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Persistent poverty in the Netherlands

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2. Methodology and description of research group

2.1. Research methodology

This study aims to explain the perpetuation of poverty and is based on data collected during the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project (1997-1999). More information on the background of this study can be found in several reports (Engbersen 1997; Staring et al., 2002; Ypeij et al., 2002; Ypeij & Snel 2002). Initially this chapter describes the data collection, processing, coding, analyzing, research reliability, validity, and generalizability of this research project. Then, I explain why I chose for qualitative data analysis. In the second part of this chapter, I describe the research group itself. Although data gathered in several neighborhoods, the neighborhood turns out not to be the most pivotal element in the data analysis.

2.1.1. Data collection

Compared to other regions, low-income groups are concentrated in cities such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam (Engbersen & Snel, 1996; p. 129). Although similar poverty concentrations are also to be found in other Dutch regions, half of all poverty regions are to be found in the big cities (cf. Snel et al., 2000; p. 34). Therefore, research was conducted in three Dutch urban areas: two in Amsterdam (“De Bijlmermeer” and “Amsterdam-Noord”), and one in Rotterdam (“Rotterdam-Delfshaven”). Compared to others on the list of poverty districts, some of these areas’ neighborhoods are at the top (cf. Engbersen, 1997; p. 19). The researchers supposed that in these neighborhoods poverty is expressed most distinctly, and that they could observe processes of social exclusion. During the project, two researchers respectively lived in Amsterdam-Noord and Rotterdam-Delfshaven. Their aim was to gain unconstrained access to people in poverty, and to collect eighty interviews per neighborhood. In chapter 5 (Sympathizing, fear and loathing in the neighborhood), these neighborhoods are briefly described on the basis of their characteristics. Furthermore, the researchers were in search of specific ethnic groups, to know Dutch (single) parents in Amsterdam-Noord, Turks in Delfshaven and Surinamese in Amsterdam Bijlmermeer. But in each and every neighborhood, the researchers also interviewed various ethnic groups.

Amsterdam-Noord was the first area to be studied (1997-1998). The sub municipality Amsterdam-Noord contains some of the poorest neighborhood in the Netherlands: Tuindorp Buiksloot, Volewijck and IJplein/Vogelbuurt. The chief researcher lived in one of these neighborhoods – Annelou Ypeij. She participated in multiple organizations, and she could follow some respondents over time. Because she lived in this area, this was especially appreciated by the respondents. The researchers were in search of the classic blue-collar workers who have been pushed out of the regular economy. The economic restructuring should have been most visible in these neighborhoods. However, according to the researchers (cf. Ypeij et al., 2002), it became easier said than done to find the classic unemployed blue-collar workers. These workers did not live in poverty; moreover, they also moved out of the neighborhood, or were not willing to cooperate. Only six respondents were obtained via direct social contacts. The original research sites (i.e. De Vogelbuurt) were proved insufficient, and therefore the research was expanded to other neighborhoods in the area of Amsterdam-Noord. Respondents were finally found via schools, prominent city dwellers, grass root organizations³⁰, migrant organizations, ringing doorbells, approaching people in the street, contacts via social workers and social service employees (cf. Ypeij et al., 2002).

Rotterdam-Delfshaven, as well, contains two of the poorest neighborhoods in the Netherlands: Spangen and Tussendijken. To conduct his PhD-research, Richard Staring – the main researcher – lived there from 1993 until 1996 (cf. Staring, 2001). Afterwards, he conducted many interviews for the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project. He knew the ins and outs of the neighborhood and maintained many social connections in the district. He was therefore able to officiate as a mediator between the respondents and other researchers. Interviews were conducted from 1998-1999 with the help of other researchers: one from Turkish descent, and one Portuguese-speaking woman, she conducted interviews among Cape Verdians. For the researchers, it was difficult to find sufficient respondents for several reasons; there seemed to be a research fatigue, negative media attention obstructed cooperation among dweller and researchers, some dwellers faced difficulties distinguishing between journalists and researchers, and the length of the interview was for some a problem (cf. Staring et al., 2002). Most of the respondents were indirectly approached; via grass roots organizations, social workers, prominent people in migrant networks and via the chief researcher. Five respondents were accessed via snowball sampling. Some interview topics were con-

troversial; for example the questions on informal labor, and illegal possessions in their home country³¹.

The Bijlmermeer (the southeast district of Amsterdam) was the last studied area. From November 1998 until the summer of 1999, seventy interviews were conducted. The chief researcher – Annelou Ypeij – and four assistants conducted the interviews. Two assistants were from Surinamese descent. One of the Surinamese interviewers combined her research activities with her daytime job as a youth counselor. Her substantial social network provided access to other Surinamese. Thirty-three respondents were found via grass roots organizations, such as schools, employment agencies, and neighborhood centers. Twenty elementary schools were approached and this resulted in two respondents. An ad in a local newspaper proved successful. Ten respondents were found via ringing at the door and eight via snowball sampling (cf. Ypeij & Snel, 2002).

I did not participate in the original project, so in the summer of 2004, I revisited some respondents in Amsterdam Noord. I faced many difficulties. Addresses were lost or the old addresses were not available, some respondents moved out of the neighborhood, did not want to cooperate, or simply died. After biking through the neighborhood during many weeks, I only interviewed nine respondents. The amount of time spend in the neighborhood did not match up to the benefits – knowing that I still had to analyze about two hundred interviews. In the epilogue (see chapter 9, page 189), I use my collected interviews to understand whether the research results are still valuable in this century.

2.1.2. Interviews / questionnaire

The research objective was to conduct one hundred interviews per neighborhood. In the end, this project resulted in 216 transcriptions (eighty-eight in Amsterdam-Noord, sixty-six in Delfshaven and eighty in Amsterdam-South-East). Because of the quantity of questions, multiple conversations were necessary during several visits. This took many hours of interviewing, transcribing the interviews, and analyzing the transcriptions. Some respondents (N=25) were visited three times, the majority just one time (N=97), or two times (N=81)³². The average interview duration is over four hours, with a maximum of twelve hours and a minimum of one hour.

Eleven sociologists and anthropologists conducted face-to-face interviews. The researchers chose to conduct face-to-face interviews for several reasons. First of all, if they send a regular mail questionnaire, they expected high rates of non-response among the unemployed. Second, many topics, for example on informal work and debts, are only talked about during an interview with someone the respondent trusts. Third, the researchers assumed that they could get detailed information on the life-world of people in poverty, and that they could get information that has not been gathered before, and cannot be collected via mail questionnaires.

The researchers used a structured questionnaire³³ with open and closed-ended questions, and the latter were standardized³⁴. The questionnaire included about two hundred questions on several topics: neighborhood, labor, income, getting by, relationship with public services, social networks, and social participation. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. The answers to the questionnaire were processed in SPSS – a statistical software program. The respondents did not answer all questions: some were not relevant, other topics were avoided because according to the respondents it violated their privacy.

2.1.2. Coding and analyzing

The quantitative data was processed using a statistical software program, and what was left were thousands of pages of interview transcription (2.297.920 words, approximately 4500 pages). Therefore, this was available to me: the transcriptions, the statistics, and my own interviews. The first thing I did was coding³⁵ – the transformation of observations into categories and classifications assigning a number or symbol to each item of information or a statement. The analysis could be carried out subsequently. It is more or less the interpretative process by which data are broken down analytically (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 1990; p. 12). I assigned 213 codes to the transcriptions, and these codes referred to the respondents' situations, interactions, attitudes, perspectives, opinions, feelings, life-strategies, etc. The codelist was developed from observation³⁶. After that, a software program was able to generate an output of a relevant code³⁷. I did not start from fixed categories, but from what I observed during reading the transcriptions.

This coding enabled me to examine the code output rapidly. After reading and coding, I distinguished between the relevant “fields.” These fields seem to play a

central role in the life-world of the respondents. After that, I read and reread the code output and transcriptions many times. Printed transcripts allowed for a careful process of reading and rereading the data so that the key themes *per field* could be identified. Through this process, emerging themes and clusters of themes developed as the analysis progressed through consecutive stages (cf. Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The process builds on the interchange of theory and empirical observation that permits the recognition of patterns in participants' realities and their securing and explanation in a conceptual framework. So, I did not analyze the data fully inductively, nor fully deductively. But I constantly switched between theory and the data.

During writing and setting up this study, I use the statistical data to show the situation of the respondents. This data is primarily used to show background information on the respondents. Statistical data less capable showing how social relations, social mechanisms and processes contribute to the perpetuation of poverty. This kind of data cannot show the subtlety of interactions of people in poverty with others. I provide 141 interview fragments as examples of how the respondents interact with others in the relevant context and how they deal with everyday hardship. Many interview transcriptions provide much-detailed information, but not *every* interview contained information on social relations, processes, etc. Therefore, a full analysis of all transcriptions was not possible at all times, and I only use those illustrations that provided sufficient information. I selected those quotations that illustrated the particular situation coherently, and I used examples from approximately 86 interviews. After observing all the different patterns, the writing of the different chapters could start.

2.1.3. Reliability, validity, and generalizability

Questions must be answered as to whether this research is reliable, valid, and generalizable. This, however, brings about a difficulty. On the one hand, a structured questionnaire is used and many individuals are interviewed. This can be defined as *positivistic research* – for positivism embraces any approach that applies scientific method to human affairs, and conceives as belonging to a natural order open to objective enquiry (Hollis, 1994; p.41). On the other hand, the interview analysis concentrated on the life-world, social settings and interactions. This can be defined as *naturalistic research* – that focuses on the analyses of social interactions and social phenomenon (cf. Wester & Peters, 2004; p. 12-3). The concepts of reliability, validity, generalizability, and representativeness are terms

generally used for positivistic research, and are difficult to apply to naturalistic research (cf. Golafshani, 2003; Horsburgh, 2003). Despite this difficulty, I say something about the quality of the research, and how certain difficulties are being obviated.

Reliability is central in research and reflects its accomplishments. The central question concerning reliability is whether the same results would be produced if the research procedures were to be repeated; different researchers should produce similar results on a different time. If not, the findings could be based on coincidence. In point of fact of course, this research is not repeated by the same number of researchers with the same number of respondents. Although I cannot say something about whether the research findings are reliable, the use of literature and peer debriefing help to overcome some of the difficulties.

Validity refers to whether or not a measurement procedure actually measures what the researcher supposes it does; there should be a correspondence between the question asked and what has been measured. If not, the questions could have measured something completely different than originally intended. The validity of this questionnaire is guaranteed by using questions that have been used in other research. However, although validity is valid for positivistic research, it is not very useful for naturalistic qualitative research. The analysis concentrated on interactions and social settings and therefore analyzed the life-world. This study did not really measure prevalence of individual characteristics. Therefore, I cannot say much about the validity of this research.

Generalizability refers to whether what has been observed can be applied to a much larger group. However, again, this concept is useful while doing quantitative research, which measures individual characteristics of many people. Consequentially, it questions whether these individual characteristics can be applied to a much larger group. Again, this is too positivistic. I do not attempt to make statements on people, but on processes, social relations, and interactions. However, to check whether these processes are generalizable is somewhat difficult. The use of literature, in which similar processes and interactions are described, will obviate some flaws.

2.1.4. Extensive and intensive research

In this study, there is a mix of intensive and extensive research (cf. Schuyt, 1986; p. 105). This mixture is used in various studies, both theoretical and empirical (cf. Lancaster, 1961; Engbersen, 1990; Blokland 1998; Savage et al., 2001; Downward & Mearman, 2006; Rusinovic, 2006). Andrew Sayer (1992: p. 243, orig. 1984) showed that *extensive research* – studying rapidly a large number of cases – is particularly good for mapping the characteristics of a population. Extensive research methods can be applied to concrete events to derive generalisations about their patterning. However, human agents are creative, experimental beings and their contexts of actions are constantly shifting. For this reason, extensive research programs commonly adopted in the empiricist / positivist research tradition often fail to untangle the *dynamic* and *contextual* relational links between social actions and economic structures.

To counter this, abstract conceptualisations of *processes* can be developed and *intensive research* – focusing intensively on one or few cases – of specific cases can be undertaken, in order to understand causation patterns (cf. Guy & Henneberry, 2000). Sayer claims that intensive research allows the researcher essentially to follow a cause-and-effect track in a specific situation and, therefore, it was better for studying cause and effect than extensive research. With reference to this study, because I want to uncover how people become socially excluded from various fields, thus following a cause-and-effect trajectory in a specific field, intensive research suits very well.

What did I do? This research project resulted in many interview transcriptions (qualitative data) and statistical data (quantitative data). I focused predominantly on the qualitative data (roughly intensive research). I only use the quantitative data to draw attention to *differences* between people in poverty, and to determine the position of the respondents *in the field*. I chose to focus on the qualitative data (intensive research) for several reasons. First of all, the theoretical notions themselves – fields, social interactions, social relations, etc. – determined the strong focus on qualitative elements. What happens in the fields is difficult to “measure.”

Second, quantitative data obscures how the respondents interact with the significant others in the various fields, and how the respondents interpret their situation

vis-à-vis others. Sociological perspectives, such as symbolic interactionism, hardly use statistical data (quantitative data cannot get the subtlety of the social interactions). With the use of intensive research, I am more able to understand the interchange – though ethnography is the best manner to grasp social interactions and exchange. Third, the use of intensive research enables me to observe the processes towards social exclusion. A process is difficult to detect with extensive research. Fourth, using intensive research, new insights into the respondents' life-world are possible.

However, the qualitative data analysis suffers from some difficulties as well. First of all, the respondents *interpret* their past actions and choices. What they say is only a reflection on how they experience their past – not what actually really happened. The respondents' verbatims and situations reflect their definition of the situation, and cannot be taken of face value³⁸. Second, the transcriptions are often *summaries* of the interviews. Therefore, a full analysis of what the respondents said was not always possible. Third, I *interpret* the situation of the respondents. However, the situation of the respondents is already an interpretation of how they understood their situation; I tried to understand an interpretation of their situation. Furthermore, I use my words to describe their circumstances. In the course of analysis, I use sociological terms, and these terms might obscure their reality³⁹.

Short, social interactions and how the respondents deal with their social environment are central to the analysis. I predominantly focused on the qualitative data. Second, because so many people were interviewed, I was able to outline the prevalence of social phenomena, for example, how *many* respondents experience the relationship with the welfare officials negatively. Lastly, I was able to obtain much information from the transcriptions, that – as a lone researcher – I never could have gathered myself. The strength of the project lies in the fact that the researchers were able to contact many different categories of people (age, gender, poverty duration, ethnicity, etc.). The entire project sheds light on the wide diversity of people in poverty. This diversity is sketched in what follows.

2.2. Description of the research group

First, let me sketch out a brief quantitative description of the respondents by emphasizing to their relative positions in society. However, we must be careful in interpreting these data. First of all, this data might suggest that I want to explain

poverty perpetuation from the individual level: the individual constraints, the individual traits, the individual shortcomings. This is not really the case. Rather I describe their impoverished situation, simply because knowledge about this is very important to understand their actions with reference to others in the field. Second, I need to say something about the representativeness of the data. Although many people in poverty were interviewed, it is only a fraction of all low-income people in the Netherlands. Therefore, these numbers express little about *all* people in poverty in the Netherlands. Practically, the only common characteristic of the respondents (N=216) is: they all have to live from a low income, not exceeding 105-110% of the social policy minimum. First of all, I will give an overview of the main characteristics of the research group – gender, age, poverty duration, and ethnicity. After that, I will give insight into the chief resources of the respondents; their cultural, economic, and social capital.

2.2.1. The situation of the research group

Recently, Gesthuizen (2006) used a multi-level statistical model to explain the determinants of poverty in the Netherlands. He found that the household composition is the most important factor to explain poverty; the neighborhood explains little. Various household attributes have an independent effect on poverty. If the head of the household is young (25-34 years), does not work, or has a low status job, the chance of being poor is relatively high. Furthermore, young couples with kids, single-headed households, and single-parent households have a high chance to live in poverty. The economic conjecture concerns the chance of living in poverty: during extensive unemployment, the chance of living in poverty is relatively high. Along these lines, there are numerous issues involved to explain the persistence and causes of poverty (cf. Nordenmark, 1999). Whether people in poverty are able to escape hardship often depends on their circumstances: the combination of their age, gender, household situation, their occupational status, health, and income. For that reason, I make an effort to sketch the situation of the respondents. This information is used as a starting point from which the qualitative analysis will proceed. I will start with poverty duration.

Poverty duration – Being poor for a single month is not thoroughly problematic. Being poor for several months, years, or even decades causes severe problems: resources run dry, the distance to the labor market increases, social isolation advances, people have to sell their house or car, and poverty can cause depressions (Brown & Moran, 1997). Recalling from the first chapter, approximately 40% of

all people in poverty were persistently poor, which means more than four years. This corresponds to roughly 6% of all Dutch citizens and 7% of all households (SCP, 2001). The “Landscapes of Poverty” researchers were able to get in contact with many long-term poor in the Netherlands, finding that seventy-seven respondents lived in poverty for more than ten years, forty-five lived in poverty between five to ten years, fifty-eight between one and five years, and only eight were living in poverty for less than one year. One of the chief characteristics of long-term poverty is its *enduring* hardship.

Gender – Evidence for the feminization of poverty has been found in the US and Europe. To varying degrees, and with the clearest exception of Sweden, women face a greater risk of poverty than men (cf. Lister, 2004; p. 55). In the Netherlands, half of all poor households are female-headed (Engbersen et al., 2000; p. 8). The incidence of poverty is largest among single parents with young children (often women), and single person households, in particular women in old age (Visser & Hemerijck, 1997; p. 42). During the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project, 143 women and 72 men were interviewed, and 46 female-headed households were part of the research group. From all the categories (see Table 2.1), more women than men were interviewed. In the forthcoming qualitative analysis, I use more examples of women experiencing poverty than men, simply because I have more information on them.

Age – Certain age groups have a higher risk of living in poverty. For example, a distinguishing feature of poverty in old age is that escape is more difficult, especially for the oldest and the frail, as paid work is rarely an option in societies that construct older age as incompatible with continued involvement in the labor market (cf. Lister, 2004; p. 67). Therefore, the chance of getting out of poverty strongly depends on age. Numbers on poverty in the Netherlands show that about half of all young poor people (age 18 to 34 years) escaped their poverty position in 1999. This is not the case for the elderly. The common rule is that the chance of escaping poverty declines from the moment people are getting older (SCP, 2001; p. 28). Young people have a fair chance to escape their poor position, which according to the literature, slightly reduces over time (see also SCP, 2001; p. 41). In this research, practically all age groups are present (see Table 2.1). The youngest respondent is 18 years old, the oldest is 85 years old, and the average is 46.

Migrants – Among (former) migrants, poverty is a common phenomenon (SCP, 2001; p. 83). Compared to native Dutch, the labor market position of these groups is unfavorable. The high unemployment rates among these groups has several backstories: inconsiderable labor market participation (especially among Turkish and Moroccan women), the severe number of people tested as medically unfit (older Turkish and Moroccan men), and the high number of single-headed households living on welfare (especially Surinamese and Antillean women). The (former) migrants pensions are often low, which results in high poverty rates among the elderly (ibid.). About 40% of the non-western migrant households had a low income, compared to 12% of the “autochthonous.” During the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project, the researchers were in search of the (former) migrants, and they were able to interview many of them. However, the majority of the respondents is native Dutch (N=102). Additionally, Turks (N=36), Surinamese (N=30), Cape Verdians (N=20), Antilleans (N=11), and Moroccans (N=6) were interviewed. Because the social positions within these ethnic groups differ strongly⁴⁰, ethnic comparisons are difficult to make.

Household situation – According to the numbers of the SCP (2000; p. 15), single-parent households are most likely to live on a low income. From all single parents in 1999, 47% lived from a low-income. Furthermore, single-parent households have the slightest chance of getting out of poverty (SCP, 2001; p. 35). Singles are the second group most likely to live from a low income (SCP, 2001; p. 16). Women have a higher chance of living from a low income than do men (ibid.). Couples have the slightest chance of living from a low income. In 1999, about 8,6% of all couples with underage kids (under 18) had to live from a low income (SCP, 2001; p. 16). Similar groups are among the present respondents: about 36% of the respondents lives on his/her own, 31% is a single parent, 25% lives in particular as a couple – with or without children. Noteworthy is the number of respondents who went through a divorce (N=90).

Benefits – Welfare and unemployment beneficiaries are the most likely to live in poverty. In 1999, about 66% of them lived in poverty. Compared to the financial position of similar groups in 1981, their position is worsened (SCP, 2001; p. 16). Beneficiaries and the elderly had the slightest chance of getting out of poverty (compared to regular employees) (SCP, 2001; p. 32). People who live from a benefit or pension (compared to regular employers) and the duration of the poverty spell as three years and more (compared to just one year) most influence the

chance of getting out of poverty (SCP, 2001; p. 38). In addition, the financial position of entrepreneurs is precarious. The chance of living in poverty (compared to regular employment) is four times higher. If people are poor for a long period, the chance of rising above the low-income threshold becomes less (SCP, 2001; p. 13). To be brief, the kind of received income is significant, as well as the duration of poverty.

Then again, the main *source* of income among the respondents differs: 15% receive income from employment, 1% from entrepreneurial activities, 11% from pension, 47% from a welfare benefit, 3% from an unemployment benefit, and 18% from a disability benefit. The received benefit or income does not reflect the position of the respondents: 29 respondents who are tested medically unfit receive a welfare benefit instead of a disability benefit. If the disability benefit equals (financially) the welfare benefit, people receive the latter. Looking at the statistics, therefore it is difficult to pinpoint what the respondents' position is in the labor market. Therefore, I analyzed all the transcriptions and more or less determined their position with reference to the labor market. I focused on whether they are able and / or obliged to work.

Reading the transcriptions, I analyzed whether the respondents were available for the labor market, their health status and household situation. I came up with approximately nine categories (see Table 2.1). Reflecting the respondents' distance to and position in the labor market, these positions also mirror how they deal with the relevant fields, and how they interact with "others". For example, whereas many single parents face difficulties in obtaining flexible day care, the elderly have hardly any relationship with welfare officials, while subsidized workers interact sometimes with the welfare officials. These positions say much about whether people might take up employment in the future, their obligation to work and the chance they will escape poverty.

From all the respondents, 55% (N=117) works or is obliged to work. I made a distinction between subsidized workers (N=23) and the working poor, because the first category started a reintegration trajectory or is attending a course. The working poor (N=21) have little to do with this kind of trajectory. They often have small-time jobs. The other 45% is not obliged to work. They are often the elderly (N=26) or were tested medically unfit (N=66). The elderly and people who are tested medically unfit are able to contemplate on their past, and can in-

form us on how they experience welfare policy, the neighborhood, their social relations et cetera. They are not expelled from the analysis. Furthermore, I distinguished between these categories to clarify that, I elaborate how, there are many differences between people in poverty.

Table 2.1 Labor market position, gender, age and poverty duration

<i>OTW= obliged to work NOTW= not obliged to work</i>											
Numbers											
		1. OTW couples	2. OTW single parents older kids (>5)	3. OTW single no kids	4. Subsidized job, trainee, job training	5. Working poor	6. NOTW medically unfit	7. NOTW single parent kids under five	8. NOTW elderly	9. Illegal	Total
Gender	Woman	7	20	9	16	15	37	16	19	2	141
	Man	14	0	7	7	6	28	0	7	0	69
	Total	21	20	16	23	21	65	16	26	2	210
Age	0-25	1	0	0	1	4	1	5	0	0	12
	26-40	11	12	5	14	12	17	9	0	2	82
	41-55	7	8	6	6	4	29	2	0	0	62
	56 >	2	0	5	2	1	18	0	26	0	54
	Total	21	20	16	23	21	65	16	26	2	210
Ethnicity	Dutch	11	5	10	8	7	33	6	21	0	101
	Surinamese	1	3	1	5	2	8	6	3	1	30
	Turkish	8	2	2	3	4	15	0	1	0	35
	Moroccans	0	1	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	6
	Cape Verdians	1	6	2	2	3	3	1	0	1	19
	Antilleans	0	2	1	3	2	2	1	0	0	11
	Other	0	1	0	0	1	4	2	1	0	9
Total	21	20	16	23	21	66	16	26	2	211	
Poverty duration	< 1 year	0	1	0	1	0	2	3	0	0	7
	1 - 3 years	7	4	4	2	5	10	4	1	0	37
	3 - 5 years	3	1	1	2	3	4	5	1	0	20
	5 - 7 years	2	3	1	5	4	7	2	0	1	25
	7 - 10 years	1	1	1	0	2	8	2	3	1	19
	10 years up	7	8	8	3	3	31	0	15	0	75
	Total	20	18	15	13	17	62	16	20	2	183
Place	North	9	3	7	9	6	24	8	13	0	79
	Delfshaven	9	11	5	6	8	18	1	4	1	63
	Bijlmer	3	6	4	8	7	24	7	9	1	69
	Total	21	20	16	23	21	66	16	26	2	211

The first category [1] consists of couples (N=21). They are available for the labor market, and some (N=12) do have children living with them. Most of them are Turks and native Dutch, middle-age, and their poverty duration is not very long. Because they are couples, it means that both the man and the woman are available

for the labor market. However, there is little information on the labor market position of the partners. Where information is available, the woman and the man are in similar positions, which mean that they are both unemployed. [2] The second category consists of single parents with kids over five (N=20). In the 1990s, parents with children under five did not have to work, but the parents were obliged to work as soon as all the children were older than five (cf. Van Wel & Knijn, 2001). These single parents with kids over five, often in their mid thirties, Cape Verdians (N=6), native Dutch (N=5), and Surinamese (N=3), face the difficulties of organizing flexible day care for their children. These people are obliged to work and often belong to the long-term poor. The third category [3] consists of singles without children. They are available for the labor market and are obliged to work (N=16). These people are often lower-educated, native Dutch, mid age women and men. They often belong to the long-term poor. The fourth category [4] consists of the subsidized workers, trainees, or people who do some sort of job training (N=23). They are not fully employed, and still have some connection with the welfare institution. Their chances in the labor market are not that bad. They are often single parent families or couples with young children, Dutch and Surinamese. They are often younger than forty years old. They did not live very long in poverty. The fifth category [5] consists of the working poor. The working poor do not have a subsidized job, but a regular job, which is often part-time work or they run their own business (N=21). They are employed, but their income is insufficient to stay out of poverty. Sometimes they receive a benefit and they complement this benefit with a part-time job. They are often young, often Turkish and native Dutch, and are single parents. They did not live very long in poverty. The sixth category [6] (N=66) consists of people who are medically unfit – I have no information on whether they are fully or partially tested unfit. Eight of them are handicapped, two of them are temporarily ill. The latter group is likely to go back to the labor market. Most of the sixty-six people are not available for the labor market and are not obliged to work. Among the medically unfit are ten couples. The partner is often also medically unfit, or for several reasons, excluded from the labor market: s/he has to take care of her / his partner, or s/he has to, but cannot work. They are much older than the other categories, are often Turkish, Surinamese or native Dutch. Their poverty duration is severe. The seventh category [7] (N=16) consists of the single parents with young children – under five. At time of the interview, they were not obliged to work. However, they have to go back to the labor market in the future. Because they have young children, it does not mean that they do not want to work; only that they are freed from the

obligation to work. They are young, Surinamese and Dutch, all women, and relatively well educated. Their poverty duration is not very long. [8] The eighth category consists of the elderly. Not surprisingly, they are old, often Dutch, and their poverty duration is severe. They do not have to work anymore. They have hardly any prospects of changing their situation, but are able to say something about the neighborhood, their social relations, the experience of poverty. Therefore, they are not expelled from the analysis. [9] The last category consists of two illegal immigrants. They are hardly part of the analysis.

With the exception of the last one, practically all categories are part of the forthcoming analysis, and I will show the manner in which the respondents articulate their respective life-worlds. The first three categories are the most important, simply because they are fully available for the labor market. (The working poor and subsidized workers reflect on their labor market experiences). The single parents with children under five still have to go back to work in the future, and will reflect therefore on their future prospects to enter the labor market. Some of the elderly contemplate on their past, and the same goes for the ill and the handicapped. And although not every respondent is obliged to work, practically all of them can express their experiences in the labor market and other fields.

2.2.2. Cultural, economic and social resources

Besides the aforementioned position of the respondents, the possession of cultural, social, and economic resources might determine the chance to end a poverty spell; with sufficient resources at their hand, they easily can end their precarious situation. In the following section, I will give insight into the respondents' resources⁴¹. In one of the first chapters I will show how they make use of it (see chapter 3, page 55). Table 2.2 shows the distribution of the resources among the respondents.

Table 2.2 Labor market position and resources

		<i>OTW= obliged to work NOTW= not obliged to work</i>									
Numbers											
		1. OTW couples	2. OTW single parents older kids	3. OTW single no kids	4. Subsidized job, trainee	5. Working poor	6. NOTW medically unfit	7. NOTW single parent kids	8. NOTW elderly	9. Illegal	total
Educational qualifications	No	2	2	1	1	1	12	1	2	0	22
	Basic education	8	4	7	6	3	16	3	10	2	59
	Low ⁴²	5	7	3	9	11	19	5	7	0	66
	Average ⁴³	5	6	4	5	6	12	4	1	0	43
	High ⁴⁴	1	0	1	2	0	3	1	1	0	9
	Total	21	19	16	23	21	62	14	21	2	199
Financial Judgement	Sufficient	5	5	3	8	9	9	9	17	0	65
	Insufficient	13	14	12	9	10	49	6	3	1	117
	Total	18	19	15	17	19	58	15	20	1	182
Self-image	As poor	8	7	3	3	4	22	2	1	1	51
	Not poor	9	9	9	10	12	25	9	21	0	104
	Depends	2	3	1	5	3	10	4	0	0	28
	Total	19	19	13	18	19	57	15	22	1	183
Is able to save money	Yes, can save	3	8	3	12	6	16	6	14	0	68
	No, cannot save	16	11	12	7	13	46	10	10	1	126
	Sometimes	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Total	19	20	15	19	19	62	16	24	1	195
Has debts	Yes	15	14	10	18	15	48	11	2	2	135
	No	5	6	6	4	4	16	4	24	0	69
	Total	20	20	16	22	19	64	15	26	2	204
Getting by	Very good	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	5
	Well	2	2	4	5	4	7	1	12	0	37
	Sometimes	3	5	6	5	6	5	7	8	0	45
	Difficult	5	12	2	4	7	25	5	3	0	63
	Very hard	9	1	3	6	1	25	2	0	1	48
	Total	19	20	15	21	19	64	15	24	1	198
Support material	Few	3	3	4	4	6	20	0	15	0	55
	Moderate	4	8	5	7	7	15	7	7	1	61
	Much	13	8	7	10	6	29	8	1	1	83

	Total	20	19	16	21	19	64	15	23	2	199
Support practical	Few	5	9	3	4	0	13	3	8	1	46
	Moderate	5	5	9	7	4	17	2	6	0	55
	Much	9	5	3	8	11	32	10	4	1	83
	Total	19	19	15	19	15	62	15	18	2	184

Cultural resources – The respondents’ educational trajectories seem to differ. Some (N=22) do not have any form of educational qualifications, others (N=10) have a college degree. For these individuals, possessing educational qualifications do not guarantee a life living out of poverty. Between the different categories, there are hardly any differences. Only the elderly seem to lack diplomas. Compared to the couples, single parents and singles, the subsidized workers and the working poor are slightly more highly educated.

Economic resources – The forthcoming data mirror the respondents’ economic resources. The researchers⁴⁵ asked the respondents about their financial situations. The majority of the respondents judges his or her situation as insufficient (N=117). But there are differences between the categories. The elderly often judge their financial situation as sufficient, while the majority of medically unfit judge their situation as insufficient. The working poor and subsidized workers seem to be more satisfied with their financial situation. Although the majority of the respondents considers his or her financial situation as insufficient, they do not perceive themselves as poor (N=104). There are hardly any differences, only the medically unfit often see themselves as poor (N=22). The majority of the respondents is not able to save (N=126). Comparing the categories, only subsidized workers and the elderly are more often able to save. The amount of people who have debts is worth mentioning⁴⁶ (N=135). The elderly hardly have any debts. Debts are common among those who are tested medically unfit. Similar patterns can be observed whether the respondents are able to get by. Only the elderly say that they can get by with their income. These numbers reflect on the economic position of the respondents, and say something about their capabilities⁴⁷ to buy goods, invest in education, invite friends over for dinner, to participate in society in general, etc.

Social resources – Table 2.2 shows the amount of material and practical support the respondents are able to obtain from their social network. Material support

refers to the amount of goods the respondents can receive from their social network. Practical support refers to the amount of aid (such as moving or helping with chores) the respondents can secure from their social network. Many of the respondents seem to have access to various resources⁴⁸. Looking at material support, many (N=83) have said during the interview that they are able to obtain material goods from their friends and family. Comparing the categories, the elderly seem to acquire few assets. The medically unfit and the single parents with kids under five seem to acquire relatively much support. Looking at the practical support, a similar pattern can be observed. In this fashion, the respondents have said that they are capable obtaining material and practical support from their social environment. The amount of support differs between and among the categories.

2.3. Positions, comparisons, mechanisms and policy

All the respondents have to live from a low income –not exceeding the approximate income threshold of a welfare benefit. This is the principal characteristic of the respondents. They all live in one of the poverty pockets in one of the two big cities, which is the second common characteristic. However, I observed many differences among the respondents; whether they are able to get by, their educational trajectories, their social resources, age, gender, ethnicity, and poverty duration. Above all, the aforementioned tables show that there is no dominant cluster of similar people. There exists a vast variety of different kinds of people living in poverty. For example, there is no massive group of Dutch lower educated men available for the labor market, which could be compared with a similar group of Turkish men. Because either their situation differs, or their social, economic and cultural resources or poverty duration is different, it becomes notoriously difficult to say something about differences in ethnicity – if everything else being equal.

I am particularly interested in what perpetuates poverty and the mechanisms that contribute to the phenomenon that people cannot escape their precarious position. These mechanisms not always have something to do with their individual characteristics. Rather, it is about their position (distance to the labor market), the resources they can make use of (social, cultural and economic capital) and the social context (with others) in which people in poverty are embedded (the fields). The interplay between the position, the resources, and the context influences whether people in poverty can end their poverty spell. Then again, the actions of people in poverty often depend on others in the field. Moreover, as I argued in chapter 1, poverty concerns the positions of people in poverty vis-à-vis others in

the field, the *relationships* between the fields, and how these bonds obstruct upward mobility. Analyzing *relationships* between people and *relationships* between the fields has one advantage: relationships can each be slightly modified. In other words, the strained relationship with welfare officials, the internal differentiation of the neighborhood, the social environment, the lack of coordination between agencies, the structure of the labor market can be modified with the help of policy. Therefore, I will focus on the structure of the social field, and the constraints faced by people in poverty. I will show the resemblances between people in poverty in their daily interactions with others and their daily struggle to carry on. In this fashion, as we shall see, people in poverty have to deal with the same kind of situations in the relevant fields: they all have to deal with other urban dwellers, welfare officials, employers, colleagues, friends, foes, and family. I want to show the similarities in the manner in which they deal with the fields and people in each particular field. In addition, I show how the interrelation between fields perpetuates poverty over time.

In forthcoming chapters, the respondents will be described in the context of each relevant field. Instead of providing a detailed description of the research group, I will focus on the processes and mechanisms that contribute to poverty perpetuation. Furthermore, the respondents are given names and numbers, but all names are pseudonyms⁴⁹. The basic characteristics of the respondents can be found – with the help of these numbers – in Table 10.1, page 201.

³⁰ “Bond voor Baanloze Scheepsbouwers,” “De algemene bond voor Nederlandse ouderen,” “Stichting Baan” (Belangenvereniging voor WAO-ers).

³¹ Since 1995, I live in the West of Rotterdam (Coolhaven, and later Het Nieuwe Westen) up to now (the writing of this book in 2007). Therefore, I am familiar with the neighborhood.

³² Two respondents were visited four times, one five times, one eight times, and information from fourteen respondents is missing.

³³ The use of this kind of questionnaire excludes researcher biases.

³⁴ According to Couldry (2005; p. 363), “Bourdieu avoids the misleading neutrality of a structured questionnaire or survey that reinforced rather than softens the power differential between interviewer and respondent.”

³⁵ The transcriptions were coded in Atlas.Ti – a software program to structure transcriptions.

³⁶ I more or less used a grounded theory approach (see for example Dey, 1999).

³⁷ After coding, 11.113 text fragments were available for analysis.

³⁸ See Wacquant (2002); his subtle critique.

³⁹ See Giddens (1984; p. 284-5).

⁴⁰ I hardly use ethnicity to explain the position of people in poverty. I cannot compare the different groups, and I do not have sufficient information on their backgrounds. I want to try to explain poverty perpetuation by looking at other variables. See for example Weber who criticized the use of race and ethnicity to explain social phenomena. Swedberg who studied Weber writes: “until his death, Weber sharply criticized the way that some of his colleagues used race to explain practically everything in society. Even though race may be an important phenomenon, he argued, there is practically no adequate research on this topic. As a rule, one should ways try to explain a social phenomenon with the help of the social sciences and resort to race only when everything else has failed. Many economic phenomena, for example which at first may seem to be caused by race, are in reality the result of tradition” (Swedberg, 1998; p. 150-1). Weber’s original text: “The same tendency [to explain everything by one variable, FN] is now appearing in anthropology where the political and commercial struggles of nations for world dominance are being fought with increasing acuteness. There is a widespread belief that ‘in the last analysis’ all historical events are results of the interplay of innate ‘racial inequalities’. In place of uncritical descriptions of ‘national characters’, there emerges the even more uncritical concoction of social theories based on the natural sciences. We shall carefully follow the development of anthropological research in our journal insofar as it is significant from our point of view. It is to be hoped that the situation in which the causal explanation of cultural events by the invocation of ‘racial characteristics’ testifies to our ignorance” (Weber, 1949; p. 69).

⁴¹ Nee and Sanders (2001) argue that the mode of incorporation is largely a function of the social, financial, and human-cultural capital of immigrant families and how these resources are used by individuals within and apart from the existing structure of ethnic networks and institutions.

⁴² LBO / MAVO.

⁴³ MBO/HAVO/ VWO.

⁴⁴ HBO / WO.

⁴⁵ About thirty-five respondents face difficulties in paying the bills on time. Fifty-eight respondents retrench on their medical expenses.

⁴⁶ In 1999, about 28% of low income people faced difficulties in making ends meet (SCP, 2001; p. 18), and practically every year, about seven to ten percent of low-income people have debts (SCP, 2001; p. 18).

⁴⁷ See for example Sen (1985).

⁴⁸ Deprivation – From *all* people in poverty, 60% has insufficient resources to go on holiday, to be a member of a club and 30% cannot give a dinner party, and some do not have sufficient financial resources for a hot meal everyday (cf. Snel et al. 2000; p. 47). It seems that the majority of the respondents do not suffer from severe material deprivation. However, still, twenty-nine respondents cannot have a hot meal every day, fifty-four retrench on clothing, and twenty-six retrench on heating.

⁴⁹ Any resemblance to real names is entirely unintentional and is thoroughly a matter of coincidence.