, the focus was intended to cover “only” physical violence, with an exclusive or primary goal to hurt or kill, meaning that criminal offenses with a clear element of physical violence (such as robbery, rape, and terrorism) but without an exclusive or (at least) primary goal to hurt or kill the victim should have been excluded. This was initially based on the presumption that “pure” physical violence is phenomenologically and etiologically different than other forms of physical violence, where the physical violence is merely a means to an end, and not the goal itself. However, in reality there seems to be no such thing as “pure” physical violence. As an empirical working definition, it was decided to define violence, for the purpose of Violence Lab’s research, as follows: *Violence is any intentional physical harming or killing of another person*. Of course, the definition might immediately strike one as far too simple, narrow or even obvious, but eventually that is the idea of an understandable and multidisciplinary transposable definition. In the context of violence research, it is of particular importance not to lose sight of the central research question, which in this case is the study of the phenomenology, etiology, and prosecution of violence with focus on protecting particularly vulnerable groups of victims, with the dark figure of violence being an integral focus of interest. One of the central objectives of Violence Lab is to empirically capture and analyze the phenomenology, etiology, and prosecution of overall violence in Croatia; that is, not only the most severe forms of violence like homicide

or bodily injury, but also minor violent acts prohibited by law. Thus, Violence Research Lab should provide a detailed insight into the phenomenology of violence by empirically examining its incidence, structure, geographical distribution, perpetrator profiles, victim profiles, and phenomenological profiles. By taking into consideration all kinds of violence, ranging from less severe misdemeanors (e.g., unacceptable, disturbing and indecent behavior in public space) to more severe criminal offenses (e.g., aggravated murder), the project strives to provide the violent context in Croatia. This is necessary to be able to interpret the findings on violence in their actual empirical and cultural setting. In addition, Violence Lab aims to investigate etiological factors of violence, related to specific (sub)types of perpetrators, victims, and violence. The criminogenic and victimogenic factors are exceptionally relevant, especially in terms of practical implications, as they are important for preventing and managing violence and protecting particularly vulnerable groups of victims. We present a section of our current qualitative research related to the empirical analysis of the dark figure of violence.

## Section Summary

- The measuring of physical violence included the development of a multidimensional model, so we even asked for help from experimental physicists and mathematicians
- One of the goals is to develop an interactive social map of violence with the possibility of analyzing criminogenic and victimogenic factors
- Potential benefits of this research could include innovations in criminal law and judicial procedures

## Research Design

The selection of appropriate research methods to study violence is a complex endeavor for many reasons. In criminology, in general, “collecting and making sense of the data we obtain from our research subjects may well be rather harder to handle than in some allied fields” (Gadd et al., 2012, p. 4) as criminological research includes a disproportionate number of individuals who are considered dangerous, deprived, or vulnerable. In addition, violence is a particularly sensitive topic (Fraga, 2016). Today, experiments comparable to the famous Stanford Prison Experiment or the Milgram Experiment are nearly impossible and, for a number of reasons, the observation of violence in a “natural” setting is limited. With the specific purposes of Violence Research Lab in mind, the methodological approach to measure violence was guided under the following considerations. First, using statistical data only, would not have met the aim of the project, as statistics are oriented toward normative conditions. In addition, they do not provide sufficient data on the real extent of violence, the used force, and supplementary information that is required to investigate etiological and phenomenological questions. Very often, violent acts (e.g., domestic violence) happen in private settings, “behind closed doors” (Cantos et al., 1994; Fraga, 2016; Wright & Benson, 2011). It is expected that a considerable number of violent offenses remains in the dark. Thus, surveys on self-reported delinquency (i.e., discovering and questioning perpetrators) and on nonreported victimization are ostensibly promising research methods to grasp the real extent of violence. However, violence research has to meet certain ethical standards. Violence Research Lab is interested in the level and phenomenology of violent offenses on a

large scale. The latter means that we were interested in a large data set that required an adjusted research instrument encompassing a large number of “cases”—personal or professional experiences with reporting or preventing violence. We decided to devise a semi-structured interview guideline with the purpose of analyzing the dark figure of violence including phenomenological features of nonreported violent offenses via interviews with victims, perpetrators, and “gatekeepers” (i.e., professionals who might report or not report violent acts) such as police, medical doctors, social workers, or teachers, to name just a few.

## Section Summary

- Violence is a sensitive research and social topic, so empirical research is limited because potential interviewees often decline participation
- We decided to find out more about the dark figure of violence by talking to various experts in diverse social sectors and institutions
- Our approach was qualitative because we needed data on the etiological and phenomenological aspects of violence

## Method and Instrumentation

The purpose of the interview was to collect data about the dark figure of violence, which meant violence that is neither reported nor prosecuted. For the purposes of collecting specific real-life data and feedback from experts in various domains of social and professional life dealing with potential violence victims and incidents, the Violence Research Lab team developed a semi-structured interview schedule based on particular violence-related experiences different experts might encounter during their practice. We specifically aimed a sample of medical professionals, teachers and preschool caretakers, school pedagogues and psychologists, social workers, police officers, judges and judicial experts, even night-club bouncers, criminals, taxi drivers and priests, as well as nongovernmental organization (NGO) workers dealing with victims of violence. The research subject was violence as a “hidden” phenomenon with the focus on the phenomenology and prevalence of violence from the perspective of our sample of selected experts. Our research was designed to capture different experiences of violence to describe the typical forms of violence, the context and prevalence of violent acts, the procedures for reporting and dealing with violence acts in different areas of society, to understand the reasons for reporting and nonreporting of violent incidents, such as fear, mistrust in institutions or the judicial system, as well as potential lack of knowledge or awareness. Moreover, the study aimed to identify relevant mechanisms and toeholds for the improvement of hidden violence’s detection across all relevant institutional actors. It was expected that these results could be translated into the development of solutions for better detection, reporting, and prevention of violence. Therefore, all interviewers had to provide a definition of what we defined as violence, as we would have otherwise gotten all sorts of answers referring to nonphysical violence (emotional, psychological), as well. The interview schedule was developed with the aim to collect all necessary information to identify criminogenic and victimogenic factors of violence. Prior to the main study, we decided to conduct a pilot study with short-screening interviews on a smaller sample of around 20 participants, so as to receive feedback on the validity, reliability, and appropriateness of the

proposed interview schedule. The main purpose of the short screening interviews was to identify appropriate respondents for in-depth interviews on the dark figure of violence, as well as provide recommendations for other potential and valuable respondents. Screening questions in the short-version interviews were placed to determine whether respondents had certain experiences that would make them eligible to take part in a study. That way, the short screening interviews allowed choosing a survey sample which included only respondents that provided helpful information to the study's research objectives. An important purpose of the short screening interviews was also to collect and summarize information about the process of reporting and nonreporting violence in different sectors. After the pilot study, we realized some of the interview questions we planned were related to sector-specific experiences and were not appropriate for all experts in the sample. We later decided we would adjust some questions in the interview form to specific experiences or the professional context from which the expert originated. This was mostly due to questions on available or existing procedures and protocols when dealing with violence or violent acts that, for example, existed in schools and kindergartens, but were not applicable for courts, district attorney offices, or areas of the public domain such as churches, NGOs, and nightclubs.

## Section Summary

- We specifically interviewed various experts exposed to violence, from police officers to teachers, social workers, bouncers, judges, and criminals, so as to establish the extent of nonreported violence
- We implemented both a pilot and an in-depth interview, as we wanted to adjust the questions to varying experiences in practice
- Aside from examining existing procedures, we wanted to know the motives and reasons for not reporting violence to the authorities

## Limitations

One of the most important limitations of the study was the lack of similar previous research, as well as the choice of experts, as we did not know the status or depth of their knowledge and professional experiences with violent incidents, nor if they would comply and take voluntary part in the research interviews. This was due to the sensitivity of the subject of violence with vulnerable groups and reporting it to the authorities, which in fact has resulted in at least five potential pilot-study respondents to refuse taking part in the interview. Among those were two police officers, one priest, one bouncer, and one social worker. Another issue was related to the pilot-study implementation itself, because if respondents for the next phase of the research were to be identified, would it be possible to have anonymous answers, and how would that affect their responses eventually? Thus, we agreed on a coding system so as to ensure anonymity and enable further participation for all valid respondents.

## Sampling

We used convenient and snowball sampling with nonprobabilistic quota: sample members were selected

according to specific characteristics, such as age, profession, or sector of employment, which served as a quota basis for selection. In our case, the specific characteristics were professions or institutions in which the sample members were employed, because that was the defining element. As the aim of the dark figure study was to reveal and understand aspects of “hidden” violence, a qualitative approach was accepted. The research was phenomenological, focused on describing different experiences of violence, including the understanding of violence. We included respondents who had direct personal or professional experience with violence and/or reporting violent acts, who were informative and rich in the “other” sections of the questions or explanations, and have clear ideas about what to change in the process of reporting or protocol development. Interview partners were professionals who worked in institutions where they possibly had contact with people involved in violence and victims and perpetrators who were willing to share information about the act of violence, individuals involved, and the situation in which it occurs. We conducted 200 interviews with key respondents involved in the prevention, detection, and prosecution of delinquent violence in Croatia, from educators, doctors, social workers, lawyers, or judges to priests, bouncers, policemen, and criminals. Particular attention was paid to conducting the pilot study on the “dark figure” of violence, with the potential aim to further develop a survey on the dark figure of crime and develop a registry where “gatekeepers” could report suspicions of physical violence. We calculated the manpower required for the interviews, transcribing and analyzing the interviews. Each project member was assigned with three to five interviews with experts from their corresponding sectors, based on the interviewers’ professional background.

## Section Summary

- We opted for a convenient sample, because experts who we were not previously familiar with started refusing to participate due to various reasons, mostly fear and caution
- The “gatekeepers” in our sample would later take part in reporting violence via an interactive platform (mobile app)
- A qualitative approach enabled us with far richer and detailed responses of the “behind the scenes” in nonreported violence

## Procedure and Data Collection

In the first phase of planning the research, the following was ensured:

1. Preparation of the research materials (forms, licenses, protocols, the audiotaping equipment, training materials)
2. Research ethics (anonymity, confidentiality, data coding, data protection)
3. Researcher preparation and training (familiarization with the research goal and theme, organization of interview venues, important researcher traits analysis)
4. Preparation of interview implementation (contact with the participants, arranging the interview deadlines and dates, interview equipment preparation)

In the second phase of the research design, the following was implemented:



1. Interview implementation (introduction, main part, final part)
2. Postinterview implementation activities (contacting the participants in case of additional questions or feedback, data preparation)
3. Data analysis (data familiarization, database production, code generation, thematic data analysis, results and reports production)

The procedure and implementation of the interviews began with soliciting permissions from the ministries (justice, education, health, ...) after the interview guideline was ready, because it had to be attached to the letters. We solicited permissions for both the pilot-study and the in-depth interview. We then initiated training and preparation of all the project members for the implementation of the interview with corresponding experts, as some of them had limited experience with qualitative methodology and the interview method. We held three preparatory meetings with all project members and enabled written guidelines and a video-tutorial with a mock example of the interview done by more experienced project members.

The training of researchers was focused on the following aspects:

1. Every researcher should know the research design, goal, and hypotheses in detail
2. Every researcher should be aware of the theoretical background and the importance of the research design
3. Every researcher must be capable of explaining the research goal and design in layman's terms
4. Researchers must be aware of diverse ways in which they can suggestively influence the participant and thus affect the results
5. Researchers must ensure the safety of both the participant and the researcher while conducting the interview
6. Researchers must be aware of implicit relationships that might affect the research results (i.e., a professor interviewing a student; a boss interviewing a subordinate) so as to avoid socially desirable responses
7. Researchers should be aware and need to know how to respond to possible unpredictable (emotional or stressful) situations during the interview
8. Researchers should know that every 60 min of audiotaped conversation requires 4–8 hr for transcription

We emphasized to the researchers all the important aspects of the interview preparation and initiation:

1. It is recommended to use a textual draft or a script at the beginning and the end of the conversation
2. A script or textual draft is an essential part of the interview protocol and can facilitate the conversation
3. Considering the complexity of the conversation and the number of questions at hand, a textual draft or a script can simplify the procedure and provide orientation in case of need
4. Before the interview, the participant must be informed about the key aspects of the research
5. The researcher must ask for written or oral consent before the interview
6. The introductory part of the textual draft or script should contain information on provisions ensuring

anonymity and data protection

7. It would be desirable for the researcher to initially share some personal information, so as to facilitate a relaxed atmosphere and build a relation with the participant
8. At the end of the conversation, the textual draft or script should remind the researcher to provide contact information in case of additional questions, explanations, or information ([Schwandt, 1997](#), p. 88).

We also instructed the researchers to take notice of the following practical aspects:

1. Occasionally check the equipment and ensure it is working properly during the conversation
2. Ask one question at a time and provide enough time for answers
3. Try to maintain a neutral position as much as possible during the interview
4. Try to support the respondent in providing rich and meaningful answers
5. Take care of your appearance, behavior, and note-taking procedure (i.e., maintain eye contact, nod head gently so as to show appreciation and attention, and avoid flashy or provocative clothes)
6. Enable mild transitions between main interview questions
7. Maintain control over the conversation, guide the participant, and maintain visual contact

We agreed that the duration of the in-depth interviews should not exceed 45 min. We contacted the participants and conducted the main study interviews in Croatian, while audiotaping the conversation via mobile phones. We then organized and stored the data, consequently preparing the data for analysis. After data collection, we began the process of transcription: we first became familiarized with the data (repeated listening/reading, etc.) and then transcribed the interviews including anonymizing sensitive data. We then began computer-assisted data analysis using NVivo, based on the procedure of thematic coding/thematic analysis, the iterative process of re-reading and searching for the categories again, with two coding phases: detecting key topics and categories (inductive and deductive analysis) and detecting dimensions of categories while constantly refining themes and categories. After we established and explored the relationship between categories, we began developing theory and incorporating pre-existing knowledge.

## Section Summary

- We planned the research in two phases: interview preparation and implementation
- The training of researchers was done, owing to their limited experience with qualitative methods
- Special emphasis was placed on research ethics and the interview procedure
- When audiotaping a conversation, try keeping the device out of sight, as respondents react more openly and provide better feedback without it

## Interview Questions

It is useful to think about interviews as having the following characteristics: detail, depth, vividness, nuance, and richness ([Rubin & Rubin, 2012](#)). In principal, the interview questions were open-ended, there were no

answer categories, and participants were free to describe what they knew about the dark figure of violence. The interview guideline consisted of an open narration impulse that was used to “yield spontaneous, rich descriptions” of what the interviewees themselves associated “as the main aspects of the phenomenon investigated” (Kvale, 2009, p. 60). Subsequently, questions covering different topics of the dark figure of physical and sexual violence were introduced. The interview was devised as a semi-structured interview, that is, the guideline had to be understood as a guide to the aim that all the topics of interest are addressed. Depending on the interview situation and the participant’s experiences, it was possible focusing on certain questions, modifying questions, and asking additional questions or sub questions to get a rich and detailed description of their professional experience and the topics under scrutiny. The interview was conducted in Croatian.

The structure and the types of questions in the interview:

- *Initial narration impulse (stimulus)*. Short description of the project goals and main areas
- *Main questions (general, broad questions)*. If participants describe their knowledge on violence and experience with particular cases in detail, it is enough to ask only these main or general questions. The formulation of general questions needs to be adjusted to the interview situation and participants’ previous answers.
- *Sub-questions*. If participants did not describe particular cases in detail, as well as their understanding of the dark figure problem, it was necessary to ask sub-questions to gather further information. Some sub-questions were part of the interview guide and interviewers could phrase them in the suggested way. Some sub-questions could not be formulated in advance because they depended on the specific participants’ descriptions.

The topics of the interview were arranged so as to examine the following:

- Experience with violence in the professional (experts) and personal (victims/perpetrators) setting
- Types and phenomenology of violence (extent, levels of violence)
- Information on reported and nonreported cases and procedures (how much of it remains undetected?)
- Background information on perpetrators and victims (e.g., who are perpetrators and victims, background)
- Information on the context (e.g., situational, cultural, societal)
- Implications for prevention and detection of violence on perpetrators and victims (e.g., needs)
- Responsibilities and risk (e.g., optimization of reporting procedure)

The first part of the interview questions was aimed at investigating the participants’ sociodemographic traits: place of residence; age; occupational sector (social, health, education and upbringing, justice, social care, security, political institutions, NGO, other); profession; institution of employment and years of professional experience.

The second part of the interview consisted of the following questions, with additional options provided by the interviewer in case the respondent needed help or clarification:

1. Do you have direct professional experience with violence and/or process of reporting violence? (Yes/No/Other)
2. How big/important of a problem does nonreported violence, described at the beginning of this interview, represent in our community? (I don't know/It is a minor problem/It is a large problem/ Something else)
3. How challenging is your job in relation to different cases of violence you encounter? How challenging is the process of reporting violence in your sector? (It doesn't affect my job much/My job is sometimes challenging about violent cases and reporting/This is seriously challenging in my profession/ Other)
4. Can you tell me something about the reasons for not reporting violence? What do you think, what are the most common reasons for not reporting violence?
5. *Their assessment of the violent act*: They find that the situation can be solved themselves/ They find that there were no more serious consequences/ They find the consequences of the reporting more damaging than the consequences of violence;
6. *Lack of responsibility*: They did not know who to report to; It was not clear who was responsible for reporting the violence; Other;
7. *Fear for themselves*: There was fear of the clients' reaction/There was fear of the reaction of their superiors/They were afraid of colleague reactions/There were fears of complications with the court/ Other
8. *Doubt in the system*: They do not trust the system support/They believe institutions are corrupt/They have no confidence in the effectiveness of institutions/Other
9. Other reasons
10. Is reporting a violent incident by professionals always evident in your sector? (Yes/No/Other)
11. Is there a clear procedure for the institution where you are working with regard to the treatment of children in the event of violence? Are there tools/protocols used? (Yes/No/Other)
12. How can reporting be improved in general? What can be improved with regard to the tools? (a) Better education, (b) Raising awareness; (c) Clear protocols and procedures; (d) Multi-sector cooperation; (e) Increasing trust in the system; (f) Other
13. Would you like to add anything on this topic?

### Section Summary

- The interview was about the reasons for not reporting violence and its prevalence in various institutions and sections of society
- A number of participants declined participation due to fear of possible repercussions related to the information revealed
- The second main aim was to find out more about improving the reporting procedures
- Building rapport and engaging with your interviewees by showing an interest in what they are saying should be carefully considered, as it considerably affects the interview quality.

## Ethical Considerations

Before implementing the research design and interviews, we obtained all the necessary written permissions from the Ethical Board on research at the Faculty of Law of the University of Zagreb, and the corresponding ministries and state agencies where the participants were employed. All of the project team researchers were informed on the ethical aspects and rules in conducting an interview:

1. The participation forms were available to all participants prior to the interview
2. The participants were asked for permission to audio record the conversation
3. The audio recording equipment was checked prior to the interview implementation
4. Data collection also included documenting nonverbal reactions from the participants by the interviewer
5. A safe and private location for the interview was ensured with no external disturbances
6. Adequate time for both the researcher and participant was ensured for the implementation of the interview
7. After the interview, the researcher coded, inspected and archived the data
8. After the interview, the researcher explained future steps to the participant and provided contact information in case of necessity

The ethical aspect of the research was particularly important. We ensured that:

1. All participants had adequate information on the research topic so as to enable them to affirm informed consent in writing;
2. All researchers were instructed on how to check and adjust their research approach in case the participant was personally a victim of prior violence;
3. All researchers were trained and instructed on how to implement the interview in case the participant was personally a victim of prior violence;
4. All participants were instructed on privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality aspects, as well as informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any given moment, with their already provided information deleted;
5. All data obtained in the research were coded, anonymized, archived and protected accordingly.

### Section Summary

- All ethical elements of the research were carefully considered, checked and rehearsed before the main research
- Interview location, privacy and available time are crucial for the conversation quality
- Researchers were trained and instructed how to conduct the interview with consideration for participants who were prior violence victims
- Researchers should provide contact information in case respondents remember additional information, and check their data or personal notifications immediately after the

conversation

## Conclusions

The Violence Research Lab's research on the dark figure of violence is one of the focal points in the attempt to empirically analyze the phenomenology, etiology and prosecution of violence in Croatia, based on the findings from the previous [Balkan Homicide Study \(2016\)](#). The aim was to provide a detailed insight into the phenomenology of violence by empirically examining its incidence, structure, geographical distribution, perpetrator and victim profiles, as well as phenomenological profiles, with special focus on qualitative exploration of the dark figure of violence. The purpose of the interviews was to collect data about the dark figure of violence, which meant violence that is neither reported nor prosecuted. Based on our preliminary findings, we remain confident that our empirical research and qualitative content analysis will provide precious feedback on the reasons and motives for not reporting violence, as well as the possibilities and key aspects of enhancing the process of detecting, reporting and preventing violence in diverse areas of society.

Classroom Discussion Questions

## Classroom Discussion Questions

1. What are key ethical aspects when researching violence?
2. What should researchers personally consider when preparing for an interview?
3. What are some unexpected situations or developments that can occur during an interview?
4. What are the technical and organizational prerequisites for the implementation of a qualitative method such as an interview?
5. What if the participant is also a victim of violence, and how does it impact the interviewer's approach?
6. What should researchers be aware of during an interview implementation?

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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