

INTERVIEWING TO ASSESS AND MANAGE THREATS OF VIOLENCE

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet kommer att offentligens försvaras fredagen den 15 September 2017, kl 10:00 i sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Ellen Giebels, Department of Psychology, University of Twente, Netherlands

This thesis consists of a summary and the following papers:

- I. Geurts, R., Granhag, P. A., Ask, K., & Vrij, A. (2016). Taking threats to the lab: Introducing an experimental paradigm for studying verbal threats. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 3, 53-64. doi: 10.1037/tam0000060
- II. Geurts, R., Ask, K., Granhag, P. A., & Vrij, A. (2017). Eliciting information from people who pose a threat: Counter-interview strategies examined. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 6, 158-166. doi: 10.1016/j.jarmac.2016.10.002
- III. Geurts, R., Ask, K., Granhag, P. A., & Vrij, A. (2017). *Interviewing to manage threats: Exploring the effects of interview style on information gain and threateners' counter-interview strategies*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- IV. Geurts, R., Granhag, P. A., Ask, K., & Vrij, A. (2017). Assessing threats of violence: Professional skill or common sense? *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*. Advanced online publication. doi: 10.1002/jip.1486



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Abstract

Geurts, R. (2017). *Interviewing to Assess and Manage Threats of Violence*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, P.O. Box 500, 40530 Gothenburg, Sweden. Phone: +46(0)317864283, Email: renete.geurts@psy.gu.se

What dynamics can be expected when interacting with persons who threaten to cause harm and, given these dynamics, which interview methods work best? This thesis proposes a scientific perspective on effective threat assessment and management (TAM) interviewing. A novel paradigm was developed and employed in Studies I, II, and III. Participants were given a fictitious case describing two conflicting parties and were then asked to take on the role of the threatening party in a subsequent interview with the conflicting party. **Study I** (N = 157) examined whether individuals' intent to actualize a threat shows in how they verbalize the threats. Intent was manipulated across three conditions via the likelihood to actualize the threat: low likelihood (no intent: bluffers), medium likelihood (weak intent: conditional actualizers), and high likelihood (strong intent: decisive actualizers). Based on theory and research in cognitive psychology, it was predicted that decisive actualizers would provide the most detail about the implementation of the threat, followed by conditional actualizers, and bluffers would provide the least. The opposite trend was found: Persons more likely to actualize a threat were found less informative about its implementation. **Study II** (N = 179) tested the effect of two interview techniques (low vs. high suspicion-oriented) on the information provision of bluffers and actualizers. Drawing on psychological research examining lie detection, bluffers were expected to be more forthcoming when questioned about their threats and, in particular, when the questions communicated suspicion. As expected, bluffers provided more information in response to specific questions as compared to actualizers, especially with regard to implementation details (replicating Study I). However, the difference between bluffers and actualizers was not further accentuated by the use of suspicion-oriented questions. Furthermore, the study explored whether threatening participants had used counter-interview strategies. Participants were found to be forthcoming, while also being strategic and adaptive to interviewers' responses. **Study III** (N = 120) tested the hypothesis that rapport-based interviewing would be more effective for threat assessment and management purposes than direct interviewing. Against expectations, no differences were found between interview protocols as pertains to the threateners' use of counter-interview strategies, their information provision, or their willingness to pursue/discuss the threat. Furthermore, the study advanced Study II by exploring what types of counter-interview strategies threateners employ. The most frequently reported strategies were to prove capability and to conceal information. **Study IV** was an online study that investigated whether threat assessments made by professionals were of higher quality than those made by non-professionals. Threat assessment professionals, university students, and laypersons assessed the risk for violence in three fictitious cases. In conformity with the literature on expert decision-making, it was predicted that professionals (vs. students and laypersons) would agree more with one another with respect to risk assessments, and that their information search would show more resemblance with empirically supported threat cues. The results demonstrated support for both hypotheses.

Keywords: human intelligence gathering, investigative interviewing, threat assessment, threat management, true and false intent
