

Power of the Notion

Rules, Practices and Self-evaluation of the Poor Relief of the Reformed Church in Late Eighteenth-century Rotterdam

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Abstract

Though Dutch poor relief has been appreciated by historians for the financial stability and generous assistance given to the poor, this paper examines the harsh reality to poor relief in the late eighteenth-century Netherlands. Using archival material from the Reformed Diaconate in Rotterdam, this paper deals with regulations for poor relief, compliance with them and its achievements and attempts at reform to show that not only strangers but also residents were often unable to receive (additional) alms due to strict regulations. This work also demonstrates that the notion of ‘overly generous poor relief’ and ‘lazy poor’ shared by the Diaconate and city authorities led to the tightening of the rules for almsgiving and adherence to them.

According to sociologist Abram de Swaan, pre-industrial charitable systems in Europe had an essential instability.¹ Charity was implemented separately in each local community and depended on the voluntary donations of the wealthy. When disasters occurred, such as wars, epidemics or crop failures, communities were no longer able to respond to the numerous requests for assistance, and the wealthy would try to escape responsibility. One community might exclude destitute strangers and reduce assistance to the resident poor, causing bands of unsettled poor to attempt to find refuge in neighbouring communities, further stressing their systems of support. Consequently, social care systems of communities in an area would collapse in a chain reaction.

¹ Abram de Swaan, *In care of the State. Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era* (Cambridge 1988) 28–32.

However, Maarten Prak showed that the community of Den Bosch did not experience such a collapse even in the second half of the eighteenth century, a time of general economic decline.² The main poor relief institutions increased their dependence on steady property incomes, while also receiving a municipal subsidy. Moreover, charities set up rules to preclude poor newcomers from receiving alms and distributing smaller amounts to more residents. In the case of Amsterdam, Marco van Leeuwen came to a similar conclusion.³ In both cities, charitable organisations assisted the poor continuously through the Republic era, albeit with a few differences in their respective revenue structures and cost-cutting measures.

Recently, historians emphasised the financial stability of Dutch poor relief in general. Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Griet Vermeesch have articulated an inverse association between financial durability and the centralisation of relief provisions by comparing many cities in the early modern Low Countries.⁴ They confirmed that decentralised poor relief showed the best financial performance. Charitable organisations in many Dutch cities succeeded in securing stable incomes because they were not centralised. Moreover, Van Nederveen Meerkerk and Danielle Teeuwen argued that the Dutch charitable system, 'despite its fragmented character and high dependence on charitable donations, was comparable to English welfare provision, both in terms of financial durability and per capita distribution'.⁵ Thus these studies have positively assessed the Dutch system.

On the other hand, historians have paid relatively little attention to the practices of cost-cutting, i.e. the exclusion of the poor and reducing assistance, although they were indispensable to the stable poor relief system. The charitable institutions in Dutch cities limited the access to poor relief

2 Maarten Prak, 'Goede buren en verre vrienden: De ontwikkeling van onderstand bij armoede in Den Bosch', in: H. Flap and M.H.D. van Leeuwen (eds.), *Op lange termijn. Verklaringen van trends in de geschiedenis van samenleving* (Hilversum 1994) 155–156.

3 M.H.D. van Leeuwen, 'Amsterdam en de armenzorg tijdens de Republiek', *NEHA Jaarboek* (1996) 134–137.

4 Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Griet Vermeesch, 'Reforming outdoor relief. Changes in urban provisions for the poor in the northern and southern Low Countries (c. 1500–1800)', in: Manon van der Heijden et.al. (eds.), *Serving the urban community. The rise of public facilities in the Low Countries* (Amsterdam 2009) 135–154.

5 Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Danielle Teeuwen, 'The stability of voluntarism: financing social care in early modern Dutch towns compared with the English Poor Law, c.1600–1800', *European Review of Economic History* 18 (2013) 83.

from the second half of the seventeenth century.⁶ They also kept alms to a minimum.⁷ However, studies have not clarified how severely Dutch charitable institutions restricted the concept of the 'deserving poor' and minimised the cost per person or on what grounds this was done.

Using documents from the Rotterdam Reformed Church in the late eighteenth century, this study will demonstrate that the Reformed Diaconate complied with strict regulations. Poor strangers found it prohibitively difficult to receive alms. Alms recipients failed to receive much from poor relief agencies due to their small income, labour ability and immorality, despite their neediness. Then, it will be revealed that inaccurate notions of 'overly generous poor relief' and 'lazy poor' prevailed among the personnel running the charitable system and that these notions led to the tightening of almsgiving rules and the adherence to them. That is to say, their biased view motivated and justified severe cost-cutting. These findings shed light on a negative side of Dutch poor relief activities.

In eighteenth-century Rotterdam, poor relief was semi-centralised. Each religious denomination cared for its own poor people under the supervision of the city government.⁸ The Dutch Reformed Church also had the responsibility to offer relief to so-called *stadsarmen*: poor residents who did not belong to any church in the city. The poor relief of the Dutch Reformed Church was administered in accordance with the regulations of the city government. In return, the city regularly provided financial support to the Church.⁹

The first section begins with an assessment of the financial condition of Rotterdam Reformed Diaconate in the late eighteenth century. This institution was unable to cope with the growing number of applications for relief, and the municipal government was obliged to increase the amount of subsidy provided to it. Then, poor relief regulations are reviewed as official measures to limit access to relief services. The eligibility requirements were already severe at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

6 Maarten Prak, 'Armenzorg 1500–1800', in: Jacques van Gerwen en Marco H.D. van Leeuwen (eds.), *Studies over zekerheidsarrangementen. Risico's, risicobestrijding en verzekeringen in Nederland vanaf de Middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam 1998) 81–85.

7 Ibidem, 74–75.

8 C.W. van Voorst van Beest, *De katholieke armenzorg te Rotterdam in de 17e en de 18e eeuw* ('s Gravenhage 1955) 82; id, *De strijd rondom de totstandkoming van het Burgelijk Armbestuur te Rotterdam (1795–1806)* (Rotterdam 1960) 1–22.

9 Van Voorst van Beest, *De strijd rondom de totstandkoming*, 8–11; P.A.C. Douwes, *Armenkerk. De Hervormde Diaconie te Rotterdam in de negentiende eeuw* (Schiedam 1977) 67–69.

However, the city tightened poor relief regulations several times to control expenditures towards the end of the century.

In the second section it will be clarified whether the deacons of the Reformed Church actually complied with regulations. The Rotterdam City Archives has preserved many applications for poor relief,¹⁰ making a detailed analysis possible. These documents contain information about the application reasons, as well as the outcomes of the deacons' investigations and their comments and judgements, along with their advice to the burgo-masters and administrators who made the final decisions. In total, 91 examples of applications show the reason(s) why each application was granted or rejected. Although the sample size is small, what we have suggests that the deacons adhered to the strict rules.

The third section will show important factors affecting the rigorous selection process, from various documents related to the poor relief reform plan in 1774. At request of the city council, a committee formed by the Rotterdam Reformed Church Council would review the financial problems of poor relief, discuss required measures and submit reports to the city. The available historical papers contain formal reports, the Diaconate's accounting data from the 1760s, memoranda and drafts. These sources suggest that the committee produced reports on the basis of an inaccurate notion of their poor relief activities. The notion that they shared had a considerable effect on poor relief, leading to a revision of the rules of almsgiving.

1 Financial problems and the tightening of the rules of Rotterdam poor relief

The accounting data of the Rotterdam Reformed Diaconate from 1761 to 1771¹¹ provide a glimpse into the income structure of the largest charitable institution in the city (see Figure 1).

¹⁰ Stadsarchief Rotterdam (henceforth SAR), Oud stadsarchief (henceforth OSA), inv. nr. 2784, Requesten van particulieren aan burgemeesteren om onderstand van de diakonieën of opname in een inrichting van weldadigheid, met adviezen der diakenen in margine, 1731–1794. On the application process, see SAR, code XXII C 1 n. 6, Reglement van de Broederen Diaconen van de Gereformeerde Nederduitsche Gemeente der Stad Rotterdam (1777).

¹¹ SAR, Collectie Jacob van der Heim, inv. nr. 165, Generale staat van alle inkomsten en uitgaven over 1773.

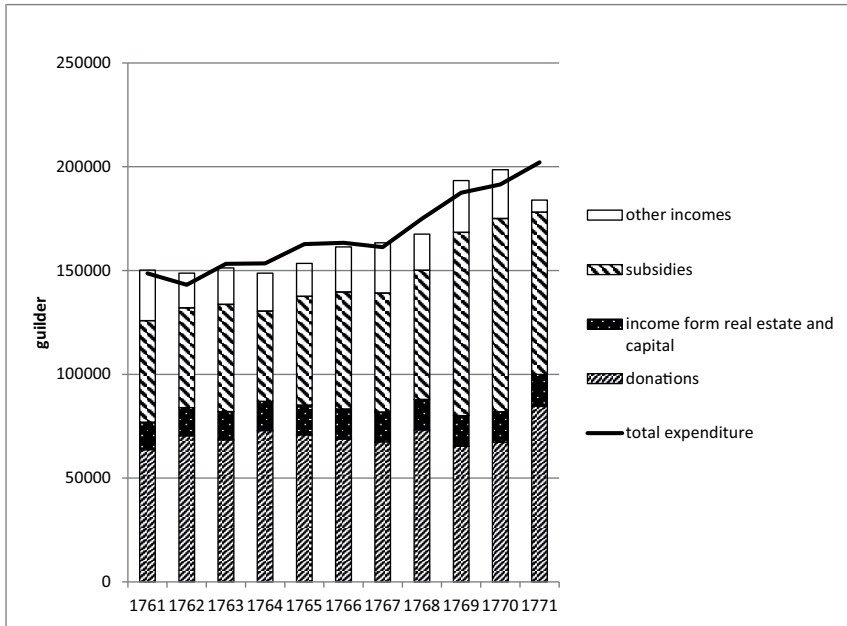


Figure 1: Nominal income and expenditure of Rotterdam Reformed Diaconie 1761-1771

Source: SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 163, 164, 2785; SAR, Handschriftverzameling, inv. nr. 3443, 3445.

According to precedent, the income is categorised as the following: (1) income from charitable donations; (2) interest from real estate and capital; and (3) subsidies.¹² The first category was the largest, averaging 43 percent of the total revenue. Most of this was income from collections. The third category, municipal subsidies, was of approximately equal significance, averaging 37 percent of the total revenue. By contrast, the share of asset income never exceeded ten percent of the total income. Beginning in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, economic stagnation in the Netherlands caused increasing demand for relief. In general, poor relief institutions in Dutch cities managed to secure enough revenue to keep up with the demand by investing in bonds.¹³ However, the Rotterdam Reformed Diaconate apparently had no financial leeway to do this. As a result, the Diaconate was unable to meet its expenses, and the municipal authorities were forced to grant financial assistance. In the eleven years covered by the accounting data reviewed here, municipal subsidies grew by 36 percent.

¹² Van Nederveen Meerkerk and Teeuwen, 'The stability of voluntarism', 88.

¹³ Ibidem, 91-92.

In the late eighteenth century, the total expenditure of the Rotterdam Reformed Diaconate fluctuated, probably rising on a long-term basis. In Figure 2, the trends of the Reformed Diaconate's outdoor relief expenditure since 1761 can be clearly seen.

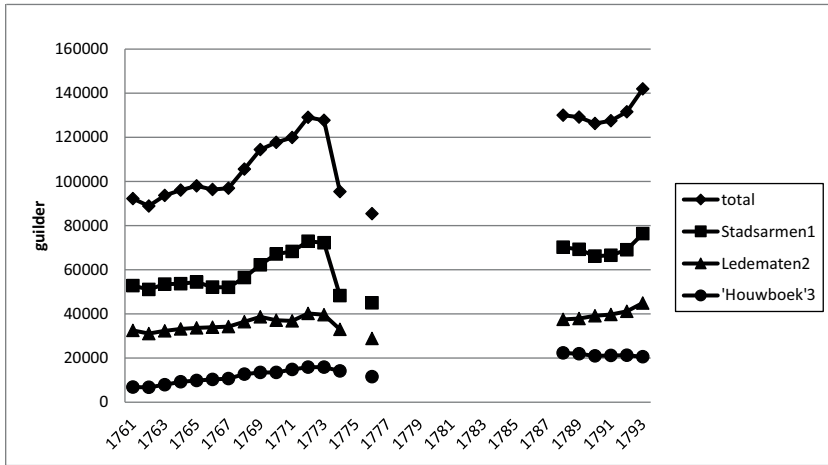


Figure 2: The spending on outdoor relief by the Reformed Diaconie in Rotterdam, 1761-1793.

Source: SAR, *Collectie Jacob van der Heim, inv. nr. 165, Generale staat van alle inkomsten en uitgaven over 1773*.

1. paupers not attached to a church
2. members of the Reformed Church
3. infants, children, the elderly and invalids boarding at the house of *houwvrouw*

Expenditures increased by 40 percent between 1761 and 1772. Following this, there was a rapid drop, to the level seen in the early 1760s. Unfortunately, there is no data available for the period from the mid-1770s to 1787. In 1788, total costs were once again as high as the level seen in early 1770s; subsequently, they increased further. The number of individuals on poor relief also increased rapidly. Outdoor relief recipients grew from 3026 in 1784 to 5396 in 1796.¹⁴ The Diaconate House accommodated about 530 elderly people and children in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. This number then increased substantially to over 750 by the early 1790s.¹⁵

Thus the subsidy for the Diaconate remained an important problem for municipal finances. According to Arie van der Schoor, annual municipal

14 Van Voorst van Beest, *De katholieke armenzorg*, 15.

15 SAR, *Lidmatenhuis, Tehuis Ouden van Dagen/Emmahuis*, no. 1–12.

expenditure for the Reformed Diaconate grew at two percent from 1755 to 1800. The poor relief comprised on average about ten percent of total city expenditures.¹⁶ To reduce costs, authorities revised the regulations on poor relief. However, formal relief policies did not change; the city only strengthened existing regulations. Therefore, we will survey the primary rules first.

Conditions, procedures and rules were stipulated in a decree of the Reformed Diaconate in Rotterdam; declared in 1716, they remained valid throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁷ This decree laid out the basic relief policies, clearly stating that charity should not be bestowed unconditionally. To that end, the deacons of the Reformed Diaconate had to observe the following three rules. The first rule constitutes an anti-abuse policy. The city government prohibited the pawning of alms and urged the deacons to give out clothes (commonly pawned items) only in cases of necessity. It was also stated that, in principle, the poor might not receive cash assistance for the paying of rent. Indeed, charity funds should be used only for the fulfilment of purposes agreed by the Diaconate. If the poor used the alms in a different way, they would be punished and would cease to receive charity.¹⁸

The second rule relates to the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries. These criteria fall into two categories: (1) the requirement for newcomers to be recognised as residents eligible for relief; and (2) moral requirements. The former was an indispensable measure, keeping the crowds of outsiders from trying to claim poor relief: to apply for relief, a newcomer had to have lived in Rotterdam for two consecutive years without any assistance and had to present an 'Acte van absolute admissie' (certificate of eligibility for residential status), granted by the overseers of the various areas in the city. Regarding the moral requirements, the decree specified that no assistance was to be given to unmarried mothers or to persons reduced to poverty through 'scandalous behaviour', such as drinking, gambling, laziness and lewdness.

The third rule demonstrates the importance of vetting applicants and receivers. To determine the need for relief and to keep alms payments to a minimum, based on the applicant's requirements, the Diaconate had to

16 Arie van der Schoor, *Stad in aanwas. Geschiedenis van Rotterdam tot 1813* (Zwolle 1999) 331.

17 SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 509, Extract uyt de Generale Keure en Ordonnantie der Stad Rotterdam. Houdende Ordonnantie op de Diaconye (1716).

18 SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 509, Extract uyt de Generale Keure en Ordonnantie der Stad Rotterdam. Houdende Ordonnantie rakende het gedrag en verbintnisse van de Armen, soo binnen als buyten het Wees-huys en Diaconye-huys, die met haer te doen hebben, en medepligtige (1716), Articles 9.

determine their true living conditions properly. When application was made for poor relief, the applicant's circumstances would be examined by the deacons to determine whether s/he and his/her household met the requirements. These deacons collected the following information before a decision was made: applicant address, family composition, occupation, age, health condition, length of residence at current domicile and in Rotterdam and whether the applicant had friends there or elsewhere. The applicant would be then ordered to appear before the deacons with two witnesses or at least two witness statements. The deacons were also obligated to periodically check the personal situations of alms recipients; recipients and their families had to present themselves before the deacons twice a year, providing updated household information, such as family composition, income and amount of alms being received. If the recipients failed to appear, their poor relief was stopped.

These strict regulations seem to have left little room for abuse or wasteful spending. Nonetheless, new decrees were implemented later in the eighteenth century to make the rules even stricter. Here we have selected the relevant revisions and supplements from available sources, discussing them chronologically. A 1741 decree stated that the article forbidding the sale of alms¹⁹ was being 'grossly' contravened. As such, penal regulations were re-stipulated.²⁰ The name of any person violating the rules would be deleted from the alms register, and they would be punished. The 1758 decree reported that many strangers were coming to the Church and begging in an 'improper' manner. The decree ordered the arrest and punishment of such people, recommending that the deacons should not bestow alms upon them.²¹ The latter decree suggests that poor strangers were perceived as a real threat to the poor relief system in Rotterdam.

19 Ibidem, Article 9.

20 SAR, Archieven van Rooms-Katholieke Wees- en Armbesturen te Rotterdam, inv. nr. 548 I, Extract uyt de Generale Keure en Ordonnantie der Stad Rotterdam. Houdende Publicatie rakende de Diaconye (1741).

21 SAR, Archieven van Rooms-Katholieke Wees- en Armbesturen te Rotterdam, inv. nr. 548 m, Publicatie tot Weering van Vreemdelingen en van buyten deeze Stad inkomende Arme Perzonen, zich adresseerenden aan de Kerke op de dagen van de Klagt der Publycque Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Diaconie deezer Stad (1758).

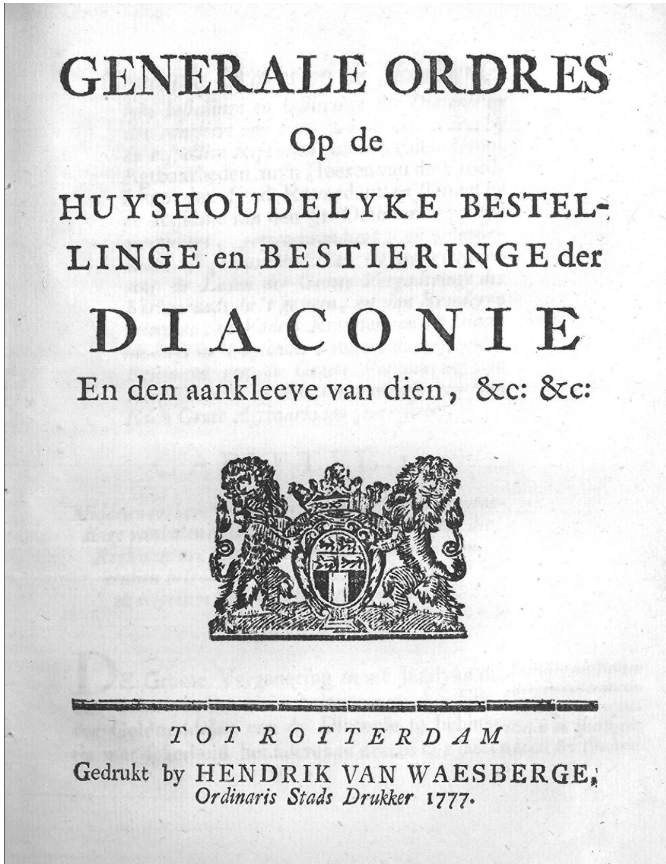


Illustration 1: Generale Ordres op de Huyshoudeleyke Bestellinge en Bestieringe der Diaconie en den aankleeve van dien, &c: &c; 1777 (SAR, code XXII C 1 n. 5).

In 1777, the rulebook for the household management and administration of the Diaconate was edited.²² These amendments were based on related decrees—particularly regulations stipulated in the decree issued on 31 October 1774. These regulations had two main features. First, they contained many countermeasures for the prevention of fraud, the exclusion of outsiders and the control of alms recipients. It was now stipulated that the recipient register must contain even more detailed information on the recipients, including the names of their employers and the incomes of their children. Further, the inspection period for recipients was extended. Second, many cost-cutting measures were added to the regulations. Alms

²² SAR, code XXII C 1 n. 5, *Generale Ordres op de Huyshoudeleyke Bestellinge en Bestieringe der Diaconie en den aankleeve van dien, &c: &c; (1777)*.

applicants had to agree to make repayments to the Diaconate if their situations improved. The deacons were required to consider stopping or reducing poor relief temporarily in the summer, the best season for finding jobs, or replacing donations of money with bread. All carpenters, bricklayers, smiths, painters and other such manual workers were forbidden to receive alms in summer. Furthermore, detailed rules were added to ensure that clothes, books and other commodities were provided sparingly.

The final decree making alms procedures stricter was declared in 1790.²³ To prevent false declarations, applicants and alms recipients were asked to present a document signed by their employers stating their daily wages. On the whole, the decrees made after 1716 show that the city government and the Reformed Church's Diaconate attempted to keep the payment of alms to a minimum throughout the eighteenth century. This finding leads us to question the reality and effectiveness of the legislation related to poor relief. We must ascertain whether the deacons actually complied with the regulations made under these decrees. We should study the real situation of compliance with (1) the anti-abuse policies, (2) the selection of beneficiaries and (3) the vetting of applicants and alms recipients. The study of the anti-abuse policies must be omitted, however, from the following discussion, due to a lack of available historical resources.

2 The Reformed Church Charity's poor relief practices

Applications for poor relief are valuable historical materials offering clues about compliance with the regulations described above. They contain the deacons' judgement and reasoning with regard to the content of each application. These comments were written not only by the deacons of the Dutch Reformed Church but also by the Church of Scotland, the Lutheran Church, the Walloon Church and the Rotterdam Municipal Orphanage; 169 such petitions are dated between 1731 and 1794. During the five years from 1788 to 1792, 63 percent of these applications were made. For the purposes of analysis, the 91 examples judged by the Reformed Diaconate in these five years were selected.

23 SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 516, Extract uit het Register der Resolutien van de Weth der Stad Rotterdam, genomen in haar Edele Groot Agtbaare Vergadering op Dinsdag den 2de Maart 1790.

Zy deze gefeld in handen
van Broederen Diaconen van de Pub-
lycque Gereformeerde Nederduitsche
Gemeente dezer Stadt om te dienen
van berigt.

Dezen 19 february
1788 Præsent alle de Heeren Burgemeesteren
dempt de Hu van Hoogendrop

Ter Ordonn: van dezelve,
Wantsylen van Kuylen

Pro Deo.
Aan de Ed: Groot Agtb:
Heeren Burgemeesteren en Re-
geerders der Stadt Rotterdam.

Geeft reverentelyk te kennen
Pieter van der Laan Soeken Drager
woonende in de Heeren Straat

Coelo Groot Agtbaare
Heeren, Diaconen Dat zy Suppliant bewoont sijn huysvrouw
bevonden bij onderzoek en drie van sijn vier kinderen sijn sijn
het gestelde in den en drie van sijn vier kinderen sijn sijn
neventstaande Requetten sijn sijn staet sijn om voor dit onge-
na waarheid en sijn huishouding het nodige te kunnen
zyn bereyd om aan *Woolorge*
dit ongelukkig huysgezin
geduende de ziekte van weshalven keert hij Suppliant zj tot
den Suppliant eene bedelling UEd: Groot Agtb: Ootmoedig verzo-
te Actioeisen, dan kende, UEd: Groot Agtb: gelieven de
dant de Suppliant door Broederen Diaconen van de Publicyque
Ued Gr Agtb: beguntigt Gereformeerde Nederduitsche Gemeinte
is met een Actie van te autorisieren en te qualificeeren de
het Zukke dragen zoudde gemelde Sup^t te mogen alimenteren.
deze bedelling Afgedig
Zijn tegen de broodhandels
der Diaconie *Van den tuffte*
Worom Diaconen sijn
schryfftelijk bevonden van Burgemeesteren en Regeerders der Stadt
Ued Gr Agtb: hier toe Rotterdam, gezien en geëxamineert hebbende den
met eerbied zullen jn wagtes inhoud van deze Requete, en het bericht van Broe-
deren Diaconen van de Publicyque Gereformeerde
Nederduitsche Gemeinte dezer Stadt, autorisieren
en qualificeeren Broederen Diaconen voorn: omme de

Resolutie der Wlootvergadering
den 29 febr 1788
Mart van OJ
A. Kortleven

Actum den 178
Præsent alle de Heeren Burgemeesteren,
Ter Ordonnantie van dezelve,

Illustration 2: Pieter van der Laan's application for poor relief, 19 February 1788 (SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2784).

There are three serious problems in the source material that must be addressed. First, it is unclear how representative the sample is because the total number of applications submitted during these five years is unknown. However, monthly distributions for the available data provide valuable insights.

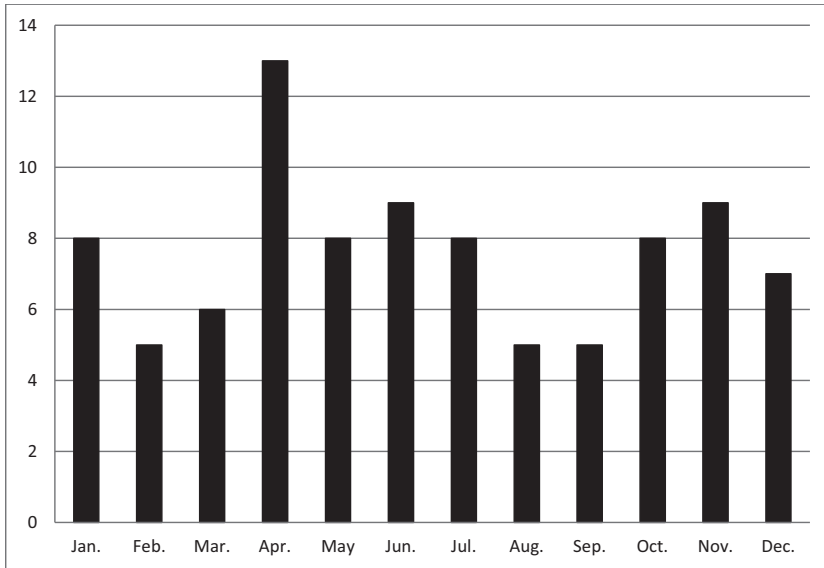


Figure 3: Monthly distribution of 91 petitions, 1788-1792

Figure 3 shows that the number of applications peaks immediately after March when the winter relief ended.²⁴ This suggests that many new applications were received in April.²⁵ The chart also shows that the number of applications was smallest in the summer.²⁶ Therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that these 91 petitions reflect general characteristics of the universal set.

Second, of the 91 documents, 32 are applications for indoor relief in the Diaconate House, founded for the elderly and half-orphans. There were additional criteria required to be a resident of this almshouse. Nevertheless, we have chosen not to change the sample size, because the requirements for almshouse accommodation were met in all 32 cases and the

24 SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 509, Extract uyt de Generale Keure en Ordonnantie der Stad Rotterdam. Houdende Ordonnantie op de Diaconye (1716), Article 74: 'De Winter-bedeeling werd gerekent van den eersten November tot den laetsten Maert/ en de laetste dag van de maend geen Vrydag wesende tot de eerste Vrydag in April'.

25 More precisely, many petitions in April were newly applied AND rejected. The degree of bias in the available data will be discussed as a third problem.

26 cf. C.J. van Baar and Noordegraaf, 'Werkschuweid en misbruik van sociale voorzieningen: Het beleid in de Alkmaarse armenzorg 1750-1815', in: E.H.P. Cordfunke c.s., *Alkmaarse Silhouetten. Uit de geschiedenis van Alkmaar en omgeving* (Zupthen 1982) 100. In addition, people did not need peat for heating in the summer.

deacons judged whether someone should be taken into the Diaconate House using the above-mentioned poor relief criteria.

Third, the degree of bias in our subset is problematic. Of the total 91 petitions, 74 percent (67 petitions) were recommended to be rejected unconditionally by the Diaconate, and the authorities accepted their opinion in most cases. This raises the question whether our data contain a disproportionate number of rejected cases. Alternatively, this might indicate that the majority of applications were rejected. Here, the 27 requests for child-care in the Diaconate House shed some light on the matter. Among the 38 children referred to in the 27 applications, only one child was taken into the Diaconate House a year following the application. However, overall, 198 children were accepted between 1788 and 1792.²⁷ Thus we can be certain that our data are biased, exaggerating the apparent adherence of the deacons to the alms rules. Nevertheless, we must suppose, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, that all petitioners were treated fairly and consistently.

Although the authorities made the final decisions, they generally accepted the Diaconate's advice.²⁸ Thus, we analyse the Diaconate's comments and judgements in detail. The responses to the 91 applications can be classified into four groups: (1) 27 cases that were judged according to the possibility for self-sufficiency on the part of the applicant, (2) 26 cases in which resident status or church membership was an obstacle, (3) sixteen cases where the applicants were accused of immorality and (4) others. The first three groups account for about three-quarters of the total.

In the first group, eighteen applications out of the 27 were refused because the deacons concluded that the applicants' households were able to provide for them without (additional) relief. Their decisions were usually based on the occupations, ages and health conditions of the applicants and their families, in accordance with the 1716 decree of the Reformed Diaconate. On 31 December 1789, Fanneke Grootveldt's application for winter relief was rejected because:

The Deacons found by research that the petitioner is not 40 years old yet and has no disabilities, without the burden of children because her two children are now looked after in the Diaconate House. Therefore the Deacons are of the

²⁷ SAR, Inventaris van Stedelijk Armhuis/Oostervant, inv. nr. 361–365, 372.

²⁸ In 67 cases out of the 91, the burgomasters and administrators agreed with the Diaconate's conclusion. In seventeen cases, the final decisions were unknown. The others show that the authorities adhered more strictly to rules.

opinion that if the petitioner makes an effort to provide for herself she should certainly be able to make a living without the Diaconate's help.²⁹

Many applicants were already alms recipients, attempting in vain to renew assistance or receive additional assistance.

Five of the eighteen petitions in this group also contained information about household income. The data shows that the Diaconate tried to assess the living conditions and needs of the applicants. On 30 January 1790, Cornelis Stam and his wife, Cornelia van Savoyen requested winter relief. However, the deacons found that he 'has received the sum of 255 guilders and 3 stuivers for 9 months' and rejected his application.³⁰

The remaining eight applications were rejected by the deacons (five cases) or were left to the authorities for a decision. In these cases, the applicant was already receiving employment assistance. The Diaconate here may have followed the rule that the poor who were given jobs such as *zakkendrager* (labourer employed to carry sacks of flour, grain, peat etc.), *turftonster* (peat-container filler) or *klapwaker* (watchman) through assistance from the city should not receive any more aid.³¹ On 20 June 1788, Geertruij Beurs's request to take her grandchild into the Diaconate House was refused because 'the father of the child [...] is favoured with a license for *zakkendrager*, whereby he, according to the reporters, can provide for himself and his child'.³²

As a whole, the applications in the first group show that the deacons examined the applicants' circumstances to minimise costs. Information on the deacons' investigative abilities can be gleaned from papers in which false statements were discovered. According to the 1716 decree, those submitting falsified applications would be deprived of any assistance and placed in confinement on bread and water for several days. Additional

29 'Diakonen bevonden by onderzoek dat den Suppl[ian]t nog geen 40 jaaren synde en geen gebreeken hebbende buyten last van kinderen doordien de 2 kinderen die sy heeft nu in het diakoniehuys worden geallim[enteerd] om welke redenen diaconen van oordeel syn soo den suppliant haar werk wilde maaken om voor haar onderhout te sorgen Sy buiten onse diakonie wel soude kunne bestaan', SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2784, the application of Fanneke Grootveldt on 31 August 1789.

30 'in 9 maande heeft gewonne een zomme van f[lorin] 255-3-', *ibidem*, the application of Cornelis Stam and Cornelia van Savoyen on 30 January 1790.

31 This rule is mentioned in applications presented as early as 11 August 1750; thus, it must have been established before that time.

32 'de vader van het kind [...] is begunstigt met Acte als zakkedrager waardoor hij volgens gedagten der berigtters in staat is om voor zig en zijn kind de kost te winnen', SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2784, the application of Geertruij Beurs on 12 June 1788.

punishment might include banishment from the city or any other punishment as deemed fit.³³ Among the 91 applications, the deacons uncovered false statements that led to rejections in four cases.³⁴ The applicants in these cases concealed information such as the fact that they or their family members were employed or already in receipt of alms. The deacons also discovered that a (now-married) mother had continued to receive alms after her illegitimate child died.³⁵ Such examples show that the deacons conducted thorough research to uncover the real condition of the poor applying for charity.

These examples of false statements reveal an interesting fact: the deacons did not, in their materials, favour punishment. For instance, Marytje Meyer, wife of Jan Meyer, submitted an application on 22 May 1788, which was rejected because of a false statement. The deacons found that:

the petitioner's husband works to this day as a hod carrier under Martinus Esbeek. Therefore, the reporters are of the opinion that the petitioner deserves a severe punishment instead of more alms.³⁶

However, the deacons did indicate their intention to assist the family because 'the Deacons know from experience that the most lenient treatment promotes the best interests of the Diaconate'.³⁷ At that time in Holland, every city had to care for its own poor. The Reformed Church could not easily banish poor offenders from its parish. If severe punishments only made residents even poorer, the Diaconate in question would be forced to bear a higher burden.

It was very important, therefore, for poor-relief institutions to identify the paupers of their districts. The deacons checked the residency status and church membership of applicants rigorously indicated by the 26 cases in the second. Applicants in four cases were deemed to be members of

33 SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 509, Extract uyt de Generale Keure en Ordonnantie der Stad Rotterdam. Houdende Ordonnantie rakende het gedrag en verbintnisse van de Armen, soo binnen als buyten het Wees-huys en Diaconye-huys, die met haer te doen hebben, en medepligtige (1716), Article 6.

34 These four cases are in the 'others' group.

35 SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2784, the application of Cornelia Bazert on 17 Januaray 1789.

36 'de man der supliante tot dato deses als opperman in het werk by Martinus Esbeek. Om welke reden de berigters van gedagten zijn, dat de Supliante eerder zouden verdienen eene scherpe, correctie, dan meerdere bedeeeling', *ibidem*, the application of Marytje Meyer on 22 May 1788.

37 'diaconen by ondervinding weten, met de sagste weg in te slaan de belangens der diaconie het meest te behartigen', *ibidem*.

other churches and thus beyond the remit of the Reformed Church. This low figure seems to reflect the fact that responsibilities were clearly divided between various churches in the city. In the remaining 22 cases, the applicants were outsiders, and most of them had had trouble attaining letters of surety. In many Dutch cities, including Rotterdam, newcomers applying for certificates of resident status had to submit letters of surety wherein the poor relief organisations in their places of birth were required to guarantee that the costs would be reimbursed if the applicants received alms at their new addresses. In this way, the cities tried to prevent the immigration of poor people and the concomitant imposition of an increased burden on poor relief funds.³⁸ Rotterdam was no exception. On 3 May 1792, Jan int Hout, a widower and father of three, requested relief. He had become poor due to defective hearing. The deacons reported that:

the petitioner, a widower with three children, cannot provide for his family because of his handicap, mentioned in the request. Therefore, the Deacons would agree to provide charity. However, seeing that the petitioner is from Kralingen, without a letter of surety and having no admission, this would go against Article 33 of the 1716 decree of the Diaconate.³⁹

The Diaconate was ready to provide aid for him and his children, although he had neither a letter of surety nor a certificate of eligibility for resident status. However, his application was finally rejected by the authorities.

Three applications were refused because letters of surety were no longer valid. Even when the deacons did not find such problems, they were very careful about preventing the Diaconate from incurring extra expenses in supporting outsiders. In fact, they would abstain from making a decision until the intention of the surety was known (as in the four cases here). In another four cases, the relief fund in the place of birth did not agree to support the applicant; hence, the application was rejected in Rotterdam.

³⁸ Van Voorst van Beest, *De strijd rondom de totstandkoming*, 12–14; H.D. van Leeuwen, 'Overrun by hungry hordes? Migration and poor relief in the Netherlands, sixteenth to twentieth centuries', in Steven King and Anne Winter (eds.), *Migration, settlement and belonging in Europe 1500–1930s. Comparative perspectives* (New York 2013) 173–203, 186–189.

³⁹ 'den Suppliant, weduwnaar zynde, Drie kinderen heeft, en door het gebrek in de Requeste vermeld, buiten staat is het noodige voor zyn Huisgezin te kunnen winnen; om welke reden Diakenen wel eene Bedeeeling zouden kunnen accordeeren; Edoch, daar de Suppl[ian]t van Kralingen zonder Acte [van indemniteit] is; en geen admissee heeft; zoude zulks tegen Art[ikel] 33 der Diaconie Ordonnantie van 1716 stryden', SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2784, the application of Jan int Hout on 3 May 1792.

Elzelina van Hucksloot and her child were in need because her husband was on a voyage, probably as a sailor. However the deacons were unable to accept her request on 15 January 1790 because 'she and her child are from Nieuwpoort, with a letter of surety, and that place refuses to bestow alms upon them'.⁴⁰ In general, information on the second group indicates that the poor-relief institution adhered rigidly to the rules in order to avoid the financial burden of giving alms to newcomers.

The treatment of the third group of applicants, which consists of some accused of immorality, also demonstrates adherence to the regulations. In thirteen out of the sixteen cases, unmarried mothers were asking for help, and the deacons were forced to make difficult decisions. Although illegitimate children were allowed to receive alms, as previously mentioned, no assistance was to be given to their mothers, regardless of their social vulnerability. Surprisingly, in three cases, the deacons indicated their intention to help these mothers, thus disregarding the rules. They left the decision to the authorities in these cases.

Two applications show a final decision made by the authorities that the deacons should follow the rules. For example, Klasina Droogsteen had been deserted with her illegitimate child, and she requested winter relief on 6 January 1789. The deacons were ready to give charity against the rules because:

the petitioner was deserted by her husband after he had spent everything, which presumably led to the ruin of the family, wherein the petitioner and her child lost their shirts and fell into extreme poverty.⁴¹

However, the city ordered alms to be given only to her child during the winter. This is the only case of all thirteen applications where approval can be confirmed. Comments and decisions about these cases of unmarried mothers thus indicate the reluctance of the deacons and (especially) the city government to break regulations. The remaining three applications in the third group were rejected due to drunkenness or a 'los en ontugtig leeven' (loose and wanton life).⁴² This type of behaviour was cited, therefore, only in a minority of examples.⁴³

40 'sy met haar kindt van Nieuwpoort met acte [van indemniteit] syn en daar weygerig syn haar te bedeele', *ibidem*, the application of Elzelina van Hucksloot on 12 January 1790.

41 'Suppl[iant] door haar man verlaaten naa dat hy eerst alles hadde aangewent, wat tot ruïne van het huisgezin diene konde waardoor de Suppl met haar kind van alles ontbloomt, in de diepste armoede geraakt is', *ibidem*, the application of Klasina Droogsteen on 6 January 1789.

42 *Ibidem*, the application of Maria van der Meer on 10 April 1789.

43 Similar moral problems were noted also in two cases in the first group.

Our petition data sample, albeit a biased one, suggests that regulations for poor relief were observed, at least during the five years focused upon here. The deacons and city authorities made strict decisions following thorough investigations that followed the rules, attempting to improve the financial position of their poor relief. In the next section, we will see that this rigorous selection process contributed to a certain degree of cost-cutting during the 1760s. Then, it will be explained why the Reformed Church and the city government further tightened regulations in 1774, in spite of this financial 'success'.

3 The power of the notion

Poor relief expenditures increased rapidly during the 1760s, putting pressure on the budget of the city government. As noted above, the city council asked the Rotterdam Reformed Church Council to analyse the situation of the Diaconate and to devise a plan for reducing the burden. The report's authors were agents appointed by the Church Council, and they reported the two council meetings held on 21 March and 11 May 1774.⁴⁴ They contain some valuable information about the accounts of the institution of poor relief.

Table 1 summarises the cost components of expenditures on outdoor relief in 1761, 1766, 1771 and 1772. The number of people in each group (*lidmaten*, or members of the Reformed Church, *stadsarmen*, or paupers not attached to a church and *houwboek*, or infants, children, the elderly and invalids boarding at the house of *houwvrouw* being cared for at a price) and the annual cost per person in each group is given. The most salient fact is that the total annual cost per person remained at almost the same level for each group, although the price of goods continued increasing dramatically.

Price data for Rotterdam in the 1760s is scarce, but the legal price for rye bread in Leiden, fixed on the basis of market prices in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, rose by 58 percent from 1761 to 1771.⁴⁵ The price of peat in Rotterdam rose by 17–27 percent during the same period.⁴⁶ These increases

44 SAR, Handschrift Versameling inv. nr. 3445, Extract uit de Acten van de Groote Vergadering van den Kerkenraad der Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Gemeente, Groote Vergadering (henceforth 'Extract van de Acten'), 21 Maart & 11 Mei 1774.

45 G.P.M. Pot, *Arm Leiden. Levensstandaard, bedeling en bedeeden, 1750–1854* (Hilversum 1994) 114, 310.

46 SAR, Archief van het Heilige Geesthuis te Rotterdam, inv. nr. 173.

in prices suggest that the prices of daily commodities in Rotterdam were increasing exponentially. Thus, the deacons needed to minimise expenditures. They managed to substantially reduce the cost per person in all cases, particularly for *stadsarmen*, probably due to their strict observance of the almsgiving regulations. In conclusion, in the 1760s, efforts to reduce costs led to a partial success. Here, the utilisation of the above-mentioned 'letters of surety' system also contributed to this cost reduction.

Table 1: Cost of outdoor relief, according to the report in 1774 (data in 1761 = 100%)

Year		1761	1766	1771	1772
lidmaten	number	1012 (100%)	1092 (108%)	1181 (117%)	1198 (118%)
	cost in guilder	33323.5 (100%)	33935.2 (102%)	36814.6 (111%)	40246.6 (121%)
	cost per pers. in guilder	32.9 (100%)	31.1 (95%)	31.2 (95%)	33.6 (102%)
	number	2280 (100%)	2313 (101%)	3074 (135%)	3242 (142%)
stadsarmen	cost	54200 (100%)	57618 (106%)	68339 (126%)	72902.5 (135%)
	cost per pers.	23.8 (100%)	24,9 (105%)	22.2 (93%)	22.5 (95%)
	number	139 (100%)	170 (122%)	251 (181%)	282 (203%)
'houwboek'	cost	7165.1 (100%)	10301.3 (144%)	14804.2 (207%)	15909.8 (222%)
	cost per pers.	51.5 (100%)	60.6 (118%)	59 (115%)	56.4 (110%)
	number	3431 (100%)	3575 (104%)	4506 (131%)	4722 (138%)
total	cost	94688.6 (100%)	101854.5 (108%)	119957.8 (127%)	129058.9 (136%)
	cost per pers.	27.6 (100%)	28.5 (103%)	26.6 (96%)	27.3 (99%)

The data in 1661 are from January to December. In the other years from April to March. A miscalculation about the cost of 'stadsarmen' are corrected.

Source: SAR, Handschrift Versameling inv. nr. 3445.

Under this system, the Reformed Diaconate in Rotterdam charged colleagues in other cities with relief costs for newcomers, and vice versa. Rotterdam used this system effectively. According to a report from 1774, this

scheme generated more than 2500 guilders each year between 1768 and 1774 (see Table 2).⁴⁷

Table 2: Income and expenditure in accordance with the letters of surety (guilder)

	1768	1769	1770	1771	1772	1773	1774
① relief cost of the indemnified poor	3005.8	3485.9	3419.2	4024.7	4419.2	4446.1	3603.4
② collected amount	2987.6	3467.7	3401.0	3916.7	4219.3	4147.8	3220.8
③ reimbursement	452.2	542.8	584.0	561.1	720.5	700.5	900.2
collection rate (② / ①)	99%	99%	99%	97%	95%	93%	89%
balance (② - ③)	2535.4	2924.9	2817.0	3355.6	3498.8	3447.3	2320.6

Source: SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2785.

This figure amounted to about five percent of the total expenditure for *stadsarmen* in 1771 or 1772. This financial contribution shows that the system of 'letters of surety' functioned well. In fact, the average collection rate over these seven years was 96 percent.⁴⁸

Interestingly, the report's authors seemed not to be satisfied with these vigorous cost-cutting efforts. On the contrary, a distrust of alms recipients is exhibited, despite the reduction in the cost per person of poor relief that the deacons achieved. The report states that beneficiaries should be investigated thoroughly because:

for reasons of health, some people can earn a bit of income, other people cannot; some people declare their earnings honestly, other seek to hide them in every way; some people try hard at everything and others neglect everything [...].⁴⁹

47 SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2785, *Uitgaaf by de Diaconie der Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotterdam wegens van hier naar elders geïndemneerde personen sedert 1768 tot 1774*; *Inkomen by de Diaconie der Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotterdam wegens van elders geïndemneerde personen sedert 1768 tot 1774*. cf. Yoshiyuki Onishi, 'The formation of the 'letters of surety' system', in: Minoru Kawakita and Takao Fujikawa (eds.), *Kukan no igirisu-shi [Various spaces in British history]* (Tokyo 2005) 209–221 (Japanese).

48 Under the system, it usually took more than a year to receive a monetary payment. Thus, the collection rates given for the period before 1774 are provisional figures. The average collection rate during these seven years also should be higher. See SAR, Handschrift Versameling, inv. nr. 3445, 'Extract van de Acten', 21 Maart 1774.

49 'zommige door den toestand des lighaam in staat zyn om nog wat te kunnen winnen, andere niet, sommige hunnen winst in waarheid opgeven, andere die op allerlei wyzen zoeken te verbergen: Sommige alles benaastigen en andere alles verwaarloosen [...]', SAR, Handschrift Versameling inv. nr. 3445, 'Extract van de Acten'.

Clearly, benefit fraud was suspected. What was the basis for these suspicions? An internal document entitled 'Memorie nopens de administratie der Diaconie der stad Rotterdam'⁵⁰ (abbreviated as *Memorie* hereafter), written by an anonymous author some point during 1771–1774, offers an important clue. 'In order to pass judgement on the direction and management of the Diaconate, based on sufficient knowledge of things, and to find out essential reform measures to ensure the viability of city finances, which has been tremendously burdened by the growing cost of the Diaconate, for some years',⁵¹ the author of *Memorie* analysed the deacons' accounts data from 1761 to 1771 and, in so doing, made a crucial mistake in the calculations, leading to an inaccurate conclusion.

Memorie begins with a complaint about the accounts data, suggesting that it was incorrect, having been recorded inconsistently and in different ways. The deacons' accounts are depicted here as a 'labyrinth' where 'you must wander again and again without a guide'.⁵² Therefore, it was difficult even for an insider to investigate the situation.

The data did not show that the total number of people in the three categories of *lidmaten*, *stadsarmen* and *houwboek* grew significantly between 1761 and 1771. The author calculated the relief cost per person for these three categories and stated that the increase did not seem to be too great, considering the rise in food prices. He could not find the main cause for the growth in expenditure. The author also looked at the fourth category, *Geïndemneerdens*, or persons indemnified by letter of surety (a category included in all figures after 1770). In his analysis, the author assumes that the total cost was divided between the four categories, but neglected to amend the figure for the total number of recipients included in this fourth category. The total number of relief receivers in 1771 was therefore inaccurate, leading to a serious miscalculation. As a result, the relief cost per person in 1771 was estimated as being higher than it really was. The author concluded, therefore, that the cost of relief per person increased considerably over an eleven-year period:

50 SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2785, *Memorie nopens de administratie der Diaconie der Stad Rotterdam*, undated.

51 'Om met behoorlyke kennisse van zaken te kunnen oordeelen over de directie en huishouding der Diaconie en de volstrekt nodige hulpmiddelen tot behoud van de Financien van de Stad, welke zedert eenige Jaren op een exorbitante wyze door de aangegroeide last der Diaconie zyn bezwaart, te kunnen uitvinden', *ibidem*.

52 'men zonder wegwyzers telkens moet dwalen', *ibidem*.

And thus you must conclude that the increasing number of indemnified persons does not come with a cost to the Diaconate, but that it is the increasing expenditures for each indemnified person that has caused the Diaconate to bear far more cost than before.⁵³

Ultimately, the author came to the conclusion that the deacons were possibly breaking rules and bestowing charity too generously:

The Deacons may be bestowing alms more than adequately and conducting no proper research to see if alms recipients are really in a situation where alms must be bestowed upon them. [...] [A]lthough the Deacons always conduct research on these *stadsarmen*, they are every day forced to burden the Diaconate with whores and their children, against the rules, because humanity forbids allowing them to die.⁵⁴

These rising costs were reported, therefore, as being the main problem that needed to be addressed.

Although the formal report, delivered on 21 March 1774, provided enough detail for the mistake to be corrected, the interpretation of the author of *Memorie* remained unaltered. The report demanded that the deacons collect information thoroughly about alms recipients, in order to reduce expenditures as much as possible. It was also proclaimed that they must observe the decrees ‘stiptelyk’ (strictly) when an application for relief was granted. This proposal was quickly adopted by the city government which was in financial difficulties. As noted above, the rulebook for the household management and administration of the Diaconate, edited in 1777, contained a package of measures to ensure that information about alms recipients was always up to date. It is probable that these regulations were stipulated in the decree issued on 31 October 1774.

First, this episode clearly shows that people involved in controlling the alms system—and perhaps also the city government—shared a negative

53 ‘En men moet dus besluiten, dat niet het meerdere getal der Gealimenteerdens het bezwaar der Diaconie uitbrengt, maar dat het is de meerdere Uitgave, die aan ieder der Gealimenteerdens gedaan is, welke veroorzaakt moet hebben, dat de Diaconie zo merkelyk meerder kost, dan voor deze’, *ibidem*.

54 ‘Diaconen kunnen meerder uitdeelen dan behoorlyk is, geen onderzoek na behooren doen of de gealimenteerdens waarlyk in dien staat zyn, dat zy bedeeft moeten worden. [...] ofschoon Diaconen in het onderzoek naar deze stads armen altoos geemployeert worden, men is dagelyks gedwongen, om tegens Wet en Regul de Diaconie te belasten met hoeren en hoere kinderen omdat de menschelykheid verbied dezelve te laten creveren’, *ibidem*.

notion of the poor and poor relief. The authors of *Memorie* and of the report could not overcome their profound sense of distrust of paupers and the deacons. Interestingly, even the deacons perpetuated negative stereotypes of the poor and of poor relief:

The Deacons have the honour to inform your Honours that they [i.e. the deacons] are very sorry to see the important work of your Honours interfered with by not only this request but also another presented by a petitioner [...] who now seems to have the desire to pester and trouble the Diaconate and to be very far from contenting himself with his pay and being humble and thankful, and, concerning the charity and privileges received, tries in every way, by the authority of your Honours to compel us to accept an increase in his alms or the complete relieving of his childcare, so that he can spend his remaining days simply idly with our support.⁵⁵

Second, it is evident that the Reformed Church was unaccustomed to analysing detailed data to understand current circumstances. The Diaconate obviously did not prepare its accounts on the assumption that the data would be scrutinised later. Moreover, no financial documents made prior to the 1760s were kept in the audit office.⁵⁶ Under such circumstances, the negative notion of the poor and poor relief exerted an influence on certain people, including the authors of *Memorie* and the report. They shared the view that the poor relief system was failing as a result of violation of the regulations, believing that the poor relief system should be reformed through the strengthening of existing policies.

55 'Diaconen hebben de eer U E[dele] Gr[oot] Agtb[are] te berigten, dat het hun van harte leed doet de gewigtige occupatie van UE Gr Agtb gehindert te zien, door Req[uest] niet alleen van dezen inhoud maar gepresenteerd door Supplianten [...] die thans lust schynt te hebben Diaconen te kwellen en moeilyk te vallen, en wel verre van met zyne bezolding te vreden te zyn, en zig dankbaar en ondergeschikt te gedraagen, nopens de ontvange weldaden en voorregten, ons op alle mogelyke wyze, door het gezag van UE Gr Agtb tragt te noodsaken of tot vermeerdering zyner bedeeeling of ter geheele ontlasting van zyne kinderen, waardoor hy dan alleen overblyvende zyne dagen in ledigheid, en door ons onderhoude zoude kunnen doorbrengen', SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2784, the application of Barend Hendrik Kolmeyer on 31 August 1789.

56 SAR, OSA, inv. nr. 2785, Pro Memoria.

4 Conclusion

Historical documents from the Reformed Church Diaconate in Rotterdam provide precious clues for the practices of selecting beneficiaries for relief in the Netherlands in the late eighteenth century. Our analysis indicated that the deacons observed strict rules established on the basis of a negative notion of the poor and poor relief. This finding leads us to the following question: did the case of Rotterdam represent the general character of Dutch charitable institutions? Unfortunately, we do not have enough information on poor relief in other cities to answer this question. However, some existing studies serve as a useful reference.

About the severe attitudes with respect to unmarried mothers, illustrated in the second section, it is possible that Rotterdam was not unique. To be sure, some studies showed the generous character of Dutch poor relief for vulnerable women. In Leiden, G.P.M. Pot did not find any cases in the late eighteenth century where unmarried mothers lost alms due to their 'immorality'.⁵⁷ Aukje Zondergeld-Hamer also wrote about generous assistance of the Reformed Diaconate for widows and unmarried mothers in late eighteenth-century Weesp.⁵⁸ However, it is too early to characterise the attitude of the Rotterdam Reformed Diaconate as exceptionally severe. In preceding studies, the excluded poor fall outside the field of view.

In Leiden, many poor residents did not receive alms. The *Huiszittenhuis*, the main charitable institution in Leiden, gave alms to 8277 poor temporarily from the revenue from extraordinary collection in 1784, while the number of summer relief recipients was only 3103 in the same year; this means at least about 5000 poor did not receive alms regularly from that institution. However, Pot did not explain why these 'randarmen' were not on regular poor relief because the *Huiszittenhuis* did not record or scarcely recorded those who were rejected.⁵⁹ Similarly, Ingrid van der Vlis illustrated only two examples of rejected applications in seventeenth-century Delft, for related documents are available 'only for a very short period'.⁶⁰ Previous studies are based on information about the alms recipients, i.e. the poor whose requests were granted. On the contrary, this paper used

57 Pot, *Arm Leiden*, 185.

58 Aukje Zondergeld-Hamer, *Een kwestie van goed bestuur. Twee eeuwen armenzorg in Weesp (1590–1822)* (Hilversum 2006) 268–271.

59 'Huiszittenhuis noteerde niet of nauwelijks welke mensen werden afgewezen', Pot, *Arm Leiden*, 192.

60 Ingrid van der Vlis, *Leven in armoede. Delftse bedeeden in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 2001) 102–103, 393(note 4).

many rejected applications and spotlighted the rigid attitude of the Reformed Diaconate in Rotterdam. Thus, previous studies and this study are possibly examining opposite sides of the same coin.

However, poor-relief reforms in the eighteenth century were not necessarily based on a negative notion of poor relief. In 1735, the magistrate of Zwolle appointed a committee for the reform of the *armenkamer*, the city charitable institution, in 1735. According to their report submitted to the city, only persons who really needed it were supported, but the institution was in debt due to a growing number of relief recipients and a decrease in collection income caused by industrial stagnation.⁶¹ In the case of Rotterdam, unavailability of precise data from that time hampered the understanding of the conditions and brought about a situation where the notion of poor relief was able to exert an influence on the activities of the charitable institution. Nonetheless, it is obvious that this notion may be an indispensable factor for the study of charitable activities in the early modern Netherlands.

About the author

Yoshiyuki Onishi (1967) completed his B.A. and M.A. degrees at Osaka University, Japan. He studied residential patterns in eighteenth century Rotterdam at Wageningen University and the poor relief system in the Dutch republic under the supervision of Joke Spaans. He is now an Associate Professor in Economics at University of Toyama, Japan. He teaches European Economic History, especially Dutch social and economic history. He writes articles about orphanages in early modern Dutch cities. His research focuses on social exclusion and centralization.

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61 Hilde van Wijngaarden, *Zorg voor de kost. Armenzorg, arbeid en onderlinge hulp in Zwolle 1650–1700* (Amsterdam 2000) 78–79.

