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Non-take-up of social support and the implications for social policies

Reijnders, M.A.W.

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Author: Reijnders, M.A.W.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In many welfare states, public authorities face a critical challenge: they must invent and organize a new system of social service delivery while simultaneously addressing severe budget cuts (Van den Berg & Groeneveld, 2017; Kickert & Randma-Liiv, 2015). In response, policymakers attempt to curb social welfare expenditure by urging individuals who are in need of social support to minimize their use of publicly funded services as much as possible and to take on more active responsibility for their personal welfare problems (see, e.g., Linders, 2019; Wright, 2016; Brandsen, Trommel & Verschuere, 2014; Newman & Tonkens, 2011). Policymakers expect these individuals to seek alternative forms of social support services from a wide array of so-called *third sector organizations* (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016) ranging from human service associations and welfare organizations to citizen platforms, mutuals, cooperatives and social enterprises.

In the eyes of policymakers, these third sector organizations form a crucial part of the social service system, as they are often located in the vicinity of individuals who are in need of help. They are therefore sometimes referred to as “proximity services” (Eme & Laville, 1988). These organizations are generally considered to be capable of delivering tailor-made services (see, e.g., Kelly, 2007) and of reaching hard-to-reach populations (see, e.g., Bach-Mortensen, Lange & Montgomery, 2018). Moreover, a key role in policy strategies geared towards *preventive* social welfare and healthcare is attributed to them (see, e.g., Dickinson *et al.*, 2012). The underlying idea is that the services that they develop and offer support welfare clients in their help needs as early as possible, before a situation takes a turn for the worse and clients become dependent on more expensive forms of social and healthcare services. Hence, policymakers emphatically position these third sector organizations at the front line in pursuit of a more efficient and tailor-made social service system.

However, even if sufficient social services are offered by these third sector organizations, it cannot be assumed that all individuals who are in need of support will actually use these services. For example, an elderly woman may suffer from severe rheumatism and feelings of loneliness but refrain from asking for help from a home care organization. A nonprofessional caregiver may run the risk of becoming overburdened but may be unaware of social support services offered by third sector organizations that could alleviate (some of) his responsibilities. A middle-aged man who is going through a divorce and is confronted with various personal problems may find it difficult to ask for help from an organization that offers emotional and administrative support. These are three examples, out of many, of individuals who – albeit under different circumstances and for different reasons – do not ask for social support that is offered by third sector organizations.

Despite its apparent universality, our empirical and theoretical understanding of this phenomenon of *non-take-up of social support* is still severely limited. Although different academic disciplines have unquestionably yielded relevant knowledge on and insights into help-seeking behavior in various contexts, such as help-seeking for professional medical care (e.g., Pescosolido, 2006) and non-take-up of social security benefits (e.g., Van Oorschot, 1995), this research has not been directly related to the phenomenon of non-take-up of social support from third sector organizations. The different disciplines have focused on different aspects of help-seeking behavior and have done so in relative isolation from one another. Furthermore, it is very challenging to contact this “hidden and hard-to-reach population” (Shaghaghi, Bhopal & Sheikh, 2011) of potential welfare clients, which further complicates the ability to gain a better understanding of non-take-up of social support.

1.1. MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

This thesis aims to better understand the problems and barriers that potential welfare recipients perceive and/or experience in their daily lives that impede the optimal utilization of social support services offered by third sector organizations. The empirical context of this study is the social service system of the Dutch municipality of The Hague (500,000+ inhabitants), which provides a *key case*, given “its capacity to exemplify the analytical object of the inquiry” (Thomas, 2011: p. 514). The main research question is as follows:

Why do potential welfare recipients not take up social support provisions that are offered by third sector organizations, and what are the implications of this phenomenon for the contemporary social policies of the Dutch municipality of The Hague?

In recent years, ‘traditional’ welfare arrangements have come under increased pressure due to different interconnected developments, including financial and economic instability, fast-paced technological innovations, the aging of the population, globalization, the heightened expectations of citizens regarding public service delivery and fundamental changes in labor markets (see Fenger, 2018; Taylor-Gooby, Leruth & Chung, 2017; Afonso, 2015; Kickert & Randma-Liiv, 2015; Vis *et al.*, 2011; Lynn, 2006). In response to these pressures, many public authorities have adopted a different approach to social welfare. Instead of maintaining an active welfare state, they gradually evolved towards a so-called *enabling state* (Van der Meer, 2009). This development coincided with a renewed emphasis on *multilevel governance* (Van der Meer, Van den Berg & Dijkstra, 2012). This means that public authorities adopt a more regulatory or facilitating role, and governance responsibilities are shared with or transferred to all sorts of societal actors, including nongovernmental agencies and citizens (Van der Meer *et al.*, 2019). Although

the regulatory role remains a key task for public authorities, their role has shifted from that of direct service deliverers to facilitators of social support.

Over time, an increasing number of tasks and responsibilities associated with social service delivery have been shared with and/or transferred to third sector organizations (Evers & Laville, 2004). In fact, these organizations have now become inextricably linked with the social service system. They can be distinguished from archetypical entities in other societal sectors, namely, public bureaucracies in the state sector, for-profit enterprises in the market sector and families in the community sector (Brandsen, Van de Donk & Putters, 2005). Third sector organizations are self-governed; in that sense, they do not 'belong' to the public sector. Furthermore, they differ from market-based organizations, as their goal is not profit maximization and they do not operate under (pure) market conditions. Finally, they are different from community-based entities; as Brandsen, Van de Donk & Putters formulate it:

"While the difference is gradual (as it is with the other domains), it is important to distinguish between small, primary social units (such as families) and larger, more organized units (such as voluntary groups). The latter may operate on the basis of care and trust, but are not based primarily on close relationships between people who individually love and cherish one another" (2005: p. 753).

Policymakers expect individuals who are in need of social support to organize their own support as a complement to – or sometimes as a substitute for – more expensive forms of help. It is expected that they will actively seek social support from third sector organizations as early as possible so that they can deal with their personal welfare problems before they worsen. However, for a number of reasons, potential welfare clients may refrain from utilizing the services offered by third sector providers. To date, only scant attention has been paid to the range of potential problems and barriers that impede the optimal utilization of social support. This lack of attention is problematic because failure to understand and effectively address non-take-up leaves social needs unattended to. Non-take-up may lead to higher social welfare costs in the long run, as individuals may develop even more serious problems. Finally, non-take-up of social support may even amplify social inequalities among citizens, as some individuals are (more) successful in realizing their social rights by effectively utilizing support, while others are not (*cf.* Brodtkin & Majmundar, 2010; Dijkstra, 1997; Van Oorschot, 1995).

The relevance of the present study therefore lies in its ambition to better understand the problems and difficulties that individuals in a hard-to-reach population – namely, eligible welfare clients who do not utilize social services from third sector providers – experience

in their daily lives and to critically assess what the phenomenon of non-take-up means for contemporary social policies. This thesis seeks to accomplish the following four objectives: 1) to examine the contents of the contemporary social policies of the municipality of The Hague to see whether (and if so *how*) the phenomenon of non-take-up of social support is taken into account by policymakers; 2) to build a theoretical understanding of non-take-up of social support; 3) to cast light on the personal experiences and perceptions of a hidden and hard-to-reach group of individuals who are eligible for but do not receive social support; and 4) to critically reflect on the implications of these findings for contemporary social policies in The Hague.

In other words, this thesis will assess the ‘goodness of fit’ between, on the one hand, the contents of contemporary social welfare policies and, on the other hand, the daily reality, perceptions and lived experiences of potential welfare recipients in the municipality of The Hague. Why do eligible individuals refrain from utilizing social support from third sector organizations? What are the implications of this non-take-up for social policies? By answering these questions, this thesis aims to contribute to the broader societal and academic debates on social policies and the governance of social service systems.

1.2. RESEARCH APPROACH

To obtain a better grasp of non-take-up of social support and its implications for social policies, this thesis develops a customized analytical framework that incorporates the entire path from policy design to – ultimately – the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals who are in need of social support. Before such a framework can be constructed, it is necessary to clarify the behavioral assumptions with regard to help-seeking for social support. After all, behavioral assumptions have implications for how one conceptualizes and investigates help-seeking for social support. In the academic literature, many studies (implicitly) adopt a rational actor model, assuming all individuals to be equally self-confident, rational, active and bureaucratically competent. In the help-seeking literature, behavior is often reduced to an isolated, static choice by an individual to seek or not to seek help. In a similar vein, in the literature of non-take-up of social security benefits¹, behavior is reduced to an individual deciding whether or not to claim a benefit based on

1 Throughout the text, the terms ‘social security benefits’, ‘welfare benefits’, ‘public benefits’, or simply ‘benefits’ will be used interchangeably, all referring to public bureaucracies that offer eligible individuals different types of programs, assistance and provisions, such as child support grants, housing benefits, supplementary pensions, healthcare insurance programs, and unemployment and minimum income benefits (see Wang & Van Vliet, 2016; Heinrich, 2015; Van Vliet & Wang, 2015; Brodtkin & Majmundar, 2010; Hernan, Hernanz, Malherbet & Pellizzari, 2004; Riphahn, 2001; Van Oorschot, 1998; Blundell, Fry & Walker, 1988; Kerr, 1982a; Kahn, Katz & Gutek, 1976).

strictly utilitarian calculations. However, it will be argued that such a conception is too limited, rendering it unsuitable as a foundation for the analytical framework to further investigate non-take-up of social support. It provides an overly simplistic account of help-seeking for social support that fails to acknowledge and capture the nuances and complexities of this process.

Therefore, this thesis will develop an alternative model with more realistic behavioral assumptions than those of the 'pure' rational actor model. This alternative behavioral model is constructed by drawing relevant insights and knowledge from different academic disciplines, including behavioral economics, psychology, law, sociology, political science and (behavioral) public administration. In summary, it posits that help-seeking behavior is *not* guided by objective, clear-cut measures of costs and (expected) benefits but rather is guided by how individuals *subjectively* construe the world (see Moynihan, Herd & Harvey, 2015; Shafir, 2013; Baicker, Congdon & Mullainathan, 2012). Furthermore, without suggesting that individuals are social dupes, the alternative behavioral model recognizes that they are boundedly rational and that help-seeking (cap)abilities are normally distributed among the population (as opposed to being equally distributed, as posited by the rational actor model). Finally, the alternative model moves beyond the rather single-minded focus on the individual of the rational actor model and pays explicit attention to the role and impact of (f)actors from the wider environment.

In line with this alternative behavioral model, non-take-up of social support is conceptualized as a dynamic process that is embedded in a multilayered social service system. Different types of problems and barriers 'operating' at different levels of the social service system may inhibit the help-seeking process of potential welfare recipients. The analytical framework consists of four levels that are relevant in this specific help-seeking context: 1) the individual level of the potential welfare recipient, 2) the organizational level of the third sector providers (and their representatives), 3) the social service system level, and 4) the level of social policy design. This multilayered framework provides a useful starting point to investigate the complex phenomenon of non-take-up of social support. Aside from identifying the various levels and actors in relation to non-take-up of social support, this framework also serves as a heuristic device for further theoretical and empirical research. The analytical framework forms the foundation of the research strategy, which comprises three distinct yet interrelated research stages. What follows is a brief outline of each research stage and an explanation of how they fit together and collectively provide an answer to the main research question.

Research stage I: content analysis of contemporary social policies

The first research stage focuses on the level of social policies. More specifically, it entails a qualitative content analysis of the contemporary social policies of the municipality of The Hague. Social policies play a crucial role, as they – directly and indirectly – shape the local social service system in which third sector organizations (must) operate and affect the life chances and socioeconomic position of (potential) welfare recipients (*cf.* Hasenfeld, 2010; Van Oorschot, 1998; Skocpol & Amenta, 1986). The main objective of this research stage is to describe the contents of these social policies and to determine whether the phenomenon of non-take-up of social support is incorporated into them – and if so, *how* it is incorporated. Such an analysis will ‘uncover’ local policymakers’ assumptions, expectations, and ideas about the social service system in general and how third sector organizations, as well as (potential) welfare clients who find themselves within this system, (should) behave. Therefore, the question is *What are the contents of the contemporary social policies of the municipality of The Hague, and (how) is the phenomenon of non-take-up of social support incorporated into these social policies?*

The results of this first research stage provide the necessary groundwork for assessing the ‘goodness of fit’ between, on the one hand, the contents of contemporary social policies and, on the other hand, the perceptions and lived experiences of individuals who are in need of social support. However, before being able to conduct such an assessment, it is first necessary to gain a better understanding of individual help-seeking behavior and non-take-up of social support. This is the goal of the second research stage.

Research stage II: understanding non-take-up of social support

The second research stage focuses on the problems and barriers perceived and experienced by potential welfare recipients in their daily lives that impede the optimal utilization of the social support offered by third sector organizations. To better understand non-take-up of social support, the lived experiences and perceptions of potential welfare clients (individuals who are eligible for social support from third sector providers but who do not receive that support) will be collected, described and analyzed. However, not all potential welfare recipients are the same. This study makes a distinction between two kinds of potential welfare recipients: the type I individual and type II individual. What differentiates one from the other is the ‘position’ each occupies within the social service system and the purpose of the social support provisions that are offered to them by third sector organizations.

The type I individual is a person who is in need of social support to sustain or increase his/her self-reliance. Many services offered by third sector organizations are oriented towards that purpose. Think, for example, of administrative support to fill out tax forms,

transportation services, companionship and emotional support from a volunteer (a buddy), and home care services to enable the individual to (continue to) live at home. The type II individual is a different potential welfare recipient, namely, a nonprofessional caregiver who provides care and support to someone in his/her personal social network (e.g., a family member, a friend, or a neighbor). Third sector organizations also design and offer social support services that specifically target these caregivers. The purpose of these social services is to build and sustain individuals' caregiving capabilities with the idea of preventing caregivers from becoming overburdened and allowing them to continue performing their caregiving tasks. Hence, these services are intended to avert the so-called *double boomerang effect* (Van Exel, De Graaf & Brouwer, 2008), namely, the situation that when a caregiver becomes overburdened, he/she and the person being cared for both become dependent on care and support.

What the two types of potential welfare clients have in common is that they have unfulfilled need(s) for social support and do not utilize services that are offered by third sector organizations. To better understand the why and how of non-take-up of social support by these potential welfare recipients, type I and type II, the second research stage will be divided into two substages (IIa and IIb), which will be explained in the following section. Particular attention is thereby paid to the methodological challenges that arise when investigating individuals from a "hidden or hard-to-reach population" (Shaghghi, Bhopal & Sheikh, 2011), in this case individuals who are eligible for social support yet do not receive it.

Research stage IIa: non-take-up of social support by type I individuals

To understand why type I individuals do not ask for the social support offered by third sector organizations, this research stage proceeds in two steps. First, a literature review is conducted to distill the determinants of non-take-up of social support from various academic disciplines, including psychology, epidemiology, sociology, public administration, and law. Second, a qualitative approach is adopted to gain an understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences of potential welfare recipients. The empirical evidence that is found for these determinants will be examined based on interviews with potential welfare recipients in the municipality of The Hague.

Given the challenge of recruiting interviewees from this hard-to-reach population, locations throughout the city where individuals, *perforce*, come to meet (some of) their other help needs were visited. These locations were the emergency room of a local hospital, different locations of the food bank and the offices of social work counselors. To further deepen our understanding of non-take-up and as a means of data triangulation, two focus groups were organized in collaboration with a local foundation in The Hague,

Stichting Kompasie. This independent foundation uses expert-by-experience volunteers who provide free information and advice to individuals with (often multiple) personal welfare problems.

Research stage IIb: non-take-up of social support by type II individuals

In spite of an estimated 4,000 third sector organizations that offer some form of social support to nonprofessional caregivers (type II individuals), non-take-up of support services also occurs in The Hague. Our understanding of this non-take-up of social support by caregivers is still limited. In particular, there has been insufficient systematic analysis of the role and impact of bureaucratic factors on the help-seeking process of nonprofessional caregivers. Bureaucratic factors are often not recognized as such or are only superficially discussed rather than systematically analyzed. To address this lacuna in our knowledge, the concept of *administrative burdens* from the public administration literature is introduced and applied. This theoretical concept is useful, as it unifies different types of administrative costs that caregivers may encounter in their help-seeking process. Applying this concept allows for a more detailed and systematic scrutiny of administrative burdens in the interaction between third sector organizations and potential recipients of social support services, i.e., nonprofessional caregivers. Thus, the following question arises: *How do administrative burdens impact the help-seeking process of nonprofessional caregivers who are eligible for social support from third sector service providers?*

A qualitative approach is adopted to gain an understanding of the administrative burdens that caregivers perceive and experience in their daily lives. Empirical data are collected from focus groups (semistructured interview format) with caregivers of Dutch (two groups), Surinamese, Turkish, Moroccan, The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, and Chinese sociocultural backgrounds. However, caregivers who are eligible for yet do not utilize social support services, especially those with non-Dutch backgrounds, constitute a hard-to-reach population. Hence, to find and recruit participants for the focus groups, a collaboration was established with social work experts from *PEP Den Haag*, a local foundation with access to nonprofessional caregivers of different sociocultural backgrounds.

Research stage III: policy implications

This third and final research stage will connect the findings from the two previous stages. The meaning for contemporary social welfare policies (analyzed in research stage I) of potential welfare recipients not taking up social support services (research stages IIa and IIb) is discussed. The following research question is posed: *What are the implications for contemporary social policies that emanate from the study of the phenomenon of non-take-up of social support in the municipality of The Hague?* Basically, The Hague's social policies ('policy on paper') will be confronted with the problems and obstacles that potential

welfare clients experience in their daily lives that inhibit them from effectively utilizing social support from third sector providers. In answering this question, a constructive approach is adopted to determine what can be learned from this study of non-take-up of social support. The discussion will concentrate on those policy elements that could (potentially) benefit the most from the knowledge acquired in this study.

Summary

The various stages of the research strategy can be summarized as follows: the first stage examines the contents of the contemporary social policies of the municipality of The Hague. What are the assumptions, expectations, and ideas of local policymakers in relation to the (governance of the) local social service system? How do policymakers envision and define the roles and responsibilities of third sector organizations that are active in this local social service system? What do they expect of (potential) welfare clients who find themselves within this system? The second research stage sheds more light on the phenomenon of non-take-up of social support. What are the problems and barriers that potential welfare clients experience in seeking social support?

Adopting a qualitative approach, the second research stage provides an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences and personal perceptions of potential welfare recipients – individuals who are eligible for social support but who do not utilize it – in The Hague. This study thereby distinguishes between type I individual and type II individual, who both occupy a specific position within the social domain. The third and final research stage critically, but constructively discusses the implications of the findings on non-take-up of social support for the contemporary social policies of The Hague. Taken together, the results of the three research stages provide the ingredients to answer the main research question. Figure 1.1 provides a schematic summary of the overarching research strategy.

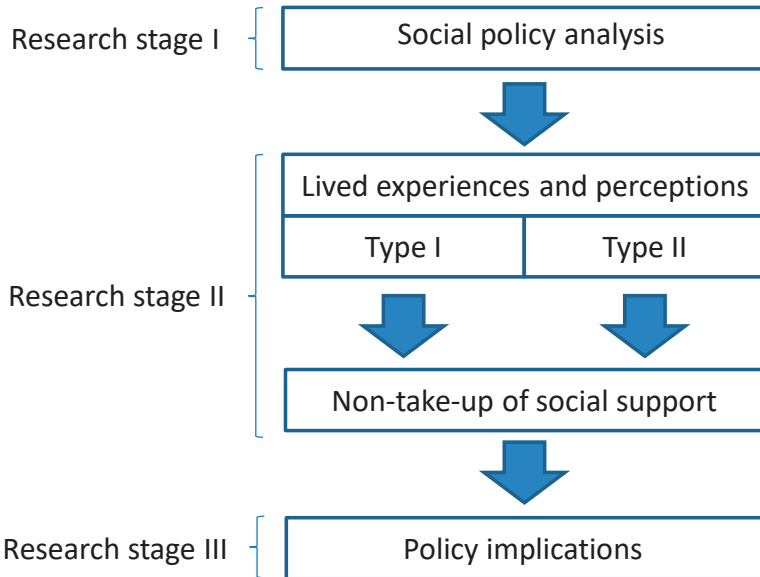


FIGURE 1.1: Visualizing the overarching research strategy – a three-stage approach

This concludes the introductory part on the research topic, objectives, research questions, and the overarching research strategy. The remainder of this introduction elaborates on the relevance of this study for both academics and practitioners, clarifies what this study will *not* deliver, and provides a reader's guide for the rest of the thesis.

1.3. RELEVANCE FOR ACADEMICS AND PRACTITIONERS

This study takes an important step in understanding how and why potential welfare recipients refrain from asking for help from social service providers in the third sector and what this means for contemporary social policies. Hopefully, this study will appeal to both academics and practitioners who work in and around the world of social service delivery. For the former audience, this study seeks to make a twofold contribution. First, by drawing relevant knowledge and insights from different, coexisting academic disciplines, this study moves towards an integrative approach to understanding the phenomenon of non-take-up of social support. Such an approach makes it possible to unveil, compare and critically evaluate the (implicit) behavioral assumptions that are made in the literature on help-seeking behavior and non-take-up of welfare benefits. It also allows the identification of commonalities between different academic disciplines, for instance, between epidemiological and public administration research. Different disciplines address similar types of external obstacles in the help-seeking process, but in their own specific ways and using their own vocabularies. Therefore, this study aims to bring different – and

until now largely separated – literatures closer together and thereby makes an important contribution to the academic debate.

Second, this study enriches the academic debate both empirically and theoretically by delivering in-depth empirical insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of a hard-to-reach population. Many studies on help-seeking for social services do not investigate this ‘invisible’ population at all (see, e.g., Pommer *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, help-seeking is described mostly in terms of *realized* access, while the preceding process of navigating the social service system to find help – and the potential problems and hurdles an individual may encounter along the way – is largely neglected. Therefore, by reaching hard-to-reach individuals to document and understand their reasons for not asking for social support, this thesis contributes to a more complete understanding of help-seeking for social support. However, it does not claim to provide an exhaustive account of non-take-up of social support.

Rather, the aim is to develop directions for further theoretical refinement and empirical investigation of this issue. Since no analytical framework, let alone a theory of non-take-up of social support, exists yet, this thesis takes the first steps along the path that will eventually lead to a full-fledged theory. It simply takes time to develop a theory, as it does not appear overnight. Adopting a phased approach to theory development (see Snellen & Van de Donk, 1998), this thesis will first identify and define the relevant concepts in order to develop a ‘conceptual lens’ (*cf.* Allison, 1971) with which the phenomenon of non-take-up can be observed and interpreted. It then moves to the phase in which empirical data about non-take-up will be systematically collected and analyzed. Finally, based on these empirical findings, the concluding chapter of this thesis will formulate a set of hypotheses that can be subjected to further empirical testing. These steps form the groundwork for what will - or should - eventually become a “mature theory” (Snellen & Van de Donk, 1998) of non-take-up of social support.²

What practitioners can expect of this study is a more fundamental understanding of the ubiquitous yet opaque phenomenon of non-take-up of social support. As Wright rightly argues:

2 Snellen & Van de Donk (1998) make a useful distinction among the various phases of theory development and use specific terms for each phase. The first phase is the formulation of a so-called minitheory, followed by developing a prototheory, embryonic theory and, ultimately, a (more or less) mature theory. In other words, with every phase, one moves from minimum to maximum theory on the scale of theory development. More on these phases and how they are translated to this thesis follows in §3.4.

“it is crucially important that policy makers begin to engage with evidence verified by authentic accounts of lived experiences; of the meanings and impacts of a range of welfare conditionality measures; the complexities of motivation; and the relationships between intentions, actions and outcomes” (2016: p. 250).

This study casts light on the problems and obstacles that individuals in need of help face or experience in their daily lives that inhibit them from asking for social support. This population remains largely outside the range of policymakers and practitioners – often to their frustration. Reaching those difficult-to-reach individuals and documenting their “lived experiences” (Wright, 2016) and to better understand their reasons for not asking for social support is expected to yield vital knowledge that will help further improve the system of social service delivery. Therefore, practitioners may find this study useful.³

1.4. WHAT THIS THESIS WILL NOT DELIVER

At the outset, it is also helpful to clarify what audiences should *not* expect from this thesis. This study will *not* provide answers to questions such as ‘How many eligible individuals are (un)successful in asking for social support?’, ‘What is the correlation between socioeconomic status and non-take-up of social support?’, ‘What is the extent of non-take-up of social support from third sector providers?’, ‘What is the total supply and demand for social support services?’, and ‘What is the effect of non-take-up of social support on individual well-being?’ Answering such questions would require quantitative research and large-N datasets. However, there are four major obstacles to conducting such quantitative research, namely, sampling problems, data unavailability, data collection challenges and insufficient preexisting knowledge.

First, the size of the total population of individuals with (multiple) latent social support needs is unknown, and there are no registers available from which a representative sample may be drawn. Moreover, there is scant preexisting knowledge on the specific topic of non-take-up of social support, further complicating the use of quantitative techniques such as questionnaires. Even if one manages to develop a decent survey, there is the major challenge of recruiting (sufficient) respondents, as one is dealing with a hard-to-reach population. Therefore, this thesis will apply qualitative methods to learn more about non-take-up of social support and its implications for social policies. While this does not address all of the aforementioned methodological issues (and also raises other method-

3 While of course bearing in mind that “usefulness is not always self-evident” (Gerring, 2012: p. 397), as it depends on – among other things – one’s professional position, personal preferences, and the type of knowledge one is seeking (utility function).

ological challenges)⁴, qualitative methods are more feasible than quantitative methods given the current state of this particular field of research (*cf.* Groeneveld *et al.*, 2015).

In addition, this study will not investigate the effects of non-take-up of social support on individual well-being. Although scholars generally seem to agree that social support (if received) produces net positive effects, the present study will not explicitly investigate the consequences of (partial) non-take-up on individual well-being. This does not mean that the issue is completely ignored but rather that the main focus will be on the determinants of non-take-up of social support. Finally, while this study will adopt a multilevel approach, it will not include the subpersonal level of “genes and proteins” (Pescosolido, in: Pescosolido *et al.*, 2011: p. 59) or of the organ systems and cellular and molecular levels of analysis (see Anderson, 1998). By implication, this excludes the academic disciplines of (medical) biology and the relatively young discipline of neuroscience, which concentrate on those other, finer levels of analysis. Nor will this study psychosomatically measure the cognitive capabilities of individuals, levels of stress and their impact on behavior, and the like, as studies in related domains have done (see, e.g., WRR, 2017; WRR, 2014; Tiemeijer, Thomas & Prast, 2009). Instead, the focus will be on the individual-psychological, organizational, systemic, and policy levels – as will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters.

1.5. READER’S GUIDE: STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THIS STUDY

The next chapter (chapter 2) will extensively review the existing literature on help-seeking and on the non-take-up of social security benefits. It provides a critical evaluation of the way help-seeking has been conceptualized in those two bodies of literature. This critical review will yield highly useful insights that are necessary to construct a tailor-made analytical framework of non-take-up of social support, which will be the topic of chapter 3. From social policy design to the daily reality of potential welfare recipients, this analytical framework encompasses all the relevant elements necessary to further investigate the phenomenon of non-take-up of social support. In that chapter, special attention will be paid to conceptualizing the ‘third sector’ and ‘third sector organizations’ and the types of social services that they offer. Chapter 4 contains a more detailed discussion of the overarching three-stage research strategy and provides the necessary background information for the broader empirical context of this study (the social service system of the Dutch municipality of The Hague).

4 How these methodological issues are dealt with will be discussed more elaborately in subsequent chapters, particularly in chapters 4, 6 and 7.

Chapter 5 – which constitutes the first research stage – will focus on the contents of the contemporary social policies of The Hague. Then, turning to the second research stage, chapters 6 and 7 will document and analyze the lived experiences and perceptions in relation to non-take-up of social support services of type I and type II individuals. Subsequently, after examining the contents of contemporary social policies (research stage I) and gaining a better understanding of the (perceived) problems and barriers in help-seeking for social support (research stages IIa & IIb), it will be possible to discuss the implications of non-take-up for social policies in The Hague. This will be addressed in chapter 8, which constitutes the third research stage. The final chapter (9) will recapitulate the key findings of this study and answer the main research question. After a reflection on the added value as well as the shortcomings of this study, the thesis will conclude with a discussion of its implications for academic research, for (policy) practice and for normative debates about social policies and non-take-up of social support.

