

# de Volkskrant

NEWS

## Psychiatrist in confidential report: 'wrong choices' were made by Amsterdam police prior to shooting of confused German influencer

The way Amsterdam police treated German influencer Sammy Baker, who was shot dead by officers in a confused state in 2020, was 'inadequate'. This is observed by crisis psychiatrist Aram van Reijssen from Rotterdam, care manager of Parnassia Group.

Willem Feenstra, Mark Misérus and Maud Effting 30 September 2023, 06:00



Demonstrators in Amsterdam demand justice for Sammy Baker, August 2021. Image Getty

Both in terms of treatment and coordination, the police could have made 'different and better choices', the psychiatrist writes in a confidential draft report which is in the possession of Argos and *de Volkskrant*. Van Reijssen called the police's actions 'not de-escalating' and 'not aimed at reducing fear', while Baker was presumably psychotic.

**If the police had waited for the police negotiator who was already on his way, it "could have had a positive impact on the outcome", he argues.** According to him, it is unclear why they did not wait, as was the plan. **It is also a 'missed opportunity' that help was not sought from the psychiatric ambulance, which was already there.**

The report forms an important part of the lawsuit brought by Baker's parents against the Amsterdam police, after the public prosecutor had previously decided not to prosecute the officers. The parents disagreed. **If the judge ruled that the police had not acted properly, it could potentially still lead to a criminal case against the officers.** Psychiatrist Van Reijssen was appointed by the court as an independent expert in the trial.

### **'Not suspect, but victim'**

23-year-old Baker was shot dead in his underwear in an Amsterdam courtyard garden in 2020. Cannabis use had probably caused him to go into psychosis. After being chased by police, he put a knife to his throat and the situation escalated. Officers drew their weapons, a dog handler ran at him from behind with a dog and took him down. In the chaos, officers shot him dead with several bullets.

Psychiatrist Van Reijssen writes that the police did seem to have the "intention" to transfer Baker safely to the appropriate healthcare

provider. For instance, the officer in charge stressed several times that Baker should be seen as a victim and not a suspect. But in reality, things were different. **'The police spoke to the victim almost continuously with weapons drawn and in a strong voice. They did shout loudly that the police wanted to help the person involved, but in a tone and volume that were rather intimidating and fear-inducing.'**

Also, according to the psychiatrist, there was little danger to third parties and the threat seemed "manageable" for the environment.

In the case, the driver of the ambulance also made a statement. According to him, his attempt to contact the police at the scene was 'ignored'. In a letter, in possession of the *Volkscrant*, he wrote that the police were 'obsessively' trying to gain control over Baker. "They used violence instead of talking or asking us to help them. (...) I will never forget this. Why did the police act like this when there were other solutions?"

### **Poor cooperation**

Van Reijssen also states in his draft report that there seem to be "no agreements" in Amsterdam on the joint deployment of the police and the mental health services.

Psychiatrist Jeroen Zoeteman, head of Amsterdam's crisis service, does not want to say anything about Sammy Baker's case. However, he does say in general that the cooperation between mental health and police does not work well. "How can the police on the one hand say they don't know anything about 'confused' people, while at the same time they say to confused people with a knife in their hands: we will solve this ourselves? This grey area - between the police, the OM,

the municipality and the mental health services - is really underdeveloped. But the police have to deal with this. Because in the coming years they will continue to face these confused people. And bystanders will continue to call 112. So policemen will have to understand the mental health sector and vice versa.”

According to Zoeteman, there needs to be a better focus on how to deal with reports of confused people. 'You see it now also in the Rotterdam case,' he says. 'We don't know all the details yet, but the future report is already almost predictable: there were signals, we all failed, but nobody was responsible. And then everyone goes their own way again. Noone feels responsible for people with misunderstood behavior. That really has to change.'

In a response, the police say they are increasingly facing people in mental distress. 'This is particularly worrying. The police are too often the final link in cases where care is necessary. In Amsterdam, the triangle has announced that we will analyse recent incidents in context. Not for blame and penalty, but to look for the weak points in the system in which so many players operate, but where people who need care still fall out.'

*The case can also be heard on Argos, Saturday at 2pm on Radio 1.*