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Rauwerdink-Nijland, E.; van den Dries, L.; Metz, J.; Verhoeff, A.P.; Wolf, J.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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The working relationship between people in marginalised situations and street outreach workers

Evelien Rauwerdink-Nijland[1,2] | Linda van den Dries[2] | Judith Metz[1,3] | Arnoud Verhoeff[4] | Judith Wolf[2]

[1]Centre for Applied Research in Social Work and Law, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

[2]Radboud University Medical Center, Radboud Institute for Health Sciences, Impuls – Netherlands Center for Social Care Research Nijmegen, Nijmegen, the Netherlands

[3]Austerlitz, the Netherlands

[4]Department of Sociology, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Correspondence
Evelien Rauwerdink-Nijland, Radboud University Medical Center, Radboud Institute for Health Science, Impuls – Netherlands Centre for Social Care Research, 6525 EZ Nijmegen, the Netherlands.
Email: evelien.rauwerdink-nijland@radboudumc.nl

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Abstract

A good working relationship between clients and professionals increases the chances of better intervention outcomes for clients. A longitudinal cohort study was carried out amongst clients who were in touch with professionals from a Dutch social street work (SSW) organisation. We used a questionnaire to examine client perspectives ($n = 332$) on the relational and goal-oriented part of the working relationship after a minimum of 8 months of contact with SSW. We furthermore examined to what extent both parts of the working relationship were influenced by client characteristics and SSW metrics. Clients were asked to reflect on the relational part and the goal-oriented part of the working relationship. Clients who only met SSW professionals in public areas perceived a weaker working relationship in both aspects. A stronger relational and goal-oriented working relationship was perceived when receiving more practical support. Clients who had been in contact with an

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SSW professional for a long period of time perceived a weaker goal-oriented working relationship. This study shows that a working relationship, with both relational and goal-oriented aspects, can be established between workers and marginalised people in their daily environment. Frequent contact and providing practical support can improve both parts of the working relationship. Please refer to the Supplementary Material section to find this article's Community and Social Impact Statement.

KEYWORDS
goal-oriented working relationship, marginalised people, practical support, relational working relationship, street-outreach work

1 | INTRODUCTION

1.1 | Social street work

Social street work (SSW) is a professional street outreach method aimed at engaging with and supporting marginalised people (Rauwerdink-Nijland & Metz, 2022). SSW professionals (herein referred to as workers) reach out to clients, frequently marginalised people, to tackle the obstacles in their lives and help them access support services (Andersson, 2013; Hill & Laredo, 2019). Marginalisation, also referred to as social exclusion, is a multilevel, structural phenomenon in society (Vrooman & Hoff, 2021; Granger, 2013), resulting in an accumulation of disadvantages at the individual level (Granger, 2013; Kromhout et al., 2020). In the Netherlands, ~20% of citizens are considered marginalised and have difficulties holding their own, and are completely dependent on local social services ('S Jongers & Kruiter, 2023; Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2021). Amongst them, there are people who face multiple, complex and strongly intertwined problems, from mental health issues (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2023) to intellectual disabilities (van Straaten, 2016). A majority experience family conflicts, relies solely on peer support or has no social network at all (Rauwerdink-Nijland et al., 2023; Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2023). Moreover, many are unemployed (Jungmann et al., 2020), live in poverty, have financial problems and debts and lack housing or stable living situations (Nationaal Plan Daklooshеid: Iedereen een thuis, 2023–2030; Kruiter & Klokman, 2016). People who struggle with housing issues, debts or unemployment experience chronic stress, which affects peoples'' functioning in life, for example, their ability to participate in society (Jungmann et al., 2020).

SSW is a specific social work method focusing on the so-called hard-to-reach clients. SSW is characterised by an open-ended social pedagogical approach, which implies that a worker's interventions are grounded in a goal-oriented, process-based, moral and dialogic approach instead of a fixed step-by-step plan (Metz, 2016). Typically, workers (with a bachelor's degree or vocational education in social work) have contact with 40–50 clients and spend at least 50% of their working time in public areas like streets and parks to reach out to these clients (Hill & Laredo, 2019; Rauwerdink-Nijland & Metz, 2022).

Workers try to make contact, generate trust and establish rapport to encourage clients to open up to the presence and input of SSW and maintain contact (Andersson, 2013; Hill & Laredo, 2019). This contact between workers and clients should be considered a goal in itself (Rauwerdink-Nijland & Metz, 2022). Once clients accept the presence and input, workers try to officially commence SSW aid to help accomplish a client's life goals (Hill & Laredo, 2019; Rauwerdink-Nijland & Metz, 2022). Workers try to provide practical support, for example by helping

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clients navigate the system and accompanying them to appointments with services, which motivates clients to accept support and connects them to society (Andersson, 2013; Hill & Laredo, 2019). A working relationship with marginalised people is a necessary condition for linking clients to services and resources, yet it is also very difficult to achieve (Kruiter & Klokman, 2016; Redko et al., 2006). This is because people at the fringes of society face complex and strongly intertwined problems (Kruiter & Klokman, 2016), frequently rooted in adverse childhood experiences (Redko et al., 2006). Consequently, marginalised people often distrust (professionals of) social services, for example, because of prior negative experiences (Reynaert et al., 2021) or because they are (too) ashamed to ask for support (Trappenburg, 2018), which could negatively affect establishing the working relationship.

1.2 | The working relationship

The working relationship between professionals and their clients, also known as the therapeutic alliance or working alliance, is an active collaboration in which both professionals and their clients develop trust in each other, bond together and work from shared goals towards desired outcomes (Bordin, 1979; Castonguay et al., 2006; Graybeal, 2007). The working relationship consists of a relational part which covers the development of a bond between client and worker and a goal-oriented part which covers the agreement about the process towards accomplishing client goals (Bordin, 1979; Crits-Christoph et al., 2006). Both parts should be in balance to refer to the working relationship as positive. Research has shown that in social work, a positive working relationship between professionals and clients increases the chances for better client outcomes (Chen & Ogden, 2012; de Greef et al., 2018; Kidd et al., 2017).

In this study the focus is on establishing a positive working relationship between workers and marginalised people, which is difficult to develop (Bogo, 2006; Lee et al., 2018) as they frequently feel overlooked in society (Baart, 2011; Van Arum et al., 2020) and distrust professionals and local governments because of prior negative experiences (Andersson, 2013; Reynaert et al., 2021).

The working relationship finds theoretical support in the social determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT is a personal development and self-motivated behaviour change theory, which includes aspects of the working relationship, for example, trust, empathy and supporting clients to formulate their own goals. In this study, we focus on the acting of workers (Markland et al., 2005).

To successfully develop a working relationship, reaching out and maintaining contact is essential (Erickson & Page, 1998; Kolar et al., 2015; Morse et al., 1996). This process revolves around long-term engagement and being present where they are (Morse et al., 1996). In SSW, in addition to the working relationship, providing practical support to marginalised people is important as it improves clients living conditions and their connection with society. Providing practical support enhances marginalised peoples' societal participation and reduces their levels of stress (Rauwerdink-Nijland et al., submitted). Practical support consists of, for example, assisting clients in obtaining the necessary information, enhancing their awareness of services, practice in dealing with difficult situations, like telephone calls with creditors or accompanying them to appointments with services. Providing appropriate support is necessary because clients often lack the skills to navigate the complex social support system and/or do not have access to the necessary devices (Kruiter & Klokman, 2016; Reynaert et al., 2021; van der Lans et al., 2003).

In the Netherlands and elsewhere research on the perceived working relationship between marginalised people and professionals in street outreach services is scarce (Rauwerdink-Nijland et al., submitted; Andersson, 2013). However, in previous analyses of our sample, we found the effort of workers in SSW developed a positive relationship with marginalised people (Rauwerdink-Nijland et al., submitted). In addition, we found that an improved working relationship was associated with improved client outcomes, such as more self-esteem and an increased ability to discover their own strengths, corroborating the importance of a positive working relationship (Rauwerdink-Nijland et al., submitted). In the current study, we wanted to gain more insight into how marginalised people perceive the working relationship with workers, both for the relational and goal-oriented part.

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The urgency of this research is clear, given the unintended negative consequences of the Dutch social support system enforcing short-term support and expecting concrete and measurable results (Tier et al., 2022; Hofs, 2017). The system tends to overlook the complexity of the problems of SSW clients, the time and effort needed to establish and sustain a relationship with marginalised people (Bogo, 2006), and the underlying structural factors influencing both their living circumstances and how the service is delivered (Tier et al., 2022; Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2018).

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do clients perceive the relational and goal-oriented part of the working relationship with workers after a minimum of 8 months of SSW contact?
2. To what extent are both parts of the working relationship influenced by client characteristics (gender and age), the metrics of SSW (phase, length and frequency of contact) and the provided practical support?

2 | METHODS STUDY DESIGN AND SETTING

2.1 | Part of a longitudinal study

Between September 2017 and September 2018, a longitudinal cohort study was carried out amongst clients who were in touch with workers of a Dutch SSW organisation covering the northwest conurbation of the Netherlands, located in seven municipalities (Amsterdam, Haarlem, Velsen, Velsenbroek, Hillegom, Heemstede and Woerden). In this study, 927 participants were followed up twice over 4-month intervals (total follow-up 8 months). Participants varied in the length of contact with SSW at baseline: (a) contact between 0 and 6 months; (b) contact between 7 months and 2 years and (c) contact for 3 years or longer.

Of the total group of 927 participants, 28% ($n = 256$) completed all three questionnaires, 32% ($n = 293$) completed two questionnaires (T0 and T1 or T0 and T2) and 40.8% ($n = 378$) completed only the first questionnaire. (For response rates at follow-up see Figure S1 in the supplementary materials.) Non-completion was labelled as completing only one or two of the three questionnaires. Several reasons were given for non-completion, like loss of contact with the client or (temporary) positive outflow of the client (see Table S1 in supplementary materials).

This study was conducted by Research Group Youth Spot (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences). The Medical Review Ethics Committee region Arnhem-Nijmegen declared that the study was exempt from formal review (registration number 2018/4450).

2.2 | Focus of the current study

In this study, we used data from the 332 clients who participated in the third and last wave that was conducted between June 2018 and September 2018. We chose this third wave as we wanted all clients to have had the opportunity to be in touch with and develop a working relationship with the workers for at least 8 months.

3 | PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited through 90 workers from 15 SSW teams in the Netherlands. Clients were eligible to participate in the study if they: (a) could complete the questionnaire, conceivably with support and (b) were aged ≥12. The recruitment of participants for the baseline (first wave) took place between September 2017 and December 2017.

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Clients were on average 27.7 years old (SD = 13.74), most clients were males ($n = 216$; 65.1%), reported a bicultural cultural background ($n = 211$; 63.6%) and reported an intermediate educational level ($n = 161$; 48.5%) (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Demographic characteristics of clients and characteristics of their contact with workers ($n = 332$).

Client characteristics		
	M = 27.7	
	SD = 13.74	
Age	***n***	**%**
Gender		
Female	116	34.9
Male	216	65.1
Cultural background		
Only Dutch	86	25.9
Bicultural Dutch and other	211	63.6
Non-Dutch	35	10.5
Educational level		
Very low	33	9.9
Low	112	33.7
Intermediate	161	48.5
High	26	7.8
SSW metrics		
Phase of contact		
Contact in public areas	216	65.1
Trajectory	116	34.9
Length of contact		
Short (8–14 months)	138	41.6
Intermediate (15–43 months)	96	28.9
Long (44 months or longer)	98	29.5
Frequency of contact		
Less than once a month	77	23.2
Once a month	54	16.3
Every 2 weeks	73	22.0
Once a week	64	19.3
More than once a week	64	19.3
Practical support		
Never	33	9.9
Almost never	45	13.6
Occasionally	106	31.9
Often	117	35.2
Always	31	3.9

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4 | PROCEDURES

Our study protocol and questionnaire were developed in collaboration with 14 workers and 6 clients. We organised several focus groups and used the input of workers and clients to fine-tune the questionnaire and study protocol, aligning them with SSW practice. All 90 workers participated in a 3-h training session to learn the study protocol. They also received a field guide with important instructions, for example, eligibility criteria and informed consent. During the focus groups the unequal power balance between workers and clients was discussed and all workers were instructed to assure their clients that if they declined participation, this would not influence the support they received. When asking clients to participate, workers verbally described the study to them, gave them an information letter about the study, and encouraged clients to participate in the study. All participants gave written consent before filling in the questionnaire. If the participant was aged <16, the worker also described the study to the primary caregivers and asked for their consent.

Participants completed the questionnaire: (a) online, on their own device or their worker's device (if participants used their own device, they received Mega Bytes to access the Internet) or (b) by filling in a hardcopy version of the questionnaire. To reduce response bias, the workers were not physically present as the clients filled in the questionnaire. Two workers mentioned that they were present when clients filled in the questionnaire because the client used the worker's device out on the streets and did not know how to use this independently.

Participants were able to ask questions when filling in the questionnaire, preferably to a worker other than their own worker. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Participants received €5 for a completed questionnaire. Clients were able to choose how and when they received the money or whether they preferred products, like groceries. They could also save the money for a bigger reward, for example, going to the movies or dinner, after completing 2 or 3 questionnaires.

5 | MEASUREMENTS

5.1 | Sociodemographic characteristics

Age, gender, cultural background and educational level were obtained at baseline.Clients filled in their age. The cultural background was assessed by self-identification: (a) native Dutch background, (b) bicultural background (combined Dutch and other) and (c) non-Dutch background. Educational level was categorised into (a) very low (did not complete or only completed primary school), (b) low (prevocational secondary education and lower secondary vocational education), (c) intermediate (higher secondary vocational education, senior general secondary education and preuniversity) and (d) high (higher professional education and university education).

5.2 | SSW metrics

Which phase of SSW contact, frequency of contact with SSW and practical support were assessed at the second follow-up measurement. Length of contact was assessed at baseline.

Regarding the SSW phase, clients were asked if they (a) were only in contact with SSW in public areas or (b) received regular support through SSW contact, including the intake phase. Frequency of contact was categorised into (a) less than once a month, (b) once a month, (c) every 2 weeks, (d) once a week and (e) more than once a week. Practical support was assessed with 3 items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'never' to 'very often': 'The worker assisted me in finding the information that I needed', 'The worker arranged things for me, like an appointment or financial support' and 'The worker accompanied me to an appointment'. Higher scores indicated more practical support from worker to client. For all scales used, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis

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(principal component analysis and direct oblimin rotation) on the client responses to determine the validity of the scales used at the first measurement. For 'practical support', the factor analyses showed a valid scale at baseline (74% explained variance and $\alpha = .82$).

Length of contact was assessed at baseline and was categorised into (a) contact between 0 and 6 months, (b) contact between 7 months and 2 years and (c) contact for 3 years or longer. Eight months later, at the second follow-up measurement, we therefore used the categories (a) 'short' which indicated contact with SSW between 8 and 14 months, (b) 'intermediate' which indicated contact with SSW between 15 months and 3 years and 7 months and (c) 'long' which indicated contact for 3 years and 8 months or longer.

5.3 | Working relationship

The working relationship was assessed using two subscales designed for this study based on relevant literature (Baart, 2011; Bordin, 1979; Chen & Ogden, 2012; Wolf, 2016).

5.3.1 | Relational working relationship

The subscale 'relational working relationship' consisted of 20 items and was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Higher scores indicated a stronger perceived relational working relationship. Items were, for example, 'The worker is there for me when I need it', 'The worker backs me up when I need it', 'The worker acknowledges how I feel' and 'The worker takes what I say or do seriously' (see Table S2 in supplementary materials for all items). For the relational working relationship, the factor analyses showed a valid scale at baseline (66% explained variance and $\alpha = .97$).

5.3.2 | Goal-oriented working relationship

The subscale 'goal-oriented working relationship' consisted of 4 items and was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'never' to 'always'. Higher scores indicate a stronger perceived goal-oriented working relationship. Items were 'The worker and I set goals together', 'The worker and I develop a strategy together', 'The worker and I discuss the progress of our strategy together' and 'I know what tasks I have to do and which tasks the worker does'. For the goal-oriented working relationship, the factor analyses showed a valid scale at baseline (81% explained variance and $\alpha = .92$).

6 | DATA ANALYSES

Data was analysed using SPSS PASW Statistics 25. Descriptive statistics were applied to describe socio-demographic client characteristics and SSW metrics with workers. Descriptive statistics of both the relational and goal-oriented working relationship are given in Table 1. To examine the associations between client characteristics, SSW metrics and the perceived working relationship we used multiple linear regression analyses. We used the exploratory stepwise backward procedure to prevent the exclusion of potentially important variables (Bursac et al., 2008; Field, 2005).

For the multiple linear regressions, we used a cut-off for the significance of $p < .10$, as we aimed to identify potential associations instead of testing hypotheses (Ranganathan et al., 2017). Multicollinearity amongst the associated variables for both regressions was examined with the variance inflation factor (VIF) and indicated by a VIF value >5.

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7 | RESULTS

7.1 | Metrics of SSW

Of all clients, 65.1% ($n = 216$) reported being in contact with workers in public areas, 41.6% ($n = 138$) reported being in contact with workers for a short period of time, 19.3% ($n = 64$) reported being in contact with workers once a week and 19.3% ($n = 64$) reported contact with workers more than once a week. Furthermore, 35.2% ($n = 117$) reported receiving practical support from workers often and ~9% ($n = 31$) reported receiving practical support always (Table 1).

7.2 | The working relationship

7.2.1 | Relational part of the working relationship

Generally, clients were largely positive about the relational working relationship with workers (M = 4.18, SD = .63). Additional analyses showed that the variables gender, phase of contact, frequency of contact and practical support were associated with the relational working relationship (F [8, 323] = 9.222, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .169$, $R^2_{adjusted} = .166$). Here, positive associations were found amongst female clients, clients who were in contact with SSW workers at least once a month or more (76.9%; $n = 255$), and clients who received practical support often or always (44.8%, $n = 148$). These clients were more likely to perceive a stronger relational working relationship with workers (Table 2). A negative association was found for clients who met workers only in public areas (65.1%; $n = 216$). These clients were more likely to perceive a weaker relational working relationship (Table 2).

7.2.2 | Goal-oriented part of the working relationship

In general, clients were mostly neutral about the goal-oriented working relationship with workers (M = 3.12, SD = 1.20). Additional analyses showed that the variables phase of contact, length of contact, frequency of contact and practical support were associated with the goal-oriented working relationship (F [9, 3,122] = 23.409, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .396$, $R^2_{adjusted} = .379$). Here, positive associations were found amongst clients who were in contact with SSW workers at least once a month (76.9%; $n = 255$), and clients who received practical support occasionally or more often (62.9%; $n = 254$), showing these clients were more likely to perceive a stronger goal-oriented working relationship with workers (Table 3). Negative associations were found amongst clients who were in contact with SSW workers only in public areas (65.1%; $n = 216$), and clients who were in contact with workers for a long period (29.5%; $n = 98$): the latter were more likely to perceive a weaker goal-oriented working relationship (Table 3).

8 | DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine, from the perspective of clients, the working relationship in SSW after a minimum of 8 months of contact with a worker and whether client characteristics (gender and age) and SSW metrics (phase, length, frequency of contact and practical support) were associated with the perceived relational and goal-oriented parts of the working relationship.

The results on the SSW metrics (65% were not yet ready for engaged help, 58% were still in contact after 15 months and 45% still needed practical support after a period of 8 months) may be an indication of the high levels of marginalisation amongst clients. This is in line with the observation that much time and effort are needed for

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TABLE 2 Results of stepwise backward multiple linear regression to explore relationships between client characteristics and the relational working relationship.

				95% CI		
Model/variable	R^2	**Beta**	***t***	***LL***	***UL***	***p***
Relational working relationship						
Model 1	.192					
Age		−.003	−.059	−.01	.01	.953
Gender						
Male		Ref				
Female		.159	3.061	.07	.34	.002***
Phase of SSW						
Public areas		−.123	−2.128	−.31	−.01	.034**
Trajectory		Ref				
Length of contact						
Short		Ref				
Intermediate		.005	.081	−.15	.16	.935
Long		.060	.975	−.08	.25	.330
Frequency of contact						
<Once a month		Ref				
Once a month		.103	1.679	−.03	.38	.094*
Every 2 weeks		.201	3.056	.11	.50	.002***
Once a week		.150	2.364	.04	.44	.019**
>Once a week		.184	2.826	.09	.50	.005***
Practical support						
Never		Ref				
Almost never		.017	.320	[−.33, .46]	.46	.749
Occasionally		−.049	−.933	[−.27, .01]	.01	.352
Often		.076	1.410	−.05	.31	.160
Always		.247	4.711	.40	.96	<.001
Final model	.186					
Gender						
Female		.146	2.878	.06	.32	.004***
Phase of SSW						
Public areas		−.111	−2.088	−.28	−.01	.038**
Frequency						
Once a month		.102	1.695	−.03	.37	.091*
Every 2 weeks		.197	3.083	.11	.48	.002***
Once a week		.146	2.333	−.04	.43	.093*
>Once a week		.196	3.102	.11	.51	.002***
Practical support						
Often		.087	1.653	−.03	.33	.099*
Always		.255	4.946	.42	.98	<.001****

Note: All the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for the associations were < 5, indicating that there was no multicollinearity in the model.

Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; *LL*, lower limit; Ref, reference group; *UL*, upper limit.

*Indicates potential association ($p < .10$); **Indicates association ($p < .05$); ***Indicates association ($p < .01$); ****Indicates association ($p < .001$).

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clients to become receptive to the attempts of workers to engage (Rauwerdink-Nijland et al., submitted; Andersson, 2013; Redko et al., 2006).

8.1 | The perceived relational part of the working relationship

Clients perceive a stronger relational working relationship with workers after having been in touch with them for at least 8 months. By establishing and sustaining contact, an important part of the relational working relationship, workers seem to be able to engage with clients and function as a bridge towards society. This is important as SSW clients frequently feel overlooked in society (Andersson, 2013; Baart, 2011) and lack a social network (Rauwerdink-Nijland et al., submitted). Our results also showed that female clients perceive a stronger relational working relationship with workers compared to male clients. This may be due to the higher safety risks females face on the streets (Reep et al., 2020), leading to a larger need for a trustful relationship with workers as a kind of refuge (Boomkens et al., 2019), as a means to feeling confident enough to share their problems with workers (Rauwerdink-Nijland et al., submitted; Fyfe et al., 2018; Abdallah et al., 2016; Leadbeater et al., 1995).

Furthermore, clients who had at least monthly contact perceived a stronger relational working relationship than clients who contacted less than once a month. This indicates that frequent contact might be necessary to establish and sustain a relationship in which clients feel respected and taken seriously, experience that workers understand their situation and believe workers will back them up and are available when needed.

Additionally, clients who often or always receive practical support were more likely to perceive a stronger relational working relationship. The higher amount of practical support may help clients believe that workers truly want to support them in improving their living conditions. In addition, they may also experience more positive changes due to the high amount of practical support, which increases their hopes for a better future (Greenberg et al., 1993; Wolf, 2016) and increases their trust in workers and thus contributes to a stronger relational working relationship.

Finally, results showed that clients who only met workers in public areas were more likely to perceive a weaker relational working relationship. This may be because the lives of these clients are often about sheer survival, a primary concern that leaves them no mental space to build a relationship. Moreover, these clients may be more distrustful of others, including professionals, and are more reluctant to engage with workers (Kolar et al., 2015; Morse et al., 1996; Redko et al., 2006; Reynaert et al., 2021), as opposed to client already engaged and who has therefore experienced and opened up to the unconditional support from a worker and (with the help of SSW) are often off the streets and sleeping in shelters. This indicates that workers must first invest heavily in the relationship with clients to gain trust (Sanches et al., 2019; Wilkens & den Hollander, 2019).

8.2 | Perceptions of the goal-oriented part of the working relationship

Clients were neutral with respect to the goal-oriented working relationship with workers. This might be due to the cautiousness of marginalised people in accepting support and envisaging that changes in their lives are possible (Andersson, 2013; Kolar et al., 2015). Setting and working on goals most likely confronts them with the challenges they have frequently avoided dealing with, sometimes for several years (Andersson, 2013; Morse et al., 1996; Redko et al., 2006), making them anxious about working on goal realisation. Their anxiety may also be fuelled by the 'why try effect', due to previous negative experiences and failures, which discourages them from pursuing personal goals as they do not expect to succeed (Corrigan et al., 2009; Sanches et al., 2019).

The finding that clients were neutral with respect to the goal-oriented working relationship may also indicate that workers focus more on the relational aspects of the working relationship than on goal realisation. This may be especially the case for clients who were in contact with SSW only in public areas. These clients perceived a weaker goal-oriented working relationship. This is in line with previous research showing that workers must first invest

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TABLE 3 Results of stepwise backward multiple linear regression to explore relationships between client characteristics and goal-oriented working relationship.

Model/variable	R^2	Beta	*t*	95% CI		*p*
				LL	*UL*	
Goal-oriented working relationship						
Model 1	.401					
Age		−.013	−.246	−.01	.01	.806
Gender						
Male		Ref				
Female		.055	1.228	−.08	.36	.220
Phase of SSW						
Public areas		−.151	−3.023	−.63	−.13	.003***
Trajectory		Ref				
Length of contact						
Short		Ref				
Intermediate		−.020	−.403	−.31	.20	.687
Long		−.089	−1.692	−.51	.04	.092*
Frequency of contact						
<Once a month		Ref				
Once a month		.262	4.976	.51	1.19	<.001****
Every 2 weeks		.323	5.718	.61	1.26	<.001****
Once a week		.407	7.446	.91	1.56	<.001****
>Once a week		.330	5.982	.67	1.16	<.001****
Practical support						
Never		Ref				
Almost never		−.045	−.998	−.98	.32	.319
Occasionally		.125	2.780	.13	.74	.006***
Often		.233	4.994	.47	1.07	<.001****
Always		.263	5.832	.92	1.86	<.001****
Final model	.396					
Phase of SSW						
Public areas		−.154	−3.252	−.62	−.15	.001***
Length of contact						
>3 years and 8 months		−.097	−2.131	−.49	−.02	.034**
Frequency						
Once a month		.270	−5.183	.54	1.21	<.001****
Every 2 weeks		.330	5.999	.64	1.27	<.001****
Once a week		.413	7.631	.93	1.58	<.001****
>Once a week		.335	6.084	.69	1.35	<.001****
Practical support						
Occasionally		.130	2.918	.15	.75	.004***
Often		.237	5.151	.48	1.08	<.001****
Always		.270	6.048	.97	1.90	<.001****

Note: All of the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for the associations were < 5, indicating that there was no multicollinearity in the model.
Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; *LL*, lower limit; Ref, reference group; *UL*, upper limit.
*Indicates potential association ($p < .10$); **Indicates association ($p < .05$); ***Indicates association ($p < .01$); ****Indicates association ($p < .001$).

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heavily in the relationship to gain trust to work towards goals more systematically (Baart, 2011; Rauwerdink-Nijland & Metz, 2022; Sanches et al., 2019; Wilkens & den Hollander, 2019). In addition, working towards specific goals may be very challenging for clients who are only in contact with workers in public areas, especially given that the 'why try effect' maybe even more pronounced in this subgroup, in combination with the mismatch between client needs and the available support and recovery resources or the experienced difficulty in accessing these. As is the case for the relational part of the working relationship, the goal-oriented part seems to thrive with a higher frequency of contact (more than once a month) and more practical support. Both seem to add to the awareness and need for shared decision-making and the setting and realisation of goals (Drake et al., 2010; Sanches et al., 2019). Clients who were in contact with workers for a long period of time were more likely to perceive a weaker goal-oriented working relationship. Perhaps these clients over time may have lost all hope and perspective and therein the willpower to work towards improving their living conditions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It is the task of workers to sustain hope and in small steps keep working on goals that are meaningful for clients (Pijnenburg, 2010; Wolf, 2016).

The results of this study indicate that the goal-oriented part of the working relationship may not get sufficient attention, also given its importance for generating hope, well-being and better living conditions. Reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the goal-oriented part of the working relationship in SSW is needed to enhance this critical part of the working relationship, more so because this goal-oriented part appears to be crucial for a productive working relationship (Drake et al., 2010; Sanches et al., 2019; Wolf, 2016).

9 | STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This study has several strengths. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that focused on marginalised people's perspectives of the working relationship in street outreach work. A second strength is the relatively large sample size of this study ($n = 332$). A third strength is the questionnaire developed in close collaboration with workers and clients, which ensured a questionnaire attuned to real-life practice and to the daily lives and abilities of clients. Fourthly, this study was carried out amongst 15 teams located in seven municipalities in the northwest of the Netherlands, meaning that our findings can be generalised to both medium-sized and larger cities. Finally, this study used a questionnaire in which clients reported from their perspective about their working relationship. This is important as a client's own perspective has been found to be a stronger predictor of outcomes than a worker's perspective (Luborsky, 1994; Sanches et al., 2019).

Several limitations must be considered when interpreting the results. First, the analyses in this study do not allow inferences of causality. Second, this study focused on marginalised people who were in contact with an SSW organisation in the Netherlands, which hampers the generalisation of our results to other countries. It would be interesting to examine whether the study findings also apply to SSW in other welfare states. Finally, future research should include both the client's and the worker's perspectives on the working relationship.

10 | CONCLUSION

This study examined and confirmed that it is possible to establish and retain a working relationship between marginalised people and workers. The results showed workers were able to establish positive relational working relationships, in which frequent contact is beneficial. To realise a positive goal-oriented working relationship, workers need to recognise the importance of continuing to set goals (and celebrating achievements), especially in long-term contact. Finally, providing practical support can improve the working relationship, both the relational and goal-oriented parts.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Evelien Rauwerdink-Nijland https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3221-7840

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