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Social capital and job search behaviour of long-term welfare recipients

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Abstract

Purpose – Long-term welfare recipients in the Netherlands are either long-term unemployed or part-time employed in jobs that generate incomes below the subsistence level. The question is whether reintegration policies aiming at their return to – a fulltime – job should consider individual social network factors besides psychological and human capital factors. The purpose of this paper is to investigate welfare recipients' job search behaviour, in particular how individual social capital is distributed, and whether it is related to job search activities.

Design/methodology/approach – Standardised and structured interviews were conducted with 189 long-term unemployed welfare recipients. An adapted version of the Resource Generator instrument was used to measure individual access to social capital.

Findings – Social capital scales measuring domestic social resources, status-related social resources, expert advice on regulations and financial matters, and advice on finding a job were developed and psychometrically tested. Status-related social resources were more easily accessible to men and higher educated persons. Advice on finding a job was more easily accessible to recently unemployed individuals. Domestic social resources were less accessible to ethnic minorities. Persons with more social capital, specifically status-related social resources and advice in finding a job, showed more active job search behaviour.

Social implications – The differences in job search activities between respondents with more social capital and those with less social capital were present but to a small degree, and therefore there is no argument for reintegration activities to focus on enlarging social capital.

Originality/value – This study addresses the instrumental functions of the social network by multidimensionally scrutinising the resources that social relationships provide access to.

Keywords Social networks, Social capital, Job search, Long-term unemployment, Resource Generator, Social resources

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In the post-industrial labour market, specific groups are at risk for becoming long-term unemployed or to end up in precarious temporary or part-time jobs providing less than a minimum income. Job search behaviour has been outlined as one of the factors in

getting re-employed in decent jobs. However, so far, research on what influences job search behaviour has been limited mostly to sociodemographic and psychological factors. Our research investigates social factors influencing job search behaviour, particularly the instrumental functions of social relationships.

Activation of long-term welfare recipients

From the 1970s and 1980s on, restructuring of the industrial economy and family structure transitions resulted in new social risks of unemployment in the Western world. The decline of the manufacturing industry and the growth of the service sector has changed the labour market, resulting in fewer unskilled and fewer permanent jobs. Male breadwinner families have been replaced by dual-earner and single-parent families. At the same time, social protection systems declined. In the Netherlands this resulted in a reduction of the length of unemployment benefits, the obligation to earn an independent income for single mothers – who are now assumed to be adult workers at equal terms with men without care obligations – and the conditionality of welfare benefits for young people up to an age of 27 (Lewis *et al.*, 2008). Social protection has been substituted by social activation; attempts to reactivate new groups of the population include young newcomers to the labour market, low-skilled and migrant workers and lone mothers (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Bonoli, 2005; Clasen and Clegg, 2006).

Like elsewhere, people receiving welfare benefits form a heterogeneous category in the Netherlands. Some of them are long-term unemployed people, who after having been entitled to unemployment benefits (for a maximum duration of 38 months, depending on employment duration) now depend on welfare because their family income is below subsistence level. Other welfare recipients work in part-time jobs earning an income below subsistence level, and some have no work history at all (refugees, young school drop-outs or people with psychiatric conditions or addicts). Not all welfare recipients have an official requirement to apply for jobs. Temporary exemptions can be made based on informal care obligations, a recent divorce or mental or physical health problems (Knijn *et al.*, 2007; Van Berkel, 2009). For those who are assessed to be fit to work, activation policies have been implemented with the aim to improve employability, for instance by offering work experience, enhancing work motivation, improving educational levels and teaching specific skills deemed necessary for re-entering the labour market (Vuori and Silvonen, 2005; Sol *et al.*, 2011; Brenninkmeijer and Blonk, 2012). These activation policies have not yet been successful for everyone. The most recent Dutch data are from 2007, when the economic crisis was not yet at its peak. At that time, 338.540 persons, being 2 per cent of the total Dutch population, received welfare benefits. In total 80 per cent of this group received benefits for at least one year and 43 per cent did so for five years or more (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). This group of very long-term welfare recipients has been called the "granite file", because of continuously failing activation. Interestingly, as Taylor-Gooby (2004) has noticed, labour market problems are increasingly individualised; instead of focusing on the demand side, the focus is now on the supply side of those who were formerly protected against labour market risks, but now have to be activated. Most of them are still unable to reach the criteria of the increasingly productive work settings. Due to "multiple complex problems" such as obsolete skills, mental and physical issues, addiction or care work this group is assumed to have few chances of getting or holding a job (Giesen *et al.*, 2007; Knijn *et al.*, 2007). This raises the question of how to activate long-term welfare recipients and prevent lifelong joblessness or lifelong employment in precarious jobs. As international

reviews have demonstrated, there is ample evidence of a positive connection between job search behaviour and re-employment success (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001; Wanberg, 2012). Studies on factors predicting job search behaviour and re-employment success focus mostly on psychological characteristics. Employment commitment, job search self-efficacy and job search attitude are confirmed predictors of job search behaviour, just as extroversion, conscientiousness, even perceived financial need (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001; Boswell *et al.*, 2012; Varekamp *et al.*, 2014). Social factors such as social support are also found to be predictors of job search behaviour. Therefore research on the influence of social networks, on how they exactly help individuals to find work and for whom they may be helpful has been advocated (Wanberg, 2012). Social networks may be related to job search behaviour because of their normative influence establishing employment as the norm. In addition, social networks may offer specific resources needed for finding one's way back to the labour market, such as information about job opportunities or work conditions at a specific firm, recommendations, strategic advice, or support in IT use (Korpi, 2001; Hatala, 2007; Gelderblom and De Koning, 2007).

The influence of social networks on employment and status attainment
Jobs are often obtained through formal channels, such as advertisements or employment bureaus, but job finding through the social network, that is, via informal channels such as friends, acquaintances, colleagues or former colleagues is of major importance too. In the USA, 27-52 per cent of jobs are obtained through informal channels, in Japan 55-75 per cent and in the UK 30-40 per cent (Granovetter, 1995). One-third of Dutch male job seekers obtained their jobs through informal channels (de Graaf and Flap, 1988). For Dutch managers figures reach 61 per cent (Boxman *et al.*, 1991). In the classical study "The strength of weak ties", Granovetter (1973) noted the significance of acquaintances compared to that of friends or family in spreading information about job opportunities, attributing the importance of these "weak ties" to their bridging function, in terms of the possibility to get in touch with other social circles. Studies reviewed by Lin (1999) point to the fact that when informal channels are used, jobs obtained have a higher occupational prestige if the contact person has a higher status. Apart from this, there is no indication that job searching through informal channels leads to employment more often than through formal channels (Völker and Flap, 1999), or that those informal channels lead to higher-status jobs (De Graaf and Flap, 1988).

The connection between social relations and occupational prestige or status attainment has been studied extensively by many sociologists, like Lin (1999), Coleman (1990) and Bourdieu (1986/2011). Analogously to economic capital (financial resources) and human capital (personal skills and capabilities), they conceived social capital as the total of social relationships that may support individuals in life. Some studies focus on the influence of initial social status, for instance parental status or education, on access to social capital. Other studies focus on the next step: the influence of mobilisation of the accessed social capital on status attainment. Lin found confirmation for the hypotheses that higher initial positions of individuals are related to more social resources, that the success of instrumental actions is related to social relations, and that weak rather than strong ties relate to accessing more diversified social resources (Lin, 1982, 1999). In these theories, social capital is understood as individual social capital – as distinguished from collective social capital, pertaining to the whole of social relations in society, based on reciprocity and trust, which give society its cohesiveness (Putnam, 2000).

The above-mentioned studies on job finding and status attainment focused on employed persons. Only a few studies examined the influence of social network characteristics on the unemployed. Korpi (2001) examined employment success of unemployed persons. He found that more than half of the respondents used neither strong nor weak ties in their attempts to find a job, which he attributes to the existence of strong public employment agencies in Sweden. He did however, find a clear correlation between network size and re-employment. In contrast with the notion that weak ties are more helpful in job finding than strong ones, he did not find a clear difference in this respect. Hatala (2007) reports on the effect of an experiment in which unemployed social assistance recipients in Canada were stimulated to make contacts that could help them find a job, assuming that social networks shrink and get less useful as welfare dependency continues. He found that the number of network contacts increased from 23 to 27 on average in the experimental group, and that participants who became re-employed had larger and potentially more supportive networks. The effectiveness of the intervention on re-employment could not be demonstrated however, due to short follow-up and small sample size. Mouw (2003) investigated the influence of social capital on job finding and wages for employed and unemployed persons. He concluded that effects of social networks found in the literature may be more or less spurious, caused by the "social homophily" effect – similar people tend to associate with each other, and this similarity may concern individual abilities such as successfulness, self-esteem or motivation resulting in high-status attainment. He also found that for unemployed people the use of social contacts in job searching was positively instead of negatively related to unemployment duration. Van Hoye *et al.* (2009) studied a large sample of unemployed Belgians. They investigated the influence of social network characteristics on informal and formal ways of job searching, job offers and employment success. Those with larger networks and on average stronger ties displayed more networking activities resulting in more job offers, but not in more re-employment. Especially for the unemployed with strong and lower-status ties the effect of networking on employment was negative. Summarised, the body of research on the importance of network characteristics for job finding and status attainment yields inconsistent findings. A criticism of network studies is that they focus too much on the structure of relationships and pay little attention to the content of ties (Smith-Doerr and Powell, 2008).

Measuring social capital

The inconsistency in the research findings on the influence of social network characteristics is partly due to the fact that individual social capital has been measured in a variety of ways. The Name Generator/Interpreter method starts with about a dozen name-generating questions, each asking the respondent to list one to five persons that can help with a specific issue, or who have a specific role relation to him or her. Next, sociodemographic and relationship characteristics of network members are collected (McCallister and Fischer, 1978). This potentially rich data collection method may result in various types social capital measures including structural indices, but requires substantial data collection resources, does usually not specify specific resources, and often leads to incomparable collections of measures (Van der Gaag, 2005), although various efforts try to simplify and standardise the procedure (Burt *et al.*, 2012; Marin and Hampton, 2007). Alternatively, the Position Generator measurement instrument is based on the assumption that relations with persons in higher-status positions provide access to more social resources and wider second-order networks. Respondents are

asked whether they know persons in a set of occupations varying in occupational prestige. Although this results in several measures of network diversity and access to prestige (Lin and Dumin, 1986; Lin, 1999; van der Gaag, 2005), the method ignores non-status-related support (van der Gaag *et al.*, 2008). This led to the development of the Resource Generator (RG), an instrument focusing on access to specific social resources via the social network (Snijders, 1999; Van der Gaag and Snijders, 2005; Van der Gaag *et al.*, 2008), which qualifies this method as most useful for our study purposes. For the development of the first RG van der Gaag and Snijders (2005) formulated 33 items, covering a number of resource domains. These were inspired by the Weberian theory that useful resources give access to power, wealth or status (Lin, 1982) and by the empirical study of Van Bruggen (2001), who found five domains relevant in daily life for which social capital is useful: first, private productive relations, such as housekeeping and caring activities; second, personal relations; third, private non-productive actions, such as recreational activities; fourth, public productive actions, which have to do with work and education; and fifth, public relations, which have to do with the outside world and citizenship. In an iterative search and test procedure, Van der Gaag and Snijders (2005) developed four social capital scales measuring prestige- and education-related social capital (six items); political and financial skills social capital (three items); personal skills social capital (four items); and personal support social capital (four items). In total 16 items appeared to be non-scalable (van der Gaag and Snijders, 2004, 2005). The scales of Van der Gaag and Snijders (2005) are useful, but population-specific, and should be empirically re-constructed through dimensional analyses for new research populations.

Aim of this study

In reviewing the literature we see that social capital makes a general contribution to status attainment and employment. Contacting network members in high-status positions is especially advantageous in this respect. For welfare recipients the general beneficial effects of social capital, and more specifically for finding a (decent) job, are less clear. The literature has shown there are indications that social networks of long-term welfare recipients become smaller and contain fewer weak ties that may be helpful in finding a decent job. However, the generalisability of these findings may be limited due to differences in national income compensations systems or housing policies, or cultural differences. This raises the questions of whether Dutch long-term welfare recipients have access to social resources and how important these are for job search behaviour, and any subsequent success on the labour market. The following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1. How is social capital distributed over various sociodemographic categories of long-term welfare recipients?

RQ2. Is social capital of long-term welfare recipients related to job search behaviour? If so, which forms of social capital are useful in this respect?

Data and methods

Study design, eligibility criteria, recruitment of participants and response

Data were collected in 2010 and 2011 in two Dutch cities, Enschede and Utrecht. Activation policies in the Netherlands are decentralised. However, since all municipalities apply the same regulations and make use of the same kind of activation instruments,

we can assume that they do not vary much in the way they support welfare recipients. Also, welfare recipients in the larger Dutch cities share the same characteristics; many of them are migrant, lone mothers and older men with obsolete skills. As our sample frame, all clients on welfare for one year or longer, with a part-time job or fully unemployed, with and without a requirement to apply for a (better) job, were informed in writing by the city's welfare agency about the research project. The anonymity of respondents was guaranteed and participants could respond by telephone, e-mail or mail. Standardised and structured interviews were conducted face-to-face at home, as social network research is too detailed to be done otherwise.

The welfare agencies of Enschede and Utrecht sent, respectively 1,280 and 1,311 invitations to participate; there were 117 and 107 respondents, which comes down to a response rate of 8.6 per cent. Due to language problems 21 persons were unable to express themselves properly, which resulted in inoperative interviews. Another ten respondents failed to meet the inclusion criterion of being on welfare for at least one year. Four respondents did not answer the extensive list of items about their social network. In the end, the final research population consisted of 189 persons.

Table I presents the characteristics of the respondents. Mean age is 43 years, more than half is female, and lower-educated people are over-represented. About one-third are single parents, 20 per cent have some kind of part-time job for 14 hours on average and receive a welfare benefit in addition (not in table), and half are non-Western immigrants. Mean duration of the last period of welfare receipt is 5.2 years and 23 per cent have been receiving welfare benefits for more than six years (not in table). A large minority, 46 per cent, have experienced more than one period of welfare receipt. The mean duration of total welfare receipt for the study population is 7.8 years, with 45 per cent having received welfare benefits totalling more than six years (not in table). More than half of the respondents are required to apply for jobs; a large minority is exempted from the obligation to work due to specific circumstances such as health

Variable (min-max)	% or mean (SD)
Age (21-63)	42.7 (9.0)
Sex, % female	56
Education	
Low	42
Middle	35
High	23
Single parenthood	34
Employment, % employed	20
Ethnicity, % non-Western immigrant	50
Duration of welfare receipt[a]	
1 year	15
>1 year and $\leqslant 2$ years	27
>2 years and $\leqslant 6$ years	35
>6 year and $\leqslant 14$ years	14
>14 years	9
Job search requirement	53
Job search behaviour (9-36)	15.1 (6.0)
Size of intimate social network (0-6)	3.8 (1.9)

Notes: $n = 189$. [a]Duration of last period of welfare receipt

Table I.
Sociodemographic
characteristics,
attitudes and social
network resources of
respondents

problems, family issues, care for young children, older age, etc. The mean score for job search behaviour is 15, which is rather low on a scale with minimum and maximum values of nine and 36.

Variables

Sociodemographic variables. Six sociodemographic characteristics were measured. Sex, being a single parent and ethnicity were measured as dichotomous variables. For ethnicity, respondents were divided into a group consisting of native Dutch individuals or Western immigrants and a group consisting of non-Western immigrants. Education was measured with seven levels. Five ranges were distinguished for duration of the last welfare receipt. Age was measured as a ratio scale variable (see Table I).

Size of intimate social network. The intimate social network (number of strong ties) was measured by asking the respondents: "From all people you know, can you name the persons with whom you feel most strongly connected?". Children living at home were excluded. A maximum of six persons could be listed.

Job search requirement. This concept was measured as a dichotomous variable of being required to apply for jobs.

Job search behaviour. This variable was measured with an adapted version of the Blau (1994) behavioural scale. Nine items measured the intensity with which various job search activities had been undertaken in the past month: writing job application letters, unsolicited application, interviewing for a position, discussing possibilities for a job with others, contacting potential employers, visiting potential employers, asking others a recommendation, visiting employment agencies, or searching for vacancies online or in newspapers. Answer categories ranged from $1 =$ (almost) never to $4 =$ very often; the scale ranged from 9 to 36 (reliability coefficient Cronbach's α: 0.88).

Social capital measured with an adapted version of the RG. Inspired by the social spheres distinguished by Van Bruggen (2001), we decided that to measure social capital it is important to cover the spheres of first, private productive activities, second, public productive activities, and third, public relationships. We decided to cover the first sphere with items on domestic social resources. The second sphere was split up into a domain of status-related social resources and a domain of expert advice on regulations and financial matters. The third sphere was covered with items about access to persons who contribute to social cohesiveness or collective social capital. An extra domain in the sphere of public productive actions, advice on finding a job, was added for this specific group of long-term welfare recipients.

The beginning of each item was: "Do you know anyone who […]". Knowing someone was defined as being in a position to start a conversation when running into that person in the street. Items should relate to resources considered potentially useful, but also appropriate to be requested from network members.

For each domain a number of items were formulated. However, for a number of items we felt they related to important resources but were unsure about the goal specificity, i.e., the domain they belonged to. Table II presents the total of 30 items together with the results of the scaling analysis. In total, 13 items were adopted from van der Gaag and Snijders (2005), sometimes slightly rephrased, and three items were slightly rephrased form Webber and Huxley (2007), who developed a RG study for the UK. In total, 14 items were newly formulated for the current study, mainly covering

RG item[a]	Source of item	Do you know someone who …	% yes
Scale 1. Domestic social resources (7 items, min.-max. value 0-7)			
$H = 0.33$, $\rho = 0.74$, mean = 4.6, SD = 2.0, skewness = -0.68, kurtosis = -0.59			
10	N	Takes you out to, e.g., the movies, an amusement park or for dinner and pays the bill	60
11	N	Has a printer that you may use once in a while	64
12	W ad.	Knows where to get cheap goods or "bargains"	59
16	VdG ad.	Can lend you a small sum of money (e.g. € 20)	75
18	VdG	Can provide a place to stay if you have to leave your house temporarily for a week	67
19	VdG ad.	Can help with small jobs around the house	72
29	VdG ad.	Will lend you a car	66
Scale 2. Status-related social resources (4 items, min.-max. 0-4)			
$H = 0.36$, $\rho = 0.60$, mean = 2.3, SD = 1.2, skewness = -0.40, kurtosis = -0.78			
1	VdG	Has a senior high school (VWO) education	67
21	VdG	Sometimes has the opportunity to hire people	21
27	N	Is a real careerist	68
28	N	Started his or her own business	69
Scale 3. Expert advice on regulations and financial matters (8 items, min.-max. 0-8)			
$H = 0.32$, $\rho = 0.75$, mean = 4.8, SD = 2.2, skewness = -0.27, kurtosis = -0.86			
2	VdG ad.	Can help you with the computer (internet, e-mail, word processing)	84
3	N	Can help you with understanding, reading or writing Dutch	68
4	VdG ad.	Knows a lot about government regulations (legislation, etc.)	62
5	N	Can explain complex forms and help fill them out	63
7	N	Knows how to deal with problems with institutions (e.g. welfare agency)	50
13	W ad.	Has knowledge about solving debt problems	42
14	N	Has knowledge about extra welfare benefits (through the welfare agency)	46
15	VdG	Has knowledge about financial matters (taxes, subsidies)	61
Scale 4. Collective social capital resources (3 items)			
$H = 0.30$, $\rho = 0.51$, skewness = 0.24, kurtosis = -1.15			
24	N	Often organises something for the neighbourhood	32
25	N	Does a lot of organising for a club or a voluntary group	41
26	N	Is active in a church, mosque or other religious institution	49
Scale 5. Advice on finding a job (4 items, min.-max. value 0-4)			
$H = 0.39$, $\rho = 0.62$, mean = 2.4, SD = 1.3, skewness = -0.41, kurtosis = -0.97			
8	N	Can help prepare an interview with the welfare agency	44
20	VdG	Can give a good reference when you are applying for a job	70
22	N	Can give advice on how to do an interview for a job	57
23	N	Can give advice on how write a good job application letter	68
Total scale (30 items, min-max 0-30)			
$H = 0.20$, $\rho = 0.85$, mean = 16.1, SD = 5.6, skewness = -0.22, kurtosis = -0.57			
Non-scalable items			
6	W ad.	Knows a lot about health (healthy lifestyle, diagnoses and treatment)	59
9	VdG ad.	Can give advice concerning a conflict with family members or friends	56
17	VdG	Is handy repairing household equipment	59
30	VdG	Is active in a political party	32

Notes: $n = 189$. VdG, Van der Gaag (2005); VdG ad., adapted item from Van der Gaag (2005); W ad., adapted item from Webber and Huxley (2007); N, newly formulated item. [a]The original order of items in the questionnaire

Table II.
Resource Generator scales: popularity (% answering yes), H values, reliability ρ, skewness and kurtosis

domains such as expert advice on financial matters, advice on finding a job and access to persons contributing to collective social capital. An item on help with the Dutch language was added, because migrants were a substantial part of our sample.

Statistical analysis

Mokken scale analysis. In order to construct a number of domain-specific social capital indicators based on dichotomous items (yes or no) item response theory (IRT) was used. IRT aims at measuring latent traits and presupposes a cumulative nature of items within one subscale, meaning that someone having access to a less popular resource probably has access to more popular resources within that domain (Sijtsma and Molenaar, 2002). The statistical scaling procedure was done with Mokken Scale Programme. The cumulative nature of scales was assessed with Loevinger's H coefficient. A scale with an H value $\geqslant 0.30$ is considered by convention a useful but weak scale, $\geqslant 0.40$ a moderately strong scale, and $\geqslant 0.50$ a strong scale. Scales are considered sufficiently reliable when reliability coefficient ρ is $\geqslant 0.60$ (Sijtsma and Molenaar, 2002; see also Table II). Ideally, scales should consist at least of four items, in order to investigate correlations with other interval variables reliably.

For some items we were not sure whether they really belonged to the expected domain for our group of respondents. For instance, the item "someone who can help with using PC possibilities such as internet, e-mail or word processing" could belong to the domain of domestic social resources, but also to the domain of expert advice on regulations and financial matters. For these items an explorative search procedure with Mokken Scale analysis was performed to decide which group of items they clustered with. Next, we tested five sets of items as scales. We decided that minimum values should be 0.30 for the H coefficient and 0.60 for reliability coefficient ρ. In deciding whether items were scalable or non-scalable, we preferred scales with a high number of items to scales with a high H value. However, in some cases where a large improvement in H value resulted from deleting items, scales were shortened. This resulted in the eventual social capital scales (Table II).

Variable transformation. The dependent variable of job search behaviour had a skewness of 1.03 and kurtosis of 1.02. High skewness and kurtosis may result in underestimated statistical relationships in regression analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). To improve normality, this variable was transformed into a logarithmic variable as follows: NewVar = Lg10(OldVar); this improved skewness substantially and kurtosis slightly. A disadvantage of transforming variables is that descriptive statistics are difficult to interpret. For that reason, the original variable is presented in Table I and the transformed variable is presented in Tables III and V.

Hierarchical multiple regression. In order to investigate the contribution of social capital to job search behaviour beyond the contribution of sociodemographic variables, we first calculated the correlations between all independent variables and the dependent variable (Table III). Next, hierarchical multiple regression was employed in order to study the separate effects of sociodemographic characteristics vs the extra influence of social capital indicators. In the first step of this analysis a set of sociodemographic variables was entered as control variables. In the second step scales of the RG were entered in order to investigate whether these explain extra variance in job search behaviour. The standardised β coefficients and matching p-values show the relative contributions of the different variables (Pallant, 2005). In an additional hierarchical multiple regression analysis we investigate whether RG scales add

Variables (min.-max. value)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Resource Generator scales													
1. Domestic social resources (0-7)	1												
2. Status-related social resources (0-4)	*0.43*	1											
3. Expert advice on regulations and financial matters (0-8)	*0.39*	*0.31*	1										
4. Advice on finding a job (0-4)	*0.34*	*0.20*	*0.47*	1									
5. Total resources (0-30)	*0.78*	*0.62*	*0.77*	*0.65*	1								
Sociodemographic variables													
6. Sex[a] (% female)	−0.01	−0.15	0.03	0.02	−0.02	1							
7. Age (21-63)	−0.12	0.06	−0.02	0.01	−0.03	−0.13	1						
8. Education (1-7)	0.06	*0.29*	0.08	0.07	*0.18*	0.00	*0.18*	1					
9. Single parent[b] (%)	−0.07	−0.07	0.06	0.00	−0.03	*0.57*	*−0.20*	−0.06	1				
10. Ethnicity[c] (% non-Western)	*−0.22*	−0.08	0.01	−0.05	−0.11	−0.08	*−0.20*	*−0.22*	0.06	1			
11. Duration of welfare receipt[d]	−0.08	−0.10	−0.01	−0.11	−0.08	*0.15*	0.11	−0.12	0.08	0.03	1		
Social network variables													
12. Size of intimate social network (0-6)	*0.27*	*0.26*	*0.28*	*0.14*	*0.34*	0.02	0.11	0.03	−0.04	−0.11	−0.01	1	
Job search variables													
13. Job search behaviour[e]	0.06	*0.20*	0.11	*0.18*	*0.17*	*−0.23*	−0.12	0.01	*−0.15*	*0.25*	*−0.16*	*0.17*	1

Notes: $n = 189$. [a]0/1 = male/female; [b]0/1 = no/yes single parent; [c]0/1 = Dutch or Western immigrant/non-Western immigrant; [d]duration of last period of welfare receipt; [e]logarithmic transformed dependent variable. Italic = significance ≤0.05

Table III.
Correlations between Resource Generator scales, size of intimate social network and job search behaviour

explanatory power to the morphological social network measure of network size by choosing the following order: first, sociodemographic variables; second, size of the intimate network; third, scales of the RG (Table V).

Results

Scale analysis of RG items

Table II presents all items formulated to investigate social capital and the results of the explorative and testing procedures. The last column shows the "popularity" of the items or the percentages answering "yes" to the question of whether they have access to someone offering this resource. The popularity of the items ranged from 21 to 84 per cent. Five underlying domains were tested, but only four scales had sufficient H values and ρ values: domestic social resources (1); status-related social resources (2); expert advice on regulations and financial matters (3); and advice on finding a job (5). Scale 4, collective social capital resources, had only three items and an insufficient ρ value and has not been used in further analyses. Most scales were more or less negatively skewed, which indicates a high popularity of most items. Four items were non-scalable. The scale measuring total social resources had an H value of 0.20, making it psychometrically unsuitable to measure social capital as a unidimensional concept, meaning that access to one social domain doesn't necessarily go together with access to another domain.

Table III presents correlations between all variables. All RG scales are strongly correlated. A large intimate social network, meaning more strong ties, goes together with more social resources on the RG scales, except for advice on finding a job.

Social capital domains and sociodemographic groups

Table IV shows how separate social capital domains are accessed by categories of sociodemographic groups. Differences were tested with unpaired t-tests for dichotomous variables or one-way analysis of variance for variables with three or more categories. Overall, persons younger than 40 have slightly more social capital, but the differences are not statistically significant. Women about equally access social capital compared to men, but they have fewer status-related social resources. The same holds for educational groups: there are no differences except for status-related social resources, which are more easily accessed by higher educated respondents. Single parents are sometimes at a slight disadvantage, and those with some kind of part-time job are at an advantage, but the differences are not statistically significant. Ethnic minorities have a large disadvantage in one domain: domestic social resources. Overall, after one year of welfare receipt access to social capital somewhat diminishes, in particular and significantly in the domain of advice on finding a job. Summarised, the subgroups of our study population are not very different in social capital, measured as access to social resources.

Social capital domains and job search behaviour

Table V presents two hierarchical multiple regressions of job search behaviour. For analysis A, six sociodemographic variables, functioning as control variables, are entered in the first step. These variables explain 16 per cent of the total variance. In the second step the four RG scales are entered. Both status-related social resources and advice on finding a job added to explained variance, which increases to 21 per cent. For analysis B, the size of the intimate network is entered as second step and the

Variable (min-max)	1. Domestic social resources (0-7) Mean (SD)	2. Status-related social resources (0-4) Mean (SD)	3. Expert advice reg. fin. (0-8) Mean (SD)	5. Advice on finding a job (0-4) Mean (SD)	Total resources (0-30) Mean (SD)
Age					
18-39 ($n = 68$)	5.1 (1.9)	2.3 (1.2)	4.8 (2.2)	2.5 (1.3)	16.8 (5.5)
40-47 ($n = 58$)	4.4 (2.3)	2.2 (1.2)	4.9 (2.2)	2.3 (1.4)	15.8 (6.0)
48-64 ($n = 63$)	4.3 (1.9)	2.3 (1.2)	4.6 (2.2)	2.4 (1.3)	15.7 (5.2)
Sex					
Men ($n = 84$)	4.7 (2.0)	*2.5 (1.1)*	4.7 (2.3)	2.4 (1.3)	16.2 (5.4)
Women ($n = 105$)	4.6 (2.1)	*2.1 (1.2)*	4.8 (2.1)	2.4 (1.3)	16.0 (5.7)
Education					
Low ($n = 79$)	4.6 (2.0)	*1.9 (1.3)*	4.7 (2.0)	2.3 (1.3)	15.4 (5.6)
Middle ($n = 65$)	4.5 (2.1)	*2.4 (1.1)*	4.7 (2.1)	2.5 (1.3)	16.2 (5.4)
High ($n = 44$)	4.9 (2.0)	*2.7 (0.9)*	4.9 (2.5)	2.4 (1.4)	17.4 (5.7)
Single parent					
Yes ($n = 64$)	4.4 (2.2)	2.1 (1.2)	5.0 (2.1)	2.4 (1.3)	15.9 (6.0)
No ($n = 125$)	4.7 (2.0)	2.3 (1.2)	4.7 (2.2)	2.4 (1.3)	16.2 (5.4)
Employment					
Yes ($n = 38$)	4.7 (2.3)	2.3 (1.2)	5.1 (2.2)	2.7 (1.3)	17.1 (6.0)
No ($n = 151$)	4.6 (2.0)	2.3 (1.2)	4.7 (2.2)	2.3 (1.3)	15.9 (5.5)
Ethnicity					
Dutch or Western immigrant	*5.1 (1.9)*	2.4 (1.1)	4.8 (2.2)	2.5 (1.3)	16.7 (5.2)
Non-Western immigrant	*4.2 (2.1)*	2.2 (1.2)	4.8 (2.2)	2.3 (1.3)	15.5 (5.9)
Duration of welfare receipt (last period)					
1 yr ($n = 29$)	4.9 (2.0)	2.4 (1.1)	5.1 (2.0)	*3.0 (1.0)*	17.3 (4.7)
> 1 yr and ≤ 2 yrs ($n = 51$)	4.7 (2.1)	2.3 (1.2)	4.7 (2.3)	*2.4 (1.2)*	16.4 (5.9)
> 2 yrs and ≤ 6 yrs ($n = 66$)	4.6 (2.1)	2.3 (1.2)	4.6 (2.2)	*2.2 (1.4)*	15.5 (5.8)
> 6 yrs and ≤ 14 yrs ($n = 27$)	4.3 (1.9)	2.1 (1.0)	5.0 (2.4)	*2.4 (1.4)*	15.8 (5.8)
> 14 yrs ($n = 16$)	4.5 (2.0)	2.0 (1.3)	4.9 (1.5)	*2.4 (1.3)*	15.9 (4.5)
Job search requirement					
Yes ($n = 100$)	4.7 (2.0)	2.4 (1.2)	5.0 (2.0)	2.6 (1.3)	16.8 (5.3)
No ($n = 78$)	4.5 (2.1)	2.2 (1.2)	4.5 (2.3)	2.2 (1.2)	15.3 (5.8)

Notes: $n = 189$. Italic = statistically significant differences ($p ≤ 0.05$)

Table IV.
Resource Generator scores for categories of the sociodemographic variables

explained variance increases from 16 to 19 per cent. The four RG scales are entered in the third step, and the explained variance increases to 23 per cent. Now only network size and the RG scale advice on finding a job are significantly related to job searching.

An extra analysis, in which the psychological construct of self-esteem also was entered as control variable did not add any explained variance, meaning that such a construct does not confound the relation between social capital and job search behaviour (not in table). Contrary to our expectations, we found that specific social

	Blocks A1 and B1 Social-demographic variables			Block A2 RG scales added			Block B2 Network size added			Block B3 RG scales added		
	B	β	p	B	β	p	B	β	p	B	β	p
Sex[b]	-0.05	-0.15	0.07	-0.04	-0.13	0.13	-0.05	-0.16	0.05	-0.05	-0.14	0.09
Age	-0.00	-0.10	0.16	0.00	-0.11	0.13	-0.00	-0.12	0.09	0.00	-0.13	0.07
Education	0.01	0.06	0.43	0.00	0.00	0.99	0.00	0.06	0.41	0.00	0.01	0.85
Single parent[c]	-0.03	-0.08	0.33	-0.03	-0.09	0.27	-0.03	-0.07	0.38	-0.03	-0.08	0.32
Ethnicity[d]	0.08	0.24	0.00	0.08	0.24	0.00	0.08	0.26	0.00	0.08	0.25	0.00
Duration of welfare receipt	-0.02	-0.17	0.02	-0.02	-0.14	0.04	-0.02	-0.16	0.02	-0.02	-0.14	0.05
Size of intimate social network							0.02	0.21	0.00	0.02	0.18	0.01
RG domestic social resources				0.00	-0.05	0.58				-0.01	-0.07	0.40
RG status-related social resources				0.02	0.18	0.03				0.02	0.15	0.07
RG expert advice on regulations and financial matters				0.00	0.00	1.00				0.00	-0.04	0.67
RG advice on finding a job				0.02	0.16	0.05				0.02	0.18	0.04
Variance explained (R^2) (%)		16			21			19			23	

Notes: $n = 189$. Analysis A: step A1, sociodemographic variables; step A2, RG scales. Analysis B: step B1, sociodemographic variables; step B2, network size; step B3, RG scales. [a]The Variable job search behaviour was transformed into a logarithmic variable in order to improve normality; [b]0/1 = male/female; [c]0/1 = no/yes single parent; [d]0/1 = Dutch or Western immigrant/non-Western immigrant

Table V.
Two hierarchical multiple regressions on job search behaviour[a]

resources as measured with the adapted version of the RG scales contribute only slightly to job search behaviour. Only "status-related social resources" and "advice on job finding" have a statistically significant relation to job search behaviour. We also see that including the size of the intimate social network to the regression analysis adds additional explained variance. Apparently the intimate social network has more functions than merely the rather instrumental functions covered by the four domains.

Conclusion

We investigated how social capital, understood as access to the resources of other people, was distributed over a group of long-term welfare recipients. We concluded that subgroups of our study population differed somewhat in social capital. Men have more access to status-related social resources and the same holds for higher educated persons. The last finding is in line with the social capital theories of Coleman (1990) and Bourdieu (1986/2011), which stress the reciprocal relations between educational achievement and status attainment. In contrast, migrants clearly lack social capital in one specific field: domestic social resources. An interesting finding is also that recently unemployed persons receive more advice on job finding. Apparently, resources in this field tend to fade away after a year of welfare receipt. Although we found differences in social capital for our study population to be small it appeared that a larger intimate social network provided more access to all of the general domains of social capital. This corroborates Van der Gaag's (2005) finding that the size of the network is associated with prestige-related and support-related social capital. Apparently, not only large total networks, but also large intimate networks consisting of strong ties are important for access to a variety of social resources.

Contrary to our expectations, only two social capital domains contribute to job search behaviour: "status-related social resources" and "advice on job finding". Moreover, the size of the intimate social network appeared to be relevant for job search behaviour, indicating that the intimate social network has more functions than merely the rather instrumental functions covered by the four domains. Whereas there is a clear relationship between social capital and status attainment in the general population (Lin, 1999) and we know that jobs are often found through informal channels (Granovetter, 1995), we conclude that for the long-term welfare recipients in our study access to more instrumental social capital scarcely leads to more job search activities.

Research limitations

This study addressed the instrumental functions that the social network may have for job search activities, by scrutinising the resources that social relationships provide access to. In doing so we focused on a specific group of people who have been unemployed for a longer period or who have been employed in precarious part-time jobs earning an income below the subsistence level. These welfare recipients often have obsolete skills, are lone mothers or migrants.

The low 8.6 per cent response rate is a weakness of this study. Unemployed welfare recipients are difficult to reach for study purposes (Van Hooft et al., 2004; Koen et al., 2010). By consequence, we should be careful when drawing conclusions about the representativeness of study results concerning social capital among the long-term welfare recipients. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design makes it more difficult to decide on causal relations between sociodemographic characteristics, social capital and job search activities (Gelderblom and De Koning, 2007). Social capital may make active job searching easier; on the other hand, active job searching may also add to one's

social capital. Although this influence will probably be less strong, future researchers should use a longitudinal long-range design to study social capital effects on job searching and employment success. As an alternative for a longitudinal study we suggest to use a mixed method study including qualitative methods to better understand the relationship between social capital of welfare recipients and their job search behaviour.

Implications for practice
We found that the difference in job search activities between respondents with more social capital and those with less social capital were not large. In general, the importance of social resources also depends on whether or not goals are available through other institutional means (Van der Gaag and Snijders, 2004). An explanation for our findings might be that in the Netherlands employment agencies and job web sites reduce the importance of informal job search channels for this specific group. In addition, merely having access to social capital is not enough. Mobilising social resources requires skills some persons lack, leaving them unable to activate potentially useful social resources. Social network factors are heavily intertwined with human capital and an individual propensity for agency. The mobilisation of social capital is a combined result of earlier investments in relationships within a particular, individually shaped opportunity structure, and an individual predisposition to mobilise social resources.

Quite another interpretation of our results is that social networks may have unexpected negative influences on employment commitment and consequently on job search behaviour. In a qualitative study on Dutch long-term welfare recipients, Engbersen (1990) portrayed six types of job search attitudes. He concluded that a minority of welfare recipients hold on to an autonomous unemployment culture, or display other work ethics than the government would like to see.

Anyhow, our study does not support the idea that activation policies in which welfare recipients are trained to expand their social network, as has been done in Canada (Hatala, 2007) will help find employment. For Belgium, Van Hoye *et al.* (2009) came to the same conclusion that larger networks do not result in more re-employment. When employment opportunities are there, it is better to have unemployed persons focusing on other opportunities to enhance their employability such as investments in general personal skills and directly job-related education. Another perspective suggested by Taylor-Gooby (2004) is that if supply side employment policies fail, trying to fit persons in an even more demanding activation trajectory does not make sense; demand-side employment policies may be the obvious way to get unemployed persons activated.

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