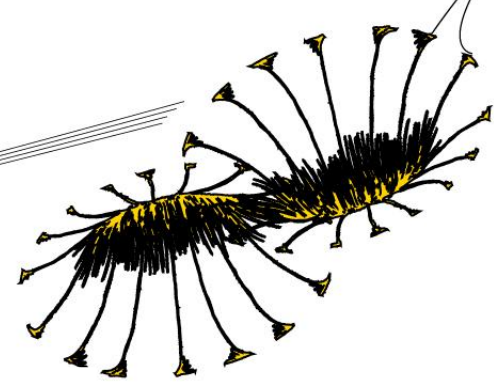




ONLINE LEGAL ADVICE AND CONFLICT SUPPORT: A DUTCH EXPERIENCE



Esmée A. Bickel, BSc
Marian A. J. van Dijk, MSc
Prof. dr. Ellen Giebels

Department Psychology of Conflict, Risk & Safety
University of Twente
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UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

SUMMARY

In this report we present the first results of a research project on online interventions in legal conflicts. First of all, this report provides an evaluation of the Dutch website Rechtwijzer.nl. Rechtwijzer.nl offers legal aid and assists parties in solving legal conflicts. We also looked at the conflicts and conflict processes of both conflict parties who did and those who did not use Rechtwijzer. We took a longitudinal approach, which enabled us to examine the developments of legal conflicts as well as short and long-term effects of Rechtwijzer.nl. We looked at divorce conflicts and consumer conflicts. By answering digital questionnaires, 1553 respondents (467 respondents going through a divorce and 1086 respondents dealing with a consumer conflict) participated in the research.

Rechtwijzer visitors gave an overall positive evaluation of the website. They gave the website a very positive grade (7.51 for divorces and 7.29 for consumer conflicts) and were inclined to recommend the website to others. We also analysed who the visitors of Rechtwijzer were, and aimed to give an overview of their conflicts.

Rechtwijzer visitors were relatively in the beginning of their process, indicating that Rechtwijzer might be especially useful for orienting on, and gaining information about, the conflict process. The reported increase in the amount of communication between conflict parties in a divorce after the Rechtwijzer visit could possibly point to a role for Rechtwijzer as a starting point for engaging in negotiations towards a divorce agreement with the other party.

Our results also showed that Rechtwijzer visitors dealt with very complex conflicts, involving relatively high stakes, which were characterized by high levels of conflict stress and escalation.

Divorce conflicts for which advice was sought on Rechtwijzer.nl, were characterized by high levels of dependence asymmetry. Respondents, especially women, felt more dependent on their (ex-)partner than vice versa. Many respondents going through a divorce had additional concerns, such as financial concerns about serious debts or an impending decline in income.

Consumer conflicts for which advice was sought on Rechtwijzer.nl generally involved large amounts of money. Moreover, the majority of these respondents did not have legal expenses insurance. This underlines the importance of costless or relatively low-priced information resources and aid bodies, such as Rechtwijzer.

We found no clear evidence for an effect of Rechtwijzer on escalation or stress in the short term. Although we did not see a difference in self-efficacy scores before and after the use of Rechtwijzer, Rechtwijzer users did report that they felt more able to solve issues related to their divorce after using Rechtwijzer. These results suggest a short term effect of Rechtwijzer on self-efficacy.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In this report we present the first results of a research project on online interventions in legal conflicts¹. Specifically, we focus on people who have visited the Dutch website Rechtwijzer.nl (translated as 'signpost to justice', 'roadmap to justice' or 'conflict resolution guide'), and compare them to people with similar conflicts who did not visit the website. The version of Rechtwijzer.nl tested in this report, was launched in October of 2012. It was designed by the Legal Aid Board in cooperation with the University of Tilburg and the Justice Innovation Lab of the The Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law. The Legal Aid board is an organisation carrying out government tasks related to legal aid.

The Legal Aid Board developed Rechtwijzer to improve access to justice and legal information. Its primary goal is to encourage self-reliance by improving control over the conflict process and understanding of own and the other party's positions and motivations in the conflict. It is designed to assist conflict parties in solving legal conflicts on their own where possible, and finding the right kind of help where needed. Visitors to the website are recommended to first prepare themselves by reflecting on the conflict, their goals, and the goals of the other party, and are then encouraged to try to solve the conflict with the other party. Rechtwijzer.nl provides information, tools, links to other websites and personal advice. Links and information on professional third parties only follow in the last step². Recent reports have named Rechtwijzer.nl as one of the frontrunners in the digital delivery of legal aid (Online Dispute Resolution Advisory Group, 2015; Smith & Paterson, 2014).

In this research project we focus on participants' experiences and reactions over a longer period of time. Doing so enables us to follow people through the process of legal conflict development, and – as such – address both the short-term and long-term effects of Rechtwijzer.nl. In conjunction with the emphasis chosen by the Legal Aid Board, we include two distinct and frequently occurring types of legal conflicts, divorce and consumer conflicts. Divorce is an important type of conflict Rechtwijzer helps with. Please note that, throughout this report, the term divorcing will not only refer to people ending a marriage or registered partnership, but also to people ending cohabitation, whether that is with or without a cohabitation agreement.

The second type of conflict we look into are consumer conflicts. These conflicts are about purchased products or services that are damaged, incomplete or do not live up to the consumer's expectations. The malfunctioning of these products can lead to a consumer conflict when the vendor does not instantly meet the consumer's wishes. It is interesting to look at both types of conflicts since they are very distinct and involve different stakes and different relations between parties.

¹ We would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions and comments of dr. Sven Zebel, as well as the valuable contribution of Arjuna Snoep.

² For more information see: http://www.rvr.org/binaries/about-rvr/brochure-legalaid_juni2013_webversie.pdf

Visitors to Rechtwijzer.nl first choose their conflict type (separation/divorce, consumer conflicts, government, rental housing, or termination of employment). They are then asked a number of questions. These questions can be factual, or can be set up to incite reflection on the conflict situation or relationship between the parties. For example, in a divorce conflict, the website asks factual questions concerning the cohabitation agreement and the number of under aged children, and asks whether both parties are employed, and how much support they expect from their social networks. In consumer conflicts, Rechtwijzer.nl asks whether visitors have legal expenses insurance.

Rechtwijzer.nl also asks questions that aim to incite self-reflection and reflection on the conflict process. It asks whether visitors generally feel capable of resolving problems themselves or whether they prefer help. In divorce conflicts, visitors are asked to reflect on their and their (ex-)partner's cooperative stances and possible consequences of the divorce. In consumer conflicts, visitors are presented with questions that help them do a cost benefit analysis of the conflict and possible steps towards claiming their rights. They are asked to reflect on how much the conflict issue is worth financially as well as how important it is to them, how much they have already spent in trying to reach a solution to the conflict, and how much more they are willing to spend. This is then compared to the costs of possible steps they can take towards conflict resolution or claiming their consumer rights. In this study, we will also be able to analyse Rechtwijzer visitors' answers to these reflective questions. Participants in the control group did not answer these questions as they were part of the total intervention of Rechtwijzer.nl.

In what follows, we will first discuss the user evaluation of Rechtwijzer.nl. Naturally a positive user experience is a pre-requisite to reaching Rechtwijzer's goals of providing low threshold information aimed at giving conflict parties the tools to solve conflicts, where possible without the help of professionals, and in as constructive a fashion as possible.

Next, we will look at the conflicts and conflict processes of conflict parties who did and did not use Rechtwijzer. As a starting point for analysing these conflicts, we use a conceptual framework, the 7-i-model (Giebels & Euwema, 2010), which will be discussed more thoroughly in the next paragraph.

1.1 Analysing conflicts: the 7-i-model

The 7-i-model (Giebels & Euwema, 2010) offers a structured approach to mapping conflicts and disentangling the different elements. First, it distinguishes between elements of the primary process: the parties and their interdependency, the issues at stake, the parties (behavioural) interaction, and the final outcomes. Then, the model takes into account the context in terms of institutions and (outside) interventions (see Figure 1). Based on this model, we will look at legal conflicts from two perspectives. The first, a practical perspective, includes analysing which type of professional third parties are involved in the conflict and which type of third part help respondents need. The second perspective, a psychological perspective, involves analysing needs, perspectives, experiences and interactions of conflict parties that might be associated with their legal aid needs.

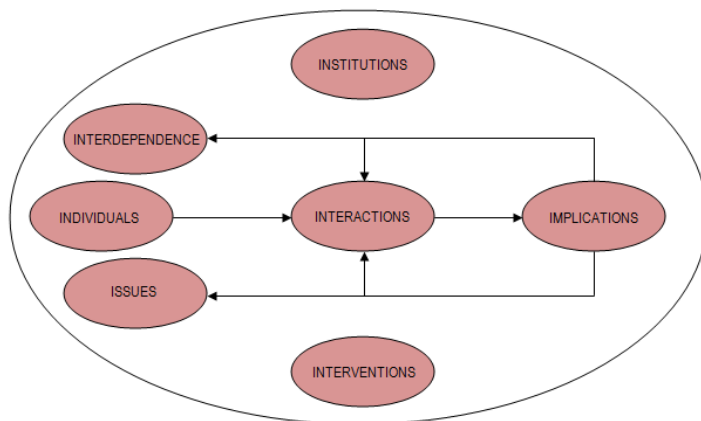


Figure 1. 7-i-model

The 7-i-model poses seven core questions, which facilitate a proper diagnosis of conflicts (Giebels & Euwema, 2010; see Table 1). Table 1 also gives an overview of the constructs that will be discussed.

Core questions		Divorce	Consumer conflict
Individuals	Who are the conflict parties?	Knowledge about divorce procedures Self-efficacy	Knowledge about consumer conflicts Self-efficacy
Interdependence	What relationship do the parties have?	Initiative Dependence asymmetry	Conflict ended or ongoing Legal expenses insurance Certainty about being right
Issues	What is the conflict about?	Additional concerns	Type of product Financial stakes Efforts Importance of a solution
Institutions	In what context does the conflict take place?	Social support	Social support
Interventions	Which third parties are involved?	Information gathering Use of third parties Need for a third-party check Needs for help	Use of third parties Need for a legal professional Needs for help
Interactions	How do people (re)act?	Communication with (ex-)partner Steps taken	Communication with vendor Steps taken

Implications	What are the final outcomes?	Satisfaction Level of stress Level of escalation	Satisfaction Level of stress Level of escalation
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Table 1. *Core questions 7-i-model and corresponding constructs*

1.2 Constructs

Each core question of the 7-i-model will be assessed using several constructs (see Table 1). This section gives an overview and theoretical explanation of the constructs that will be discussed.

Individuals

The first core question of the 7-i-model concerns the conflict parties. We will focus on two characteristics of the respondents that might influence the conflict process. The level of knowledge about conflict procedures possibly influences the way parties will handle their conflict. Moreover, a difference in knowledge between two conflict parties might imply a difference in power, which could in turn affect conflict behaviour (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Greer & Bendersky, 2013). Therefore, we will focus on both absolute level of knowledge and relative level of knowledge. Another characteristic of the conflict parties is self-efficacy (Heppner & Petersen, 1982). Self-efficacy measures the degree to which people feel able to complete tasks or reach certain goals and is an important concept in legal aid since more and more conflict parties are being asked to handle their own conflicts. For them to succeed at this, they need the tools and information to handle the conflict, as well as the confidence that they will be able to succeed in solving the conflict without or with little third party involvement.

Interdependence

A second important factor in analysing conflicts is interdependence. Although interdependence can increase the potential for conflict (Giebels & Euwema, 2010; Pruitt & Kim, 2004), a high level of interdependence can also decrease the risk of escalating behaviour in an ongoing conflict (Pruitt & Kim, 2004).

We will also focus on whether respondents themselves took the initiative to get a divorce, and the level of dependence asymmetry respondents perceived. Dependence asymmetry is related to unequal access to valuable resources, which are needed to maintain power and control over a situation (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978). This can influence conflict behavior and has a considerable impact on experienced emotions and cognitions (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Greer & Bendersky, 2013; Nauta, de Vries & Wijngaard, 2001).

When parties will be co-parenting children after a divorce, (future) interdependence is likely to be particularly high, because they will still jointly be responsible for the wellbeing of their child. Research suggests that this kind of future dependence provides a source of stability in relationships, because social bonds tend to encourage yielding and problem solving, as well as reduce contentious tactics

(Pruitt & Kim, 2004). Having children not only influences conflict behaviour, but might also determine which procedures need to be followed and what agreements partners have to make.

In the consumer conflict section, we will focus on whether the conflict has ended at the time of the first post-test or if it is ongoing (and dependence on the vendor persists) and to what extent respondents were certain of being right, and whether respondents had legal expenses insurance. Such insurance prevents respondents from being inhibited by expenses they cannot afford and might thus make consumers less dependent.

Issues

The issues that are present in a conflict can influence the way the conflict is handled by the parties involved (Giebels & Euwema, 2010). Facing financial problems after the divorce or having a consumer conflict about high amounts of money means the conflict has higher stakes, and thus has more impact on the conflict parties involved (Giebels, Ufkes & van Erp, 2014).

In the divorce section we will focus on concerns and risk factors apart from the divorce itself. Such concerns are important issues as they can create a higher level of interdependence, for example when parties have serious joint debts or concerns about their children.

When considering consumer conflicts, we will focus on the degree to which respondents find it important to reach a solution and the efforts, in terms of time and money, they have spent on the conflict³. We will also examine the amount of money and some characteristics of the products involved, for example the size of the company involved and whether the product was new or second-hand.

Institutions

The context in which the conflict takes place might influence the way the conflict proceeds. We focus on respondents' level of social support, since we know that social support is an important contextual predictor of how well individuals are able to cope with conflict and how dependent they are on professionals (Van Dijk, Giebels & Zebel, in preparation). This means that people with more social support might be less inclined to ask for the help of third parties.

Interventions

Several third parties can be involved in conflicts, in order to assist in the process of conflict management (Giebels & Yang, 2009) or help when settling intractable disputes (Conlon & Meyer, 2004). Some third parties provide support or information to conflict parties who handle their own conflict and negotiate directly with the other party, where others represent conflict parties or have decision making authority. For example, the Dutch Juridisch Loket provides information, where a lawyer represents parties in court. Equally interesting is the extent to which the third party help is aimed at the legal issues or the relationship with the other. For example, a lawyer or a notary can help

³ This information is used by Rechtwijzer to offer comparisons with the costs of different conflict resolution strategies, and is meant to encourage people to make a cost-benefit analysis before they proceed in the conflict.

with legal issues, whereas a mediator can assist in the relational aspects of a divorce. To assess the type of third parties people encounter, we examine respondents' way of gathering information and the extent to which they ask for third-party help.

Parties dealing with a conflict can have different needs, which might be an important factor in the design of legal interventions. Following previous research (Giebels & Yang, 2009; van Dijk, Giebels & Zebel, in preparation) we distinguish between problem-focused empowering help and social-emotional help. The first type consists of information on legal procedures, rights and obligations, help in structuring the issues, finding possible solutions, standing up to the other party and support throughout the conflict procedure. Emotional help is geared towards the emotional experience of the conflict and entails listening and showing understanding, and allowing space for venting and the sharing of experiences.

We will also discuss the degree to which people going through a divorce find it important that their made agreements are checked by a legal third party before finalizing these agreements, and the extent to which respondents in a consumer conflict feel the need to receive assistance from a legal professional, since these factors might indicate the employment of third parties and the degree of process- and/or outcome control parties prefer (Houlden, LaTour, Walker & Thibaut, 1978; Tyler, Rasinski & Spodick, 1985).

Interactions

The interaction between parties in a conflict shows the existing dynamics in the conflict and thus indicates where the conflict is going, in terms of escalation or de-escalation (Giebels & Euwema, 2005). We will focus on the amount and quality of communication with either the respondents' (ex-)partners, or the vendors of their product. These relations might be an important predictor for the type of interactions both parties carry out. We will also focus on the steps respondents have already taken in the conflict process.

Implications

Implications cover the consequences that interaction has on the outcomes of a conflict, in terms of escalation or de-escalation (Giebels & Euwema, 2010). Since Rechtwijzer is designed to help people with the process of their conflict, it is interesting to see whether usage of Rechtwijzer makes for a satisfactory divorce process. We will also focus on respondents' level of stress, since research shows that high levels of conflict stress can have a negative influence on individuals' ability to process and exchange information, leading to intensification of conflicts and the engaging in destructive conflict spirals (Giebels & Jansen, 2005). Finally, we will focus on the level of escalation respondents perceive. Escalated conflicts can be characterized by one of the participants in the conflict using heavier tactics than before, or by an increase in the intensity of a conflict as a whole (Pruitt & Kim, 2004). Highly escalated conflicts produce great human costs (Pruitt & Kim, 2004).

In what follows, we will first discuss the methods used. Then an overview of the main results will be presented for divorce cases and consumer conflicts separately. We start both results chapters with an evaluation of Rechtwijzer.nl, followed by an analysis of the elements of the 7-i-model.

2 METHOD

This longitudinal research project measures participants' experiences and reactions at three points in time using different questionnaires: at the outset of the conflict (t1), one to five weeks later (t2) and another three or six months later (t3), depending on the conflict involved⁴. In this report we will focus on the first two measuring moments, since data collection was ongoing at the time of writing.

Both divorce and consumer conflicts were represented in a test group of Rechtwijzer users and a control group of people going through the same conflicts but who did not use Rechtwijzer, to enable us to draw conclusions about the effects of using Rechtwijzer. This meant that there were four groups of interest in this research, each receiving basically the same version of a questionnaire, adjusted to their specific situation (divorce or consumer conflict, and marriage or other form of cohabitation form)⁵.

The first questionnaire was a pre-test, which acted as a reference point for the two follow-ups. It tested conflict perceptions and behaviour before the use of Rechtwijzer.nl. The Rechtwijzer group was asked to participate in the study when they visited the website between July 2013 and November 2014, and indicated to be in the middle of a divorce process or consumer conflict about a product. They had to reply to the first survey questions before they could access Rechtwijzer content specific to their conflict. The control group was approached to participate in the study via various channels, such as the internet and radio. An extensive amount of the control group was recruited via the digital newsletter of 'Radar', a Dutch television show for consumers, which reviews consumer services and focuses on improving consumer treatment.

The second questionnaire was sent out by e-mail one week after the pre-test. However, some respondents did not respond immediately, and were therefore sent one or more reminders. This also means that the exact time between filling in the pre-test and filling in the first post-test varied among the respondents (85.6% responded within two weeks). After the first post-test, respondents with a divorce conflict received a gift certificate worth 10 euros to be spent at the Dutch equivalent of Amazon and participated in a lottery for a second certificate worth 100 euros after the second post-test. Respondents with a consumer conflict received a 10 euro gift certificate after the second post-test. The majority of the questions could be answered using a 7-point scale, for example ranging from 'not at all' (1) to 'to a large extent' (7). Deviating scales will be discussed explicitly. For every concept consisting of multiple questions we will indicate the Cronbach's Alpha (α), showing the level of internal reliability of these questions. A Cronbach's alpha above 0.6 shows that the items reliably measure the same construct. To analyse the data, we used several statistical tests, such as independent t-

⁴ In the divorce condition, respondents received the third questionnaire within six months from responding to the second questionnaire. This period was only three months for respondents dealing with a consumer conflict, since it was expected that consumer conflicts took less time to solve than divorces.

⁵ More information on divorce procedures in the Netherlands can be found on <http://www.government.nl/issues/family-law/divorce-and-ending-a-relationship>

tests, pair wise t-tests and one-way ANOVA's. Rechtwijzer asked several diagnostic questions, such as questions concerning respondents' cohabitation form (marriage or other) or additional concerns, to be able to provide their users with the appropriate information. In this study we also report answers to these diagnostic questions.

2.1 Respondents

2.1.1 Divorce

The divorce Rechtwijzer group consisted of a total of 394 Rechtwijzer users. A total of 253 (drop-out rate of 35.8%) also participated in the first post-test (t2). Two entries were excluded from the analyses because these respondents had answered the questionnaire twice; one respondent was excluded from the pre-test for providing incomplete information and nine entries were excluded because they were not in a divorce procedure (were already divorced) in the first post-test. Since it is likely that this group had already finished their divorce before the pre-test, their results cannot be used to identify developments in their conflict, and are thus not suitable to include. After excluding these entries, the Rechtwijzer group consisted of 382 respondents in the pre-test. The first post-test consisted of 243 respondents (see Figure 2).

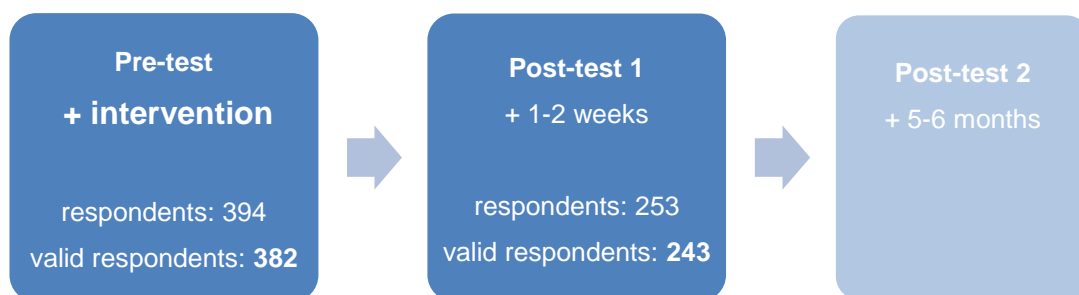


Figure 2. Respondent numbers Rechtwijzer group

Of the 382 people who took part in the pre-test on Rechtwijzer.nl, 72.9% was female and 26.6% male (see Table 2). Their average age was 42.09 years. Rechtwijzer posed a diagnostic question about the respondents' level of education, to which the majority of the respondents answered with either secondary vocational education (middelbaar beroepsonderwijs) (38.4%) or higher professional education (hoger beroepsonderwijs) (35.5%). A small group of respondents had completed either scientific education (wetenschappelijk onderwijs) (14.1%) or secondary school (middelbaar onderwijs) (11.0%). Only a tiny minority indicated elementary school (basisschool) to be their highest level of education (1.0%).

The control group – a group of people going through a divorce who did not use Rechtwijzer – consisted of 107 respondents in the pre-test. A total of 85 of these individuals (drop-out rate of 20.6%) participated in the first post-test. In the pre-test, 22 respondents were excluded; one for providing incomplete information; one for showing signs of serious mental health problems; two because they had already filled in the questionnaire of the test group, which means they made use of Rechtwijzer

and were thus not able to participate in the control group⁶, and 18 because they were not in a divorce procedure (were already divorced) in the first post-test. After these exclusions, the control group consisted of 85 respondents in the pre-test and 64 respondents in the first post-test (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Respondent numbers control group

Of the 103 respondents who took part in the control group, 70.6% was female and 29.4% male (see Table 2). Their average age was 42.74 years. The three highest levels of education – secondary vocational education (28.2%), higher professional education (33.0%) and scientific education (28.2%) – are fairly evenly distributed across the respondents. The remaining respondents reported their highest level of education was secondary school (10.7%). None of the respondents indicated elementary school to be their highest level of education.

Table 2 shows an overview of the demographic characteristics of participants in the first post-test in percentages; age is given as an average number. Dutch descent was defined as being born in the Netherlands as well as both parents being born in the Netherlands. If we compare this group of participants to national data and a study amongst Dutch divorcees, we can say that people with a higher education (and women) were overrepresented in this study. (Statistics Netherlands; TNS NIPO, 2012)

Characteristic		Rechtwijzer group	Control group
Gender	Male	26.7%	31.0%
	Female	72.8%	69.0%
Age	<i>Average in years</i>	42.19	42.94
Level of education *	Elementary school	1.0%	0.0%
	Secondary school	11.0%	10.6%
	Secondary vocational education	39.0%	24.7%
	Higher professional education	34.8%	34.1%
	Scientific education	14.1%	30.6%
Descent	The Netherlands	88.5%	87.5%

⁶ In the last questionnaire (post-test 2) the control group is probed for their knowledge and use of Rechtwijzer to exclude those that used Rechtwijzer but did not participate in the test group questionnaire.

	Other	11.5%	12.5%
Income	No income	10.0%	8.5%
	Up to 10.000	10.5%	15.3%
	10.000 to 20.000	18.6%	13.6%
	20.000 to 30.000	28.6%	18.6%
	30.000 to 40.000	19.1%	16.9%
	40.000 to 50.000	5.9%	5.1%
	50.000 or more	7.3%	22.0%

Table 2. *Demographic characteristics first post-test*

* Significant difference between Rechtwijzer and control group

The groups were significantly different in terms of level of education, as the control group had a higher level of education than the Rechtwijzer group. As presented in Table 2, no other significant differences between the two groups were found, meaning they can be considered similar in terms of gender, age, descent and income.

Cohabitation form

In the divorce section, cohabitation form was measured in the Rechtwijzer diagnostic questions, using one question with four answering categories, namely: marriage, registered partnership, cohabitation agreement and cohabitation without agreement. As shown in Figure 4, by far the largest part of the Rechtwijzer group (69.1%) was married. Additionally, 5% had a registered partnership, 16.5% had a cohabitation agreement and 9.4% lived together without an agreement. Comparing the Rechtwijzer group to the control group showed a significant difference in cohabitation forms. Marriage was more prevalent in the control group (80%) than in the Rechtwijzer group (69%). This means that the other three forms of cohabitation, namely registered partnership (2.4%), cohabitation agreement (12.9%) and cohabitation without agreement (4.7%), were relatively less frequent for the control group in comparison to the Rechtwijzer group. The overrepresentation of marriage in the control group is most likely due to selection bias through a focus on divorce in the media. The prevalence of the other types of cohabitation in the Rechtwijzer group suggests all of these groups indeed use Rechtwijzer, instead of its use being limited to those who have to go through court to end their relationship.

Rechtwijzer also posed a diagnostic question about whether or not respondents had set up a prenuptial agreement or partnership conditions. Of the married respondents in the Rechtwijzer group pre-test, 27.7% indicated to have arranged a prenuptial agreement, whereas 21.1% of the respondents with a registered partnership indicated to have set up partnership conditions.

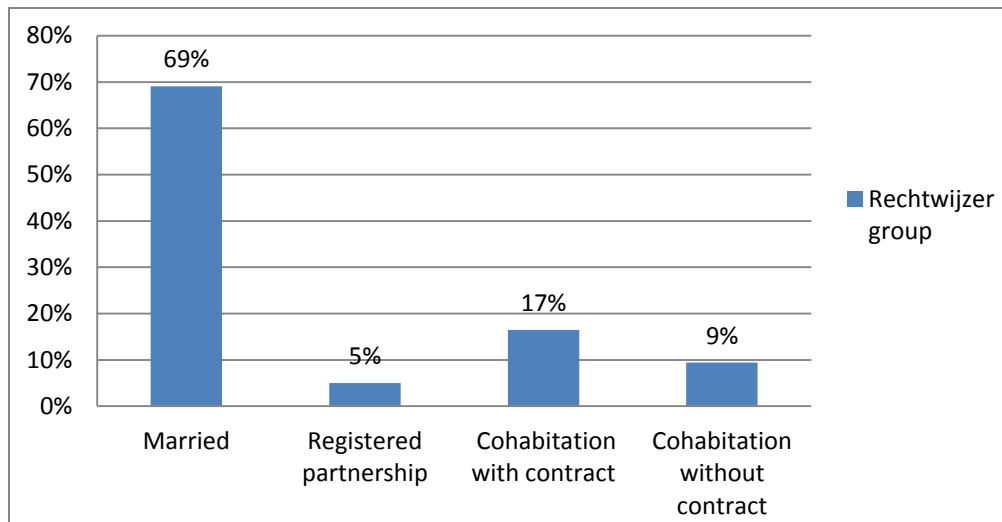


Figure 4. *Cohabitation forms*

Children

How many children respondents had, and to which age categories these children belonged was another diagnostic question on Rechtwijzer.nl. Almost three-quarters of the Rechtwijzer group in the pre-test, 74.6%, indicated to have children under the age of 21. A minority of 16.9% had no children. The residual 8.5% thus has children older than 21 years. Results showed that the control group did not significantly differ in terms of having under aged children.

User profiles

The three preceding factors are all determinants for the divorce procedures (ex-)partners have to follow to dissolve their relationship. If we look at them together, we find the following division across user profiles in the test group (see Figure 5). The largest group (37%) is made up by people who are married, don't have a prenuptial agreement and do have children under the age of 21. Almost no users (5%) have a registered partnership, but Rechtwijzer users are quite often (26% in total) ending a relationship with someone they were living with; of those, most (12%) had children and a cohabitation contract.

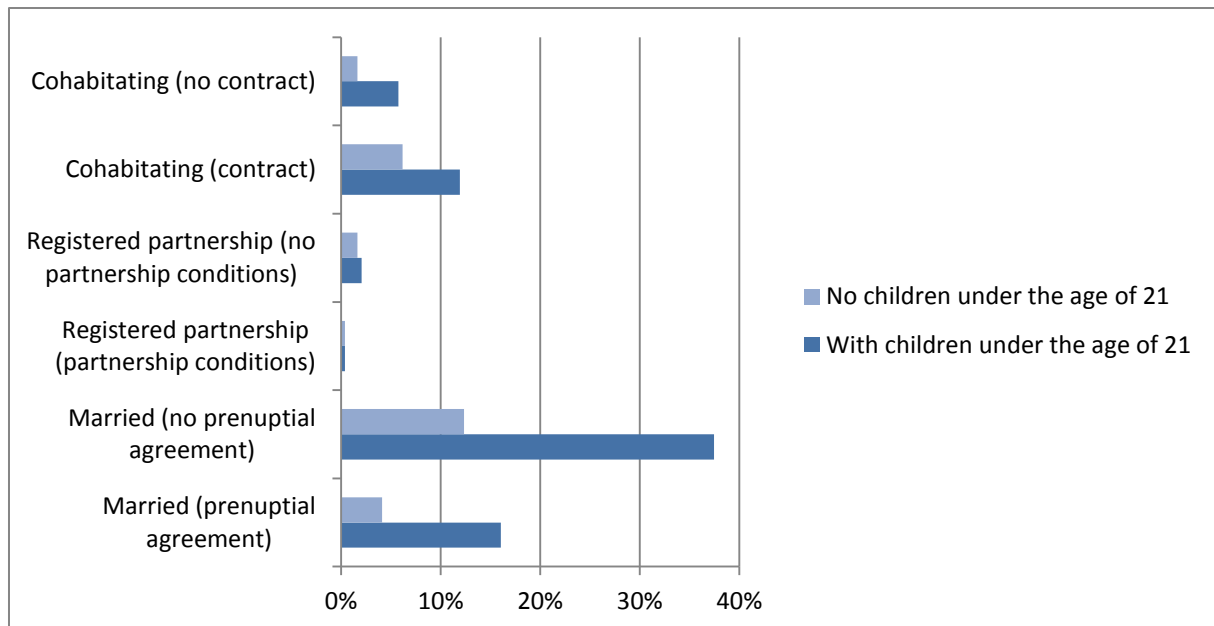


Figure 5. *User profiles*

2.1.2 Consumer conflicts

In the Rechtwijzer group, a total of 211 Rechtwijzer users with a consumer conflict participated in the pre-test. A total of 89 of those individuals (drop-out rate of 57.8%) also participated in the first post-test. Three respondents were excluded for providing incomplete information, and one respondent was excluded because he or she answered the questions as vendor instead of consumer. The remaining Rechtwijzer group thus consisted of 207 respondents in the pre-test and 88 respondents in the first post-test (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. *Respondent numbers Rechtwijzer group*

Of the total of 207 respondents in the Rechtwijzer group, 53.1% were female and 45.4% male (see Table 3). Their average age was 42.48 years.

The control group – people dealing with a consumer conflict who did not use Rechtwijzer – consisted of 882 respondents in the pre-test. A total of 604 of these individuals (drop-out rate of 31.5%) participated in the first post-test. One respondent was excluded from the pre-test for providing incomplete information; one for showing signs of serious mental health problems, and one for filling in

the questionnaire for someone else. After these exclusions, the control group consisted of 879 respondents in the pre-test and 603 respondents in the first post-test (see Figure 7).

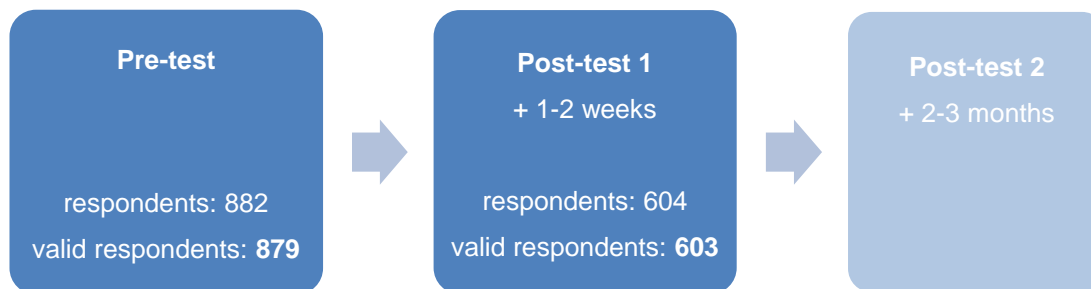


Figure 7. Respondent numbers control group

Of the 879 respondents in the control group, 43.1% was female and 56.9% male (see Table 3). Their average age was 53.69 years. The majority of the respondents either completed secondary vocational education (middelbaar beroepsonderwijs) (34.1%) or higher professional education (hoger beroepsonderwijs) (41.8%). A relatively smaller part completed secondary school (middelbaar onderwijs) (10.8%) or scientific education (wetenschappelijk onderwijs) (12.5%). Only a tiny minority indicated elementary school (basisschool) to be their highest level of education (0.8%). Compared to national data people with a higher education were overrepresented in this study (Statistics Netherlands). Table 3 shows the answers of respondents in the first post-tests in percentages; age is given in an average number.

Characteristic		Rechtwijzer group	Control group
Gender	Male	42.0%	58.2%
	Female	55.7%	41.0%
Age *	<i>Average in years</i>	42.68	54.21
Level of education	Elementary school		0.8%
	Secondary school		11.8%
	Secondary vocational education		33.5%
	Higher professional education		42.0%
	Scientific education		11.8%
	Unknown	100%	
Descent	The Netherlands	87.5%	91.2%
	Foreign	12.5%	8.8%
Income *	No income	4.5%	2.2%
	Up to 10.000	9.1%	5.6%
	10.000 to 20.000	19.3%	12.8%
	20.000 to 30.000	14.8%	13.8%
	30.000 to 40.000	17.0%	16.1%

40.000 to 50.000	8.0%	9.6%
50.000 or more	5.7%	10.3%
Unknown	21.6%	29.7%

Table 3. *Demographic characteristics first post-test*

* Significant difference between Rechtwijzer and control group

The Rechtwijzer group and the control group showed a significant difference in age and income, as the latter group was, on average, older and had a higher mean income than the Rechtwijzer group. The results presented in Table 3 indicate both groups do not show any significant differences when it comes to gender and descent. Level of education of the Rechtwijzer group was measured in the second post-test and therefore could not be compared to the control group yet.

2.2 Constructs

The following paragraph will focus on how the important constructs were measured.

Evaluation of Rechtwijzer 1.0

Respondents in the Rechtwijzer group were asked to answer a number of questions in the first post-test in which they had to evaluate Rechtwijzer 1.0. These results provide insight in the user experience of Rechtwijzer.nl. The Rechtwijzer group, consisting of Rechtwijzer users, counted 243 respondents. However, 12 of them were excluded because they reported not remembering visiting Rechtwijzer.nl, resulting in a group of 231 respondents whose answers regarding Rechtwijzer 1.0 were analysed. Trust in the advice was measured using seven statements, for example 'I have faith in the advice', which could be rated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent) ($\alpha=0.90$ for the respondents in divorce and $\alpha=0.91$ for respondents with consumer conflicts) (Briggs, Burford, De Angeli & Lynch, 2002).

Individuals

Level of knowledge about conflict procedures was measured in the pre-test, using one question concerning respondents' experiences with divorces or consumer conflicts. The extent to which respondents perceived to have more or less knowledge about conflict procedures than their (ex-)partners or the vendor of their product was also measured with the help of one question in the pre-test.

To measure general problem solving self-efficacy beliefs, the belief to what extent people feel able to solve problems or conflicts, we used a short version of an existing scale (Heppner & Petersen, 1982). This was measured in the pre-test, using six statements, for example 'I have faith in my abilities to solve new and complicated problems' ($\alpha=0.86$ for divorce and $\alpha=0.74$ for consumer conflicts). These statements could be rated using six response categories ranging from 'not at all' to 'to a large extent'. We also used an adapted scale, measuring self-efficacy specific to the current conflict process. This was measured with six more questions, such as 'I think I can stand up for my points of

view against my (ex-)partner' or 'I have faith in my abilities to confer and make arrangements with the vendor', both in the pre-test and in the first-post-test ($\alpha=0.86$ for divorce and $\alpha=0.88$ for consumer conflicts). These statements could also be rated with the help of a six-point scale.

To measure self-perceived changes in self-efficacy, as opposed to measuring change indirectly by calculating difference scores between the pre- and post-tests, the Rechtwijzer group was asked in the first post-test to what extent they believed their self-efficacy had changed since using Rechtwijzer. In the divorce condition, we used 10 statements, such as 'I have a better overview of what needs to happen in a divorce' ($\alpha=0.72$). Eight statements, such as 'I have a better view of the costs I can expect in a consumer conflict' were used to measure self-perceived changes in self-efficacy in the consumer conflict condition.

Interdependence

Two questions about the initiative to get a divorce were asked in the pre-test, namely 'who took the initiative to get a divorce?' and 'what is most applicable to your situation?'. This last question could be answered by choosing one of three answering options: 'I think separating is the best option, but my (ex-)partner would rather not', 'My (ex-)partner thinks separating is the best option, but I would rather not' or 'We both think separating is the best option'. Moreover, dependence asymmetry was measured in the pre-test, using two questions. These were directed at the perceived dependency on the respondent's (ex-)partner (to what extent are you dependent on your (ex-)partner?) as well as the perceived dependency of the (ex-)partner on the respondent (to what extent is your (ex-)partner dependent on you?).

When considering consumer conflicts, the Rechtwijzer diagnosis asked a question about the degree to which respondents were certain about the fact that they were right. In the first measurement, one question asked whether respondents had legal expenses insurance. Finally, whether or not the respondents' conflict was still ongoing was examined in the first post-test, since consumer conflicts can be resolved quickly.

Issues

In the divorce section, a Rechtwijzer diagnostic question asked whether respondents experienced one or more out of six additional concerns, besides their divorce. These additional concerns were an impending decline in income, serious debts, children and child protective services, mental health problems, addiction problems and domestic violence.

When dealing with a consumer conflict, respondents were asked whether their product was new or second-hand, where they bought their product (in a shop or at a market stall, online, by telephone or at the door, at a party or on the street) and what the size of the company involved was (small, middle-sized or large). Respondents were asked in the pre-test what amount of money was at stake in their conflict, using an open-ended question. As part of the reflective intervention, the Rechtwijzer group was asked four questions in the pre-test focused on the efforts (in terms of time and money) respondents had already spent on the conflict, and were willing to spend in the future, and one question focused on how important they perceived it to be to find a solution to their conflict.

Institutions

The absolute degree of social support was measured in the first post-test using seven questions, such as 'to what extent did you have people in your surroundings who supported you in the process?' ($\alpha=0.94$ for divorce and $\alpha=0.88$ for consumer conflicts). In addition, one of the Rechtwijzer diagnostic questions measured the relative level of social support (to what extent respondents perceived to have more or less social support than their (ex-)partners).

Interventions

Respondents were asked how they gathered information about their conflict, with the help of an open-ended question. They were also asked whether they had consulted one or more out of eight types of third parties that are commonly used in divorce or consumer conflicts, such as a lawyer, mediator, the Juridisch Loket or a divorce coach. We examined the respondents' needs for two types of help with two sets of questions, each with answers ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent). The need for problem-focused empowering help was measured with nine statements, such as 'I would like to receive more explanation about rights and obligations of me and my (ex-)partner/the vendor' ($\alpha=0.90$ for divorce and $\alpha=0.80$ for consumer conflicts). The need for social-emotional help was measured with six statements, such as 'I would like to share my experiences with others' ($\alpha=0.89$ for divorce and $\alpha=0.86$ for consumer conflicts).

Respondents dealing with a divorce were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent) to what extent they found it important to have their agreements checked by a third party. When dealing with a consumer conflict, respondents also reported to what extent they felt the need for the help of a legal professional to deal with their conflict.

Interactions

Mutual trust between parties was measured with four questions, such as 'to what extent do you trust your (ex-)partner when it comes to arranging the divorce?' or 'to what extent do you trust the vendor to comply with agreements between you both?' ($\alpha=0.87$ for divorce and $\alpha=0.89$ for consumer conflicts). We measured the amount of contact between parties both in the pre-test and the first post-test with the help of seven answering categories, ranging from 'almost no contact' to 'a lot of contact'. Moreover, in the first post-test, respondents were asked to characterize the quality of communication with their (ex-)partner with the help of six two-sided scales ranging from -2 (negative/low quality) to +2 (positive/high quality), ranging for example from 'a lot of misunderstanding' to 'a lot of understanding' ($\alpha=0.94$ for divorce and $\alpha=0.91$ for consumer conflicts).

In the first post-test, respondents were asked what steps they had already taken in the conflict process. In a divorce process, respondents could indicate whether they had started discussing possible divorce arrangements, without making agreements about everything yet; whether they had made specific agreements about the house, furniture, and finances, and the children; and whether their lawyer had already sent a request for divorce to a judge. When dealing with a consumer conflict, respondents could indicate whether they had already complained to the vendor, either by telephone or

verbally, whether they had sent a letter to the vendor, and whether they had sent their case to a Consumer Complaints Board⁷.

Implications

General satisfaction with the process was measured in the first post-test, using one question with answers ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent). Level of stress was measured with the help of four questions, for example 'to what extent do you experience tension during or directly after arranging your consumer conflict with the vendor?'. These questions were asked in the pre-test, as well as in the first post-test ($\alpha=0.91$ for divorce and $\alpha=0.89$ for consumer conflicts). We measured the level of escalation of the divorce using five answer categories each describing a different level of escalation based on the conflict escalation ladder in both the pre-test and the first post-test (Glasl, 1997). Finally, on a scale of 1 to 6, the Rechtwijzer diagnosis asked the Rechtwijzer group to reflect on whether they would want a 'consultation divorce' or a 'divorce battle'⁸ and what they thought their (ex-)partner would prefer.

⁷ For more information: <http://www.degeschillencommissie.nl/english>

⁸ Overlegscheiding of vechtscheiding.

3 RESULTS

In this chapter we will discuss the results from the pre-test and the first post-test. We will first consider individuals who faced a divorce conflict and then analyse those facing a consumer conflict. We will first discuss the user evaluation of Rechtwijzer.nl. The remaining results will be structured according to the 7-I-model. We report results of the Rechtwijzer group, unless stated otherwise, for example when it comes to comparisons between the Rechtwijzer group and the control group.

3.1 Divorce

3.1.1 Evaluation of Rechtwijzer 1.0

Overall evaluation

Respondents gave Rechtwijzer an overall grade between 1 (very negative) and 10 (very positive) in accordance with their appreciation of the website. The average grade respondents assigned to Rechtwijzer was a 7.51. As can be seen in Figure 8, all respondents were rather positive about Rechtwijzer.nl. By far the majority of the respondents gave Rechtwijzer either a 7 (44.0%) or an 8 (37.7%). Only four of the 231 respondents gave an insufficient grade, namely a 3 or a 5.

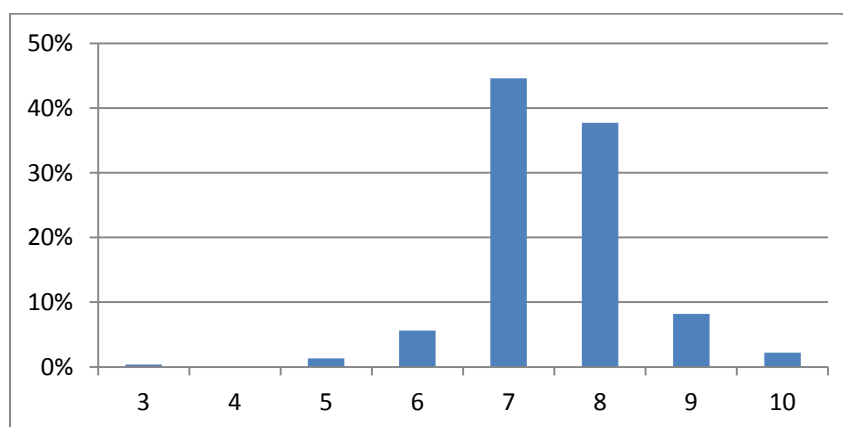


Figure 8. *Distribution of grades Rechtwijzer.nl*

Use

Respondents reported an average of 3.92 visits to Rechtwijzer.nl since the pre-test. The majority of the respondents had visited Rechtwijzer five times or less up to then (see Figure 9). Note that most respondents visited the website more than once and seemed to come back, possibly to find links or look at the step by step plan and reread information.

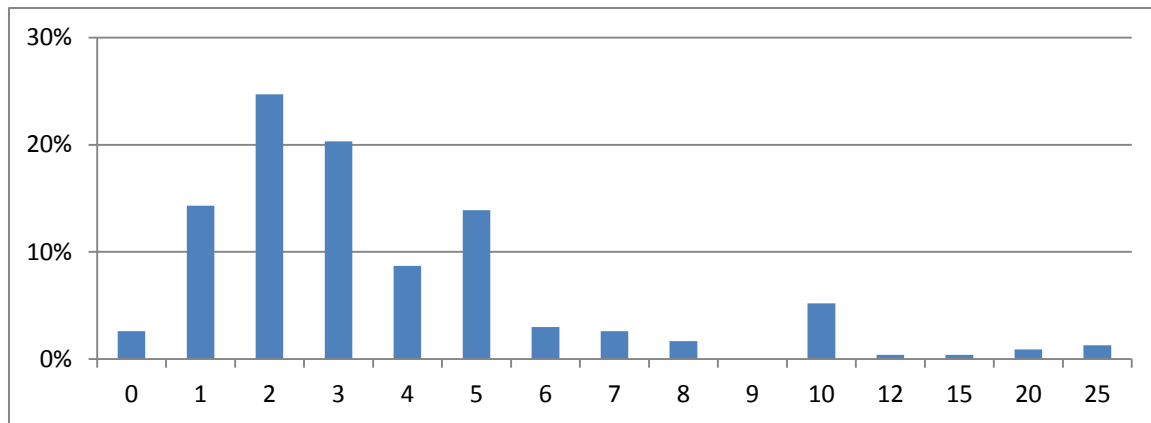


Figure 9. *Frequencies in use of Rechtwijzer*

Figure 10 shows that respondents were inclined to use the website again or recommend the website to others. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group gave an average answer of 5.26 when asked for an assessment of their expected future use of the website. They answered with an average of 5.39 when asked to what extent they would recommend the website to others. These positive answers might map the future use of Rechtwijzer, and give an alternative indicator of user satisfaction rates.

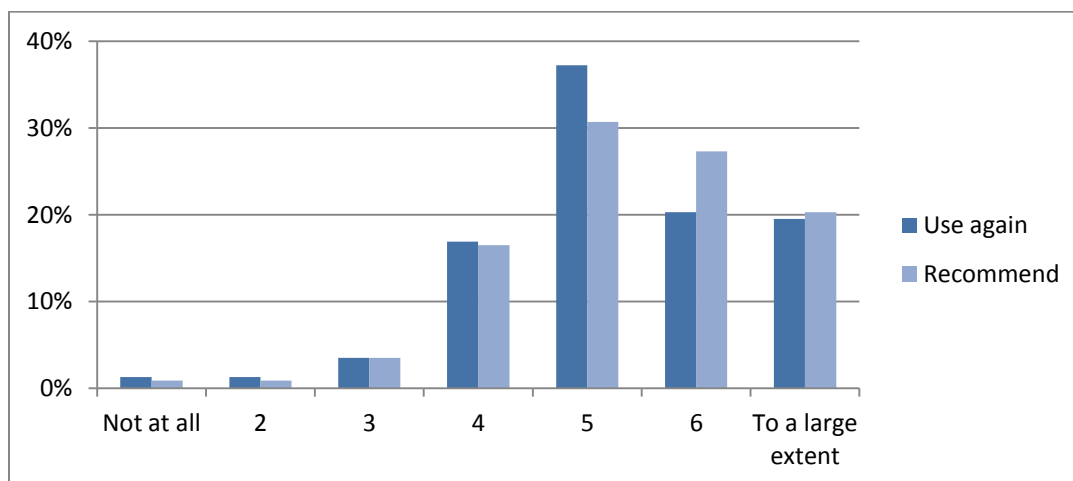


Figure 10. *Intention of future use and intention to recommend*

Rechtwijzer tools

The results shown in Figure 11 illustrate that a number of tools on Rechtwijzer are less well known than others, for example the video about child hearing and the website 'wijzeruitelkaar.nl', whereas the divorce- and parenthood plan is known by almost all of the respondents. Almost half of the respondents indicated they would use the divorce- and parenthood plan again⁹, whereas respondents stated they are not likely to use the (interactive) video's again in the future.

⁹ A new interactive version of Rechtwijzer for divorce conflicts will integrate the divorce- and parenthood plans.

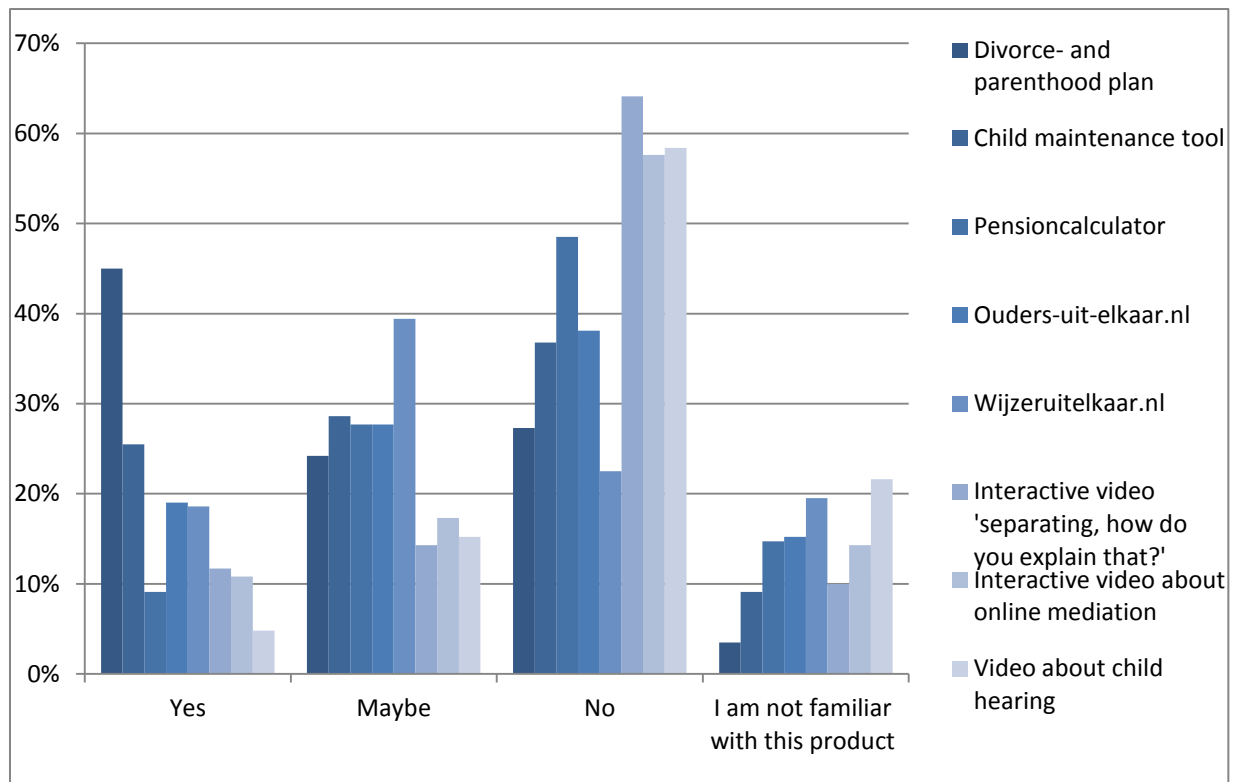


Figure 11. Use of tools Rechtwijzer

Advice

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group gave an average answer of 4.53 when asked to what extent they perceived the given advice as attainable, and a 4.56 when asked whether they had the intention to follow the advice. Respondents reported their faith in the given advice with an average answer of 4.52. The results shown in Figure 12 illustrate that all three questions were answered moderately to modestly positively. Only a small number of people perceived the given advice to be unattainable and untrustworthy and was thus not inclined to follow the given advice.

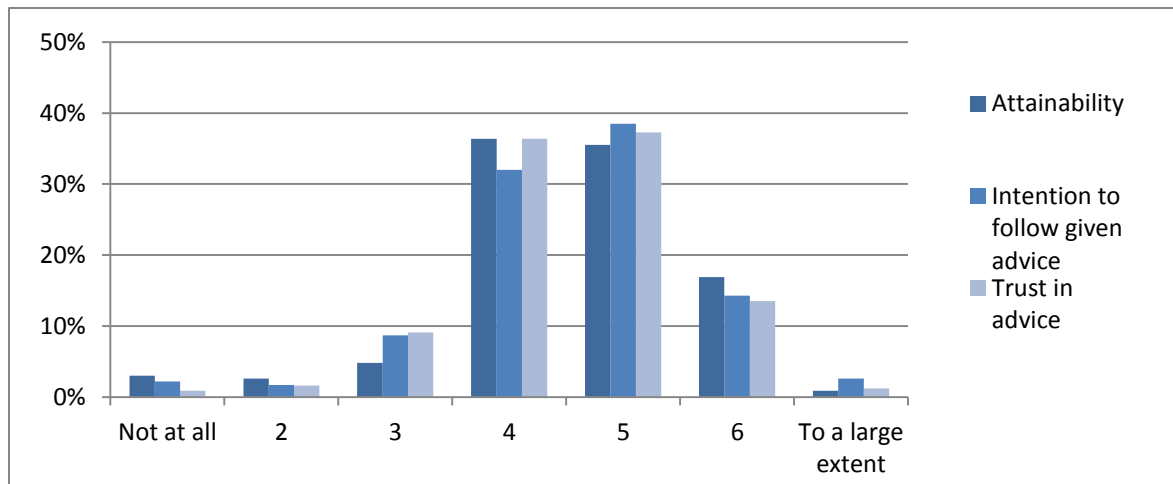


Figure 12. *Quality of advice*

3.1.2 Individuals

Knowledge about divorce procedures

Rechtwijzer diagnosed the level of knowledge and experience visitors have. Of the Rechtwijzer group, 22.5% indicated to have experienced a divorce before, whether directly or indirectly as witness to a divorce of close others.

The average relative level of knowledge the Rechtwijzer group assessed in the pre-test on a scale from 1 (less) to 5 (more) was a 3.56. This significantly deviated from the scale mean, indicating that respondents believed they had slightly more knowledge and skills to achieve a good solution than their (ex-)partners.

Self-efficacy

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 6 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group indicated a moderately high level of self-efficacy with an average answer of 4.20. They rated their level of self-efficacy specifically related to divorce with an average answer of 4.12, indicating they perceive to have a fairly high level of self-efficacy as well when it comes to their divorce.

In the first post-test, the Rechtwijzer group responded with an average answer of 4.15. This was not significantly different from the pre-test, and thus indicates that their perceived self-efficacy in relation to their divorce had not changed during the time between the pre-test and the first post-test. There were no significant differences between the Rechtwijzer group and the control group, meaning neither the Rechtwijzer group nor the control group experienced changing levels of self-efficacy between both tests.

Whereas the previous analysis examined differences in the reported level of self-efficacy, respondents were also asked directly in the first post-test whether they experienced a change after using Rechtwijzer. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group gave an average answer of 4.05 when asked directly to what extent they believed their self-efficacy had changed since using Rechtwijzer. This means they perceived their self-efficacy to have somewhat positively changed since using Rechtwijzer. It is interesting to see that almost no one of the

Rechtwijzer group chose category 1 or 2 (see Figure 11), indicating that almost all respondents feel some improvement in their self-efficacy. It might be that using Rechtwijzer, gives users a short term experience of higher self-efficacy which dissipates quickly after the step by step plan is no longer fresh in their memory. This effect might be due to thinking about the divorce, and being presented with a guided pathway which explains procedures, shows what actions can be taken, and where to get help. This would explain why respondents report a positive change in their self-efficacy when asked directly, but not when measured indirectly, and corresponds to the reported repeat visits to the website.

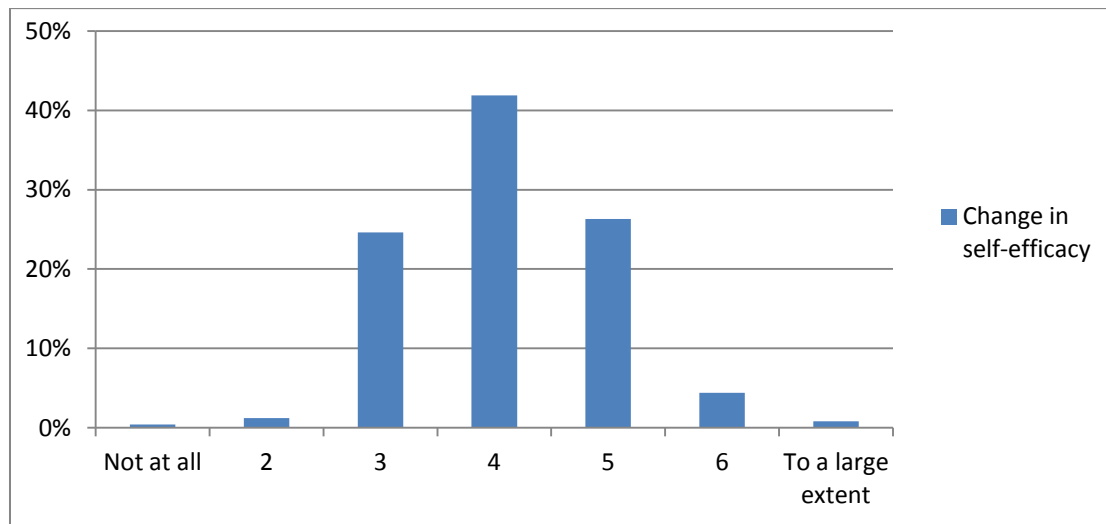


Figure 13. *Self-efficacy change Rechtwijzer group*

3.1.3 Interdependence

Initiative

The majority of the respondents took the initiative to end the relationship themselves (56.0%), one third indicated their (ex-)partner took the initiative (31.7%) and the remaining few report taking the initiative to get a divorce together (12.3%). In the Rechtwijzer group, 61.6% indicated themselves and their (ex-) partner both believed separating was the best option whereas 38.4% believed separating was the best option, when their (ex-)partner did not. This means that none of the respondents indicated that their (ex-) partner perceived getting a divorce as the best option whilst they themselves did not. There were no significant differences between the Rechtwijzer and control groups on these variables.

Dependence asymmetry

On a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group gave an average answer of 4.41 when asked how dependent they were on their (ex-)partner. When asked how dependent their (ex-)partner was on them, the Rechtwijzer group answered with an average of 3.74. This difference score was significant. This means that the Rechtwijzer group perceived themselves to be more dependent on their (ex-)partner than vice versa.

The control group felt less dependent on their (ex-) partner and reported the same dependence of their (ex-) partner on them as in the Rechtwijzer group. Therefore, there was no significant difference in the control group between perceived dependency on respondents' (ex-)partner and vice versa.

We also examined whether the level of perceived dependence would depend on gender. Female respondents in the Rechtwijzer group gave an average answer of 4.64 when asked about the dependence on their (ex-)partner, whilst male respondents answered with an average of 3.79. This means that female respondents perceived themselves to be more dependent on their (ex-)partner than male respondents (see Figure 14). Similarly, when asked how dependent their (ex-)partner was on them, male respondents answered with an average of 4.51, whilst female respondents gave an average answer of 3.47. This means that male respondents perceived their (ex-)partner to be more dependent on them than female respondents. The same differences were found in the control group, although the difference in gender influencing how dependent their (ex-)partner was on the respondents was not significant since both men and women in the control group felt less dependent on their (ex-)partner than respondents in the Rechtwijzer group.

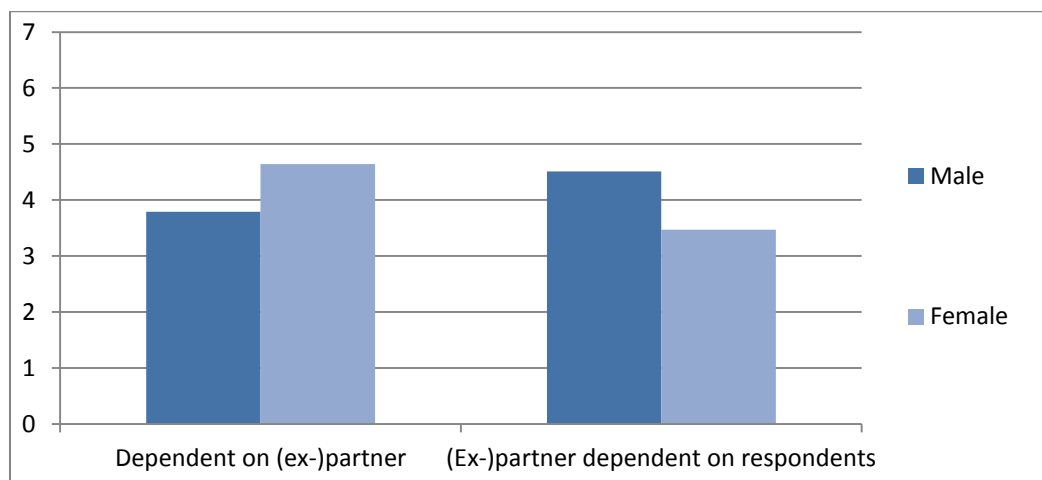


Figure 14. *Dependence asymmetry Rechtwijzer group*

Another factor that influenced the perceived level of dependence is whether or not respondents had children under the age of 21. Respondents that had children under the age of 21 indicated significantly higher levels of dependence, both for themselves and for their (ex-)partner, than respondents that did not have children under the age of 21. This confirms that having children creates a higher level of interdependence between both parties. The same was found in the control group, although this did not prove to be significant since both respondents with under aged children and respondents without under aged children in the control group felt less dependent on their (ex-)partner than respondents in the Rechtwijzer group.

3.1.4 Issues

Additional concerns

More than half of the respondents (52.9%) indicated they had additional concerns, besides the divorce itself. The concern that was most evident was financial problems (see Figure 15); whether that was an impending decline of the respondents' income or serious debts they were confronted with. This might be because financial problems can be a risk of divorce itself rather than an additional concern complicating the divorce procedures. This suggests that potential income drops should be a point of attention for any divorce arrangement, which corresponds to findings in other research (TNS NIPO, 2012). Because initial reported rates of domestic violence seem high, more detailed data on type and intensity of domestic violence is to be collected in the second post-test.

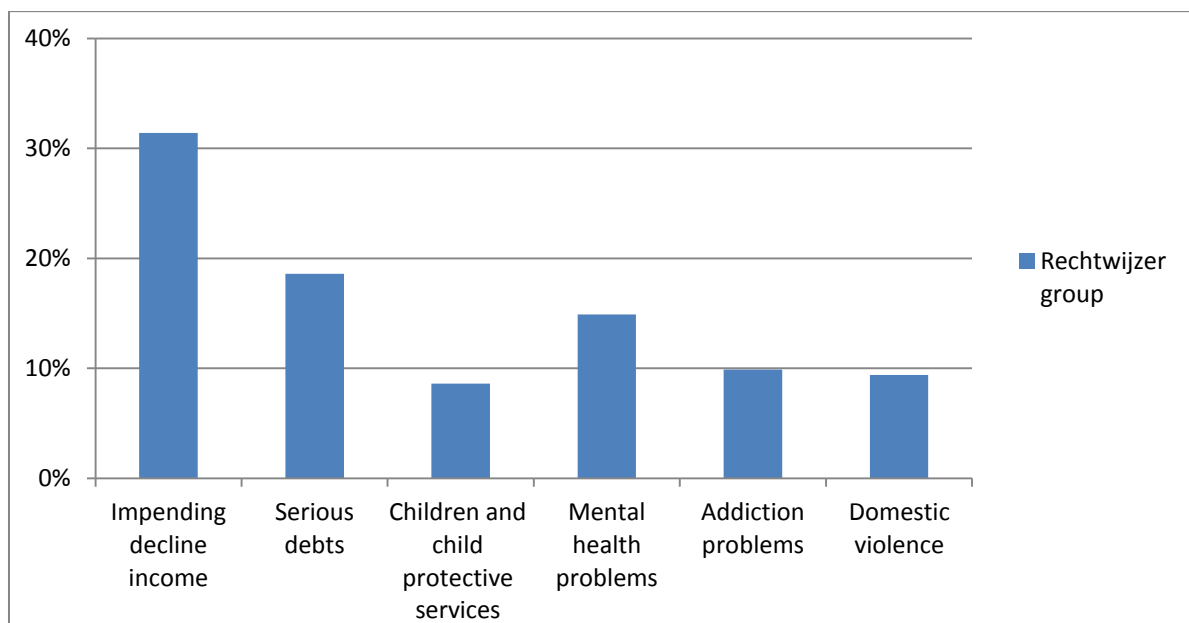


Figure 15. *Respondents' concerns*

The Rechtwijzer group and control group were compared on their indicated additional concerns. A significantly smaller part of the control group (35.3%) indicated to have additional concerns in comparison to the Rechtwijzer group (52.9%). Additional concerns were less prevalent in the control group. However, they did report more concerns about their children involving child protective services. This is surprising because the proportion of participants with children was equal in the control and Rechtwijzer groups.

3.1.5 Institutions

Social support

With a mean of 5.12, the Rechtwijzer group reported a relatively high degree of social support. Of the Rechtwijzer group, 3.2% could be considered a risk group as they indicated to experience extremely low social support, namely an average score between 1 and 2. On a scale from 1 (less) to 5 (more), the Rechtwijzer group reported their relative level of social support with an average answer of 3.46.

This means that on average, they perceive to have slightly more social support than their (ex-)partner. No significant differences were found between the Rechtwijzer group and the control group, meaning these groups can be considered similar in terms of perceived social support.

3.1.6 Interventions

Information gathering

The most-used websites to gather information about divorces are: rvr.nl (website of the Legal Aid Board), rijksoverheid.nl (website of the national government), juridischloket.nl (website of the Juridisch Loket) and Google to search for divorce-related topics and information.

Use of third parties

Results show that the majority of the Rechtwijzer group (31.7%) had not consulted a third party at all at the time of their visit to Rechtwijzer, whilst only 1% of the respondents consulted all eight types of third parties. If respondents had already contacted a third party, they generally asked two parties for assistance. As can be seen in Figure 16, the most frequently involved third party was the Juridisch Loket¹⁰, which is important in the orientation phase of the conflict. These results suggest that Rechtwijzer.nl, as a tool for people going through a divorce, is often employed at the start of the process, which corresponds with Rechtwijzer's aim to provide help in the beginning of a conflict process.

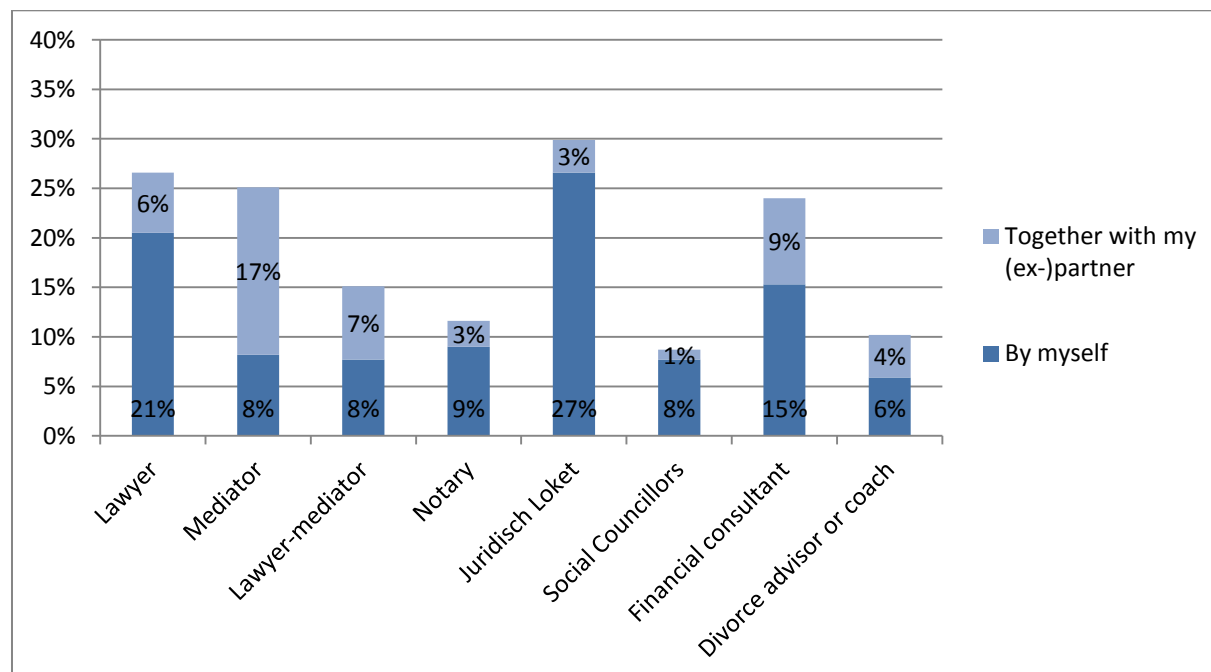


Figure 16. *Third-party help pre-test Rechtwijzer group*

¹⁰ The Juridisch Loket/ Legal Counter is a Dutch organization financed by the Legal Aid Board, which provides free legal advice for all citizens, especially those with low incomes.

We also examined whether the specific type of cohabitation influenced the likelihood of involving a lawyer or a mediator (see Figure 17). Married respondents were significantly more likely to have already sought help from a lawyer than respondents with a registered partnership or a cohabitation agreement, most likely due to procedural requirements. When it comes to a mediator, married respondents in the Rechtwijzer group were significantly more likely to seek help than respondents with a registered partnership or cohabitation without a cohabitation agreement. People who lived together with an agreement were significantly more likely to seek help from a mediator than people with a registered partnership.

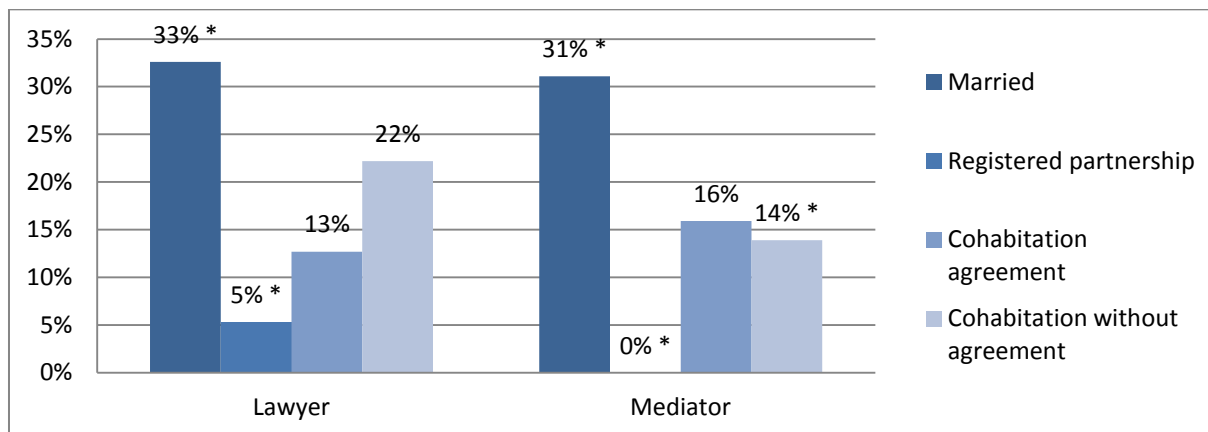


Figure 17. Significant differences third-party help in relation to cohabitation forms

* $p < .05$

Unexpectedly, no additional significant differences were found between cohabitation forms and the degree to which the Rechtwijzer group sought help from a third party. This is surprising, because whilst cohabitation without a contract is the only cohabitation form where a divorce can be settled without the help of third parties, results show that these respondents did not always make less use of third parties. This suggests that people visiting Rechtwijzer and looking for information related to ending cohabitation, might face a particularly complex situation.

We compared respondents without under aged children to respondents with under aged children in terms of consulting third parties. This showed that respondents in the Rechtwijzer group with under aged children are significantly more likely to have already consulted a mediator (28.8%) than respondents without under aged children (15.5%). As expected, based on future dependence, respondents with under aged children seem more motivated to end their relationship on good terms.

Likewise, whether or not married respondents in the Rechtwijzer group have set up a prenuptial agreement has an impact on the type of third-party help they consult. Results show that respondents that have set up a prenuptial agreement are more inclined to ask for the help of a mediator or a notary (see Figure 18).

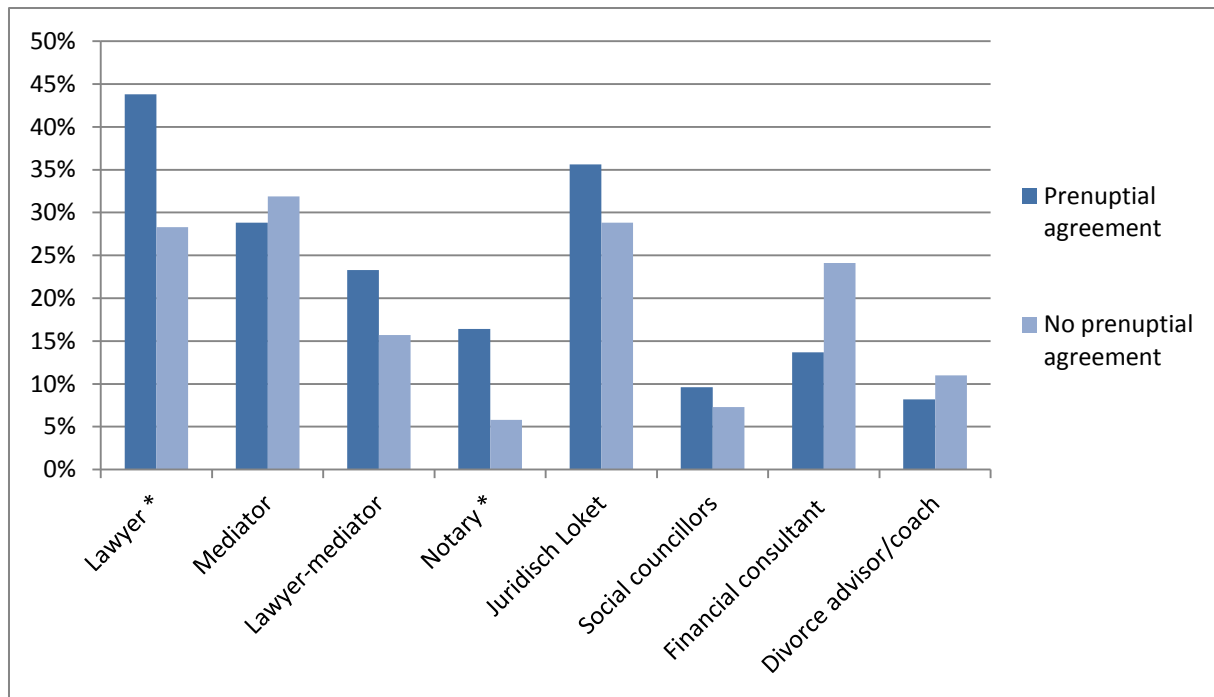


Figure 18. *Third-party help in relation to predefined agreements (married respondents)* * $p < .05$

Need for a third-party check

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group reported a preference for a third party checking their agreements made with an average answer of 5.16. As can be seen in Figure 19, the most frequent answer was 'to a large extent' (30.0%). This means that the Rechtwijzer group found it important that agreements made were reviewed by a legal third party. The same can be said for the control group. They gave an average answer of 5.50, which is not significantly different from the Rechtwijzer group.

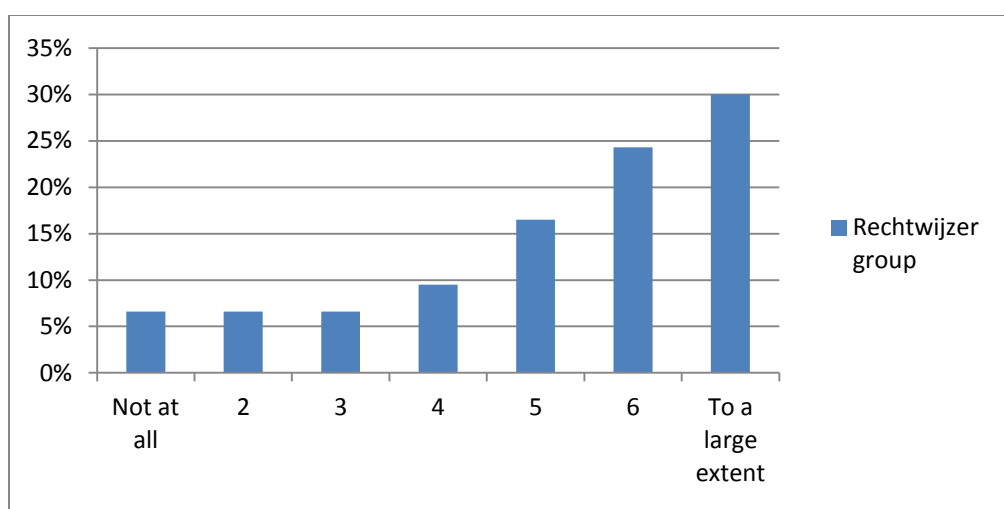


Figure 19. *Importance third-party check*

We examined whether the specific type of cohabitation influenced the degree to which respondents found it important to have their appointments checked by a third party. Results show that there is a significant difference between these cohabitation forms in the Rechtwijzer group (see Figure 20). Married respondents gave an average answer of 5.28, which means they found it more important to have their appointments checked by a third party than respondents who lived together without an agreement, who gave an average answer of 3.83. There were no significant differences between the other forms of cohabitation in relation to third-party checks of made agreements.

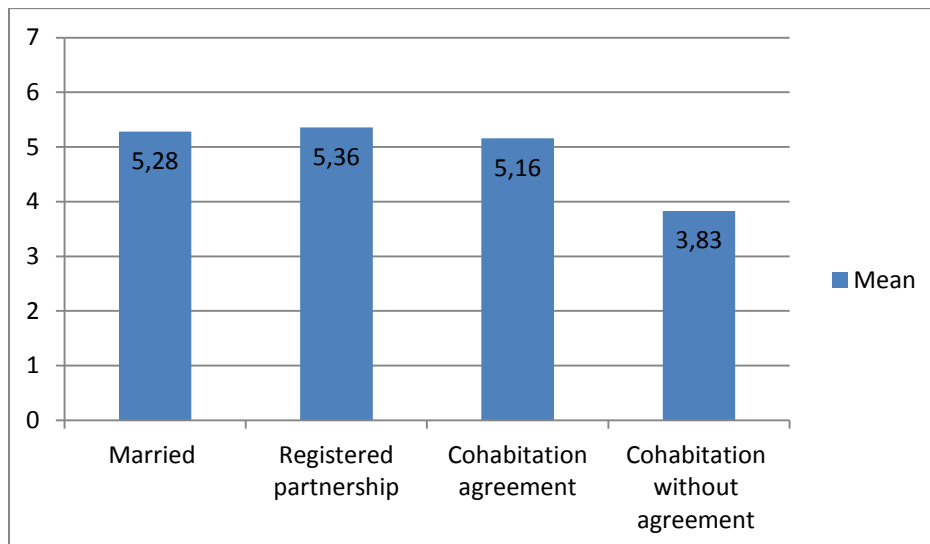


Figure 20. *Third party check according to cohabitation form*

Needs for help

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group indicated a need for problem-focused empowering help with an average answer of 5.43, and a need for social-emotional help with an average answer of 4.40. This means that the need for problem-focused empowering help was significantly higher than the need for social-emotional help. The control group felt a significantly higher need for social-emotional help, namely an average of 4.99, than the Rechtwijzer group.

Both the need for social-emotional help and the need for empowering help depended on whether the respondent had taken the initiative for divorce. Respondents who took the initiatives to get a divorce themselves reported an average need for empowering help of 5.36, and thus experienced significantly less need for this type of help than respondents whose (ex-)partners took the initiatives (average answer of 5.65). When the respondents took the initiative themselves and wanted to get a divorce, they reported an average need for social-emotional help of 4.29, and thus experienced significantly less need for social-emotional help than when they did not want to separate, but their (ex-)partner took the initiative for a divorce (average answer of 4.67). Furthermore, having additional concerns besides the divorce seemed to increase the need for both problem-focused empowering help and social-emotional help (see Figure 21).

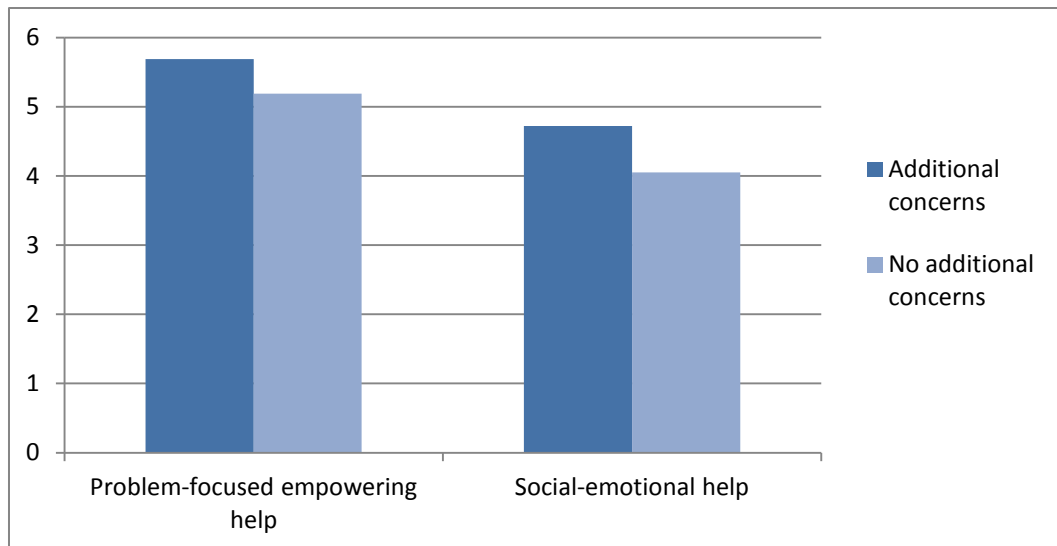


Figure 21. *Additional concerns and types of help*

3.1.7 Interactions

Communication with (ex-)partner

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group indicated a moderate amount of mutual trust between them and their (ex-)partner with an average answer of 3.85.

On a scale from 1 (almost no contact) to 7 (a lot of contact), the Rechtwijzer group reported the amount of contact with their (ex-)partner at the moment of responding with an average of 4.15. They estimated their amount of contact after the divorce with an average of 3.31. This shows that respondents had a reasonable amount of contact at the moment of responding, but estimated to have less contact in the future.

In the first post-test, respondents reported an average of 4.36 when asked for the amount of contact with their (ex-)partner. This is significantly different from their answer in the pre-test, meaning their amount of contact increased in the period between both tests. To see whether this is an effect of Rechtwijzer, the same analysis was done for the control group. This showed that there was no significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test, meaning the amount of contact the control group had with their (ex-)partner did not change between both tests. This suggests that Rechtwijzer was at the start of, or was even the catalyst of, a period of actively engaging with the other party in order to come to a divorce agreement. However this could not be shown conclusively as the difference between the two groups was not significant.

On a scale from -2 (negative/low quality) to +2 (positive/high quality), respondents described the communication between them and their (ex-)partner in the first post-test with a -0.5, which is slightly negative.

Steps taken

The Rechtwijzer group was relatively in the beginning of their divorce process. The majority (53.5%) had spoken about how they would like to arrange things, but had not yet made concrete decisions.

Only a small part of the Rechtwijzer group had already sent out a request to a judge (9.9%). Compared to the Rechtwijzer group, a significantly larger part of respondents in the control group had already sent out a request to a judge (37.5%). This shows that the control group was in a more advanced stage in the divorce process than the Rechtwijzer group.

3.1.8 Implications

Satisfaction

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group reported an average answer of 3.57 when asked whether they were satisfied with the divorce process. This indicates the Rechtwijzer group was moderately satisfied with the conflict process so far. This did not differ significantly from the control group.

Level of stress

The Rechtwijzer group perceived a moderate amount of stress during their divorce. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), respondents gave an average answer of 4.88 (see Figure 22).

Of the Rechtwijzer group, 29.5% indicated to experience very high levels of stress, namely a score between 6 and 7. This means there is a substantial group at risk of experiencing intensified conflicts and destructive conflict spirals, because they suffer from high levels of stress.

In the first post-test the average reported stress level was 4.23 (see Figure 22). The Rechtwijzer group perceived significantly less stress in the first post-test than in the pre-test. However, the same difference was found for the control group who did not visit Rechtwijzer. Perhaps the reason that the perceived level of stress decreased for both groups might be that merely being heard, venting or reflecting on the conflict, by filling in the questionnaire, already offers some form of emotional help and therefore reduces the level of stress. This makes it difficult to purely measure the effect of Rechtwijzer, but might suggest that being heard could be an important factor in decreasing stress levels (Tyler et al., 1985).

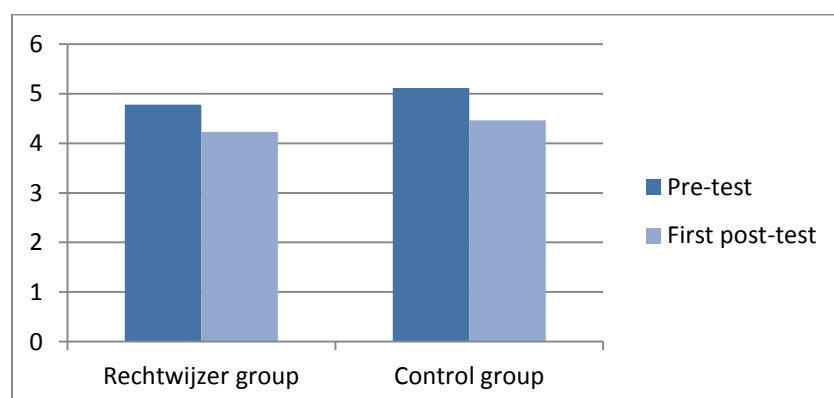


Figure 22. *Perceived levels of stress*

Level of escalation

The Rechtwijzer group reported an escalation level of 2.63, which means that their conflicts were moderately escalated. When asked whether their problems were increasing or decreasing, the average answer of the Rechtwijzer group was a 3.48, indicating their problems are getting larger over time. No significant differences were found between the Rechtwijzer group and the control group.

In the Rechtwijzer group, 15.7% reported that their problems were getting much larger over time, indicating that these conflicts were rapidly escalating at the time of completing the questionnaire. A total of 10.5% of the Rechtwijzer group was already experiencing a highly escalated conflict at the first post-test (thus within 1-5 weeks after the first measuring moment).

Results showed that respondents did not indicate to be in a different phase in their conflict when completing the first post-test, but were experiencing their problems to be significantly decreasing compared to the pre-test. This can also be seen when considering the risk group mentioned before once more. This showed that whilst 15.7% of the Rechtwijzer group in the first measurement indicated that their problems were getting much larger over time, in the post-test only 6.6% reported increasing problems.

The same analyses were done for the control group. There was no significant difference in the indicated phase or direction of the conflict between the pre- and post-tests. It seems that Rechtwijzer had a small positive effect on the direction of escalation of divorce as we found a positive change for the Rechtwijzer group which we did not find for the control group. However, we couldn't show the effect of Rechtwijzer conclusively as the change scores were not significantly different between the Rechtwijzer group and the control group.

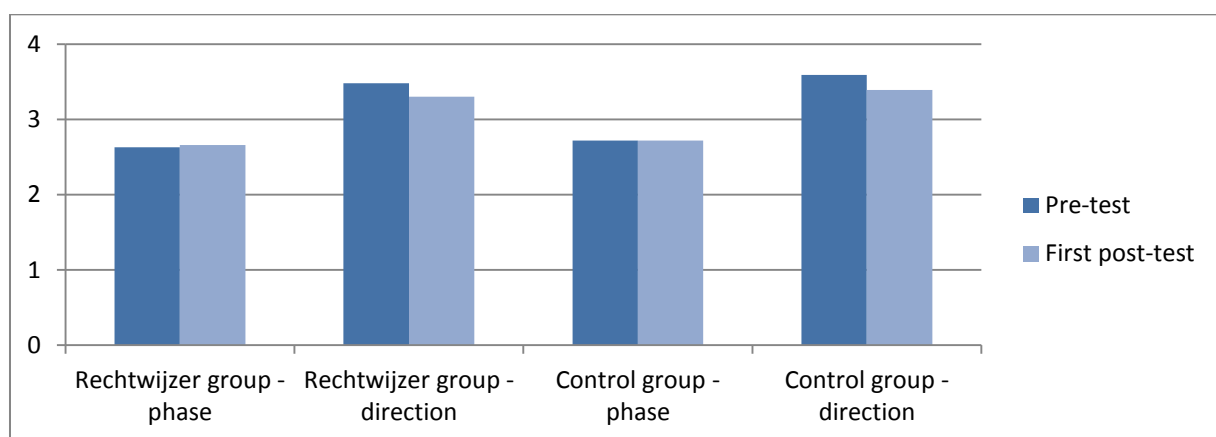


Figure 23. *Levels of escalation*

Results from one of the reflective questions in the Rechtwijzer diagnosis show that respondents would rather want a 'consultation divorce', whilst they think their (ex-)partner might be slightly more inclined to have a 'divorce battle (see Figure 24).

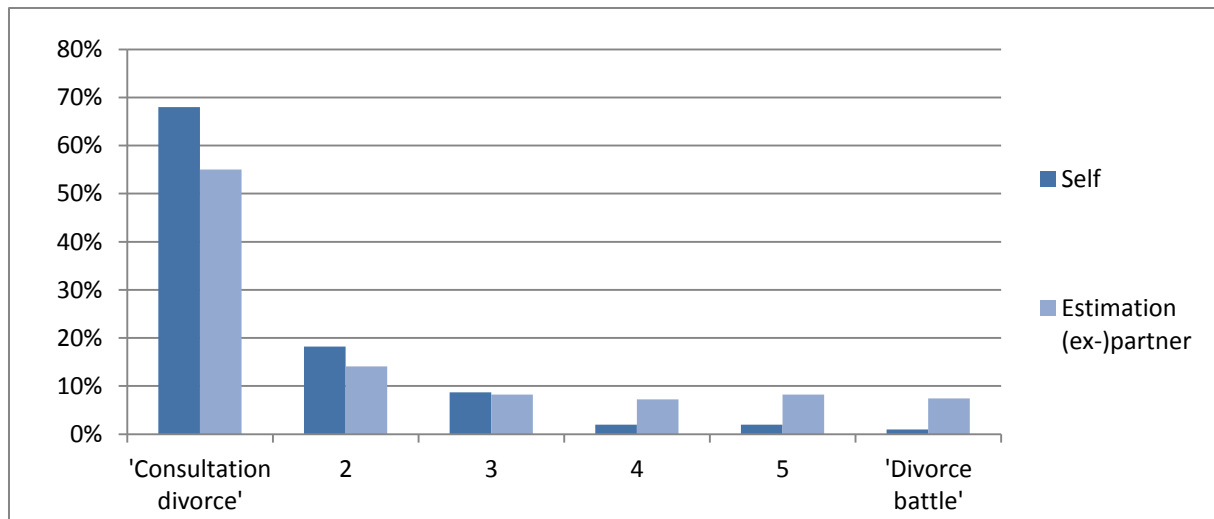


Figure 24. *Escalation divorce*

3.1.9 Conclusion

To conclude, the Rechtwijzer group positively evaluated Rechtwijzer. They gave the website a very positive grade of 7.51, were inclined to recommend the website to others and were positive about the given advice. Respondents seemed to come back to the website several times and were willing to use the website again. They also reported that they felt better able to deal with their divorce (had higher self-efficacy) after using Rechtwijzer. However, we could not find a difference in reported self-efficacy before and after using Rechtwijzer, which suggests a short term effect of Rechtwijzer on self-efficacy beliefs related to the divorce process.

Most of the visitors of Rechtwijzer were married and had children under the age of 21. Mutual dependence was higher when respondents had children under the age of 21. Use of a mediator was higher for this group which corresponds to a higher motivation to preserve the relationship and prevent conflict escalation when interdependence is high.

As Rechtwijzer is most likely to be used during the orientation phases, before divorce arrangements are made, a large part of the respondents had not consulted a third party yet. If they had, the most frequently contacted third party was the Juridisch Loket. Respondents found it important that their agreements were checked by a third party before becoming final.

We also looked at risk factors in divorce conflicts, such as financial worries, dependence asymmetry, stress and escalation. Many respondents had additional (mostly financial) concerns besides their divorce. Overall, respondents felt more dependent on their (ex-)partner than vice versa. Women were more likely to be disadvantaged in terms of dependence than men. Divorces tend to be quite escalated conflicts and generate a large amount of stress. About one third of the respondents experienced extremely high levels of stress. Participants reported a decrease in stress between the first and second measurement. This could have been an effect of participating in the study, which could have generated an opportunity for venting, reflection or have created the effect of being heard (by the researchers), but will have to be looked into further. Despite expected benefits of both types of

help, respondents indicated a higher need for problem-focused empowering help than social-emotional help. This confirms the importance of information sources such as Rechtwijzer.

The Rechtwijzer group and the control group did not differ on many important variables, which means we can compare these groups to test for effects of Rechtwijzer, as we did for the short term effects in this report. Results did indicate, however, that, most likely due to selection bias, the Rechtwijzer group dealing with a divorce might have been in a different, less advanced stage in their process than the control group.

3.2 Consumer conflicts

This chapter will focus on respondents dealing with a consumer conflict. Again, we will start by giving an evaluation of Rechtwijzer, followed by an analysis of the seven core questions of the 7-I-model.

3.2.1 Evaluation of Rechtwijzer 1.0

The Rechtwijzer group evaluated Rechtwijzer 1.0 in the first post-test. These results provide insight in the user experience of Rechtwijzer.nl. 88 respondents constituted the Rechtwijzer group. However, three of them reported they did not remember using the website and would thus not be able to evaluate it. The answers regarding Rechtwijzer 1.0 of the remaining 85 will be analysed in the following paragraphs.

Overall evaluation

The Rechtwijzer group was asked to grade their overall appreciation of the website on a scale from 1 (very negative) to 10 (very positive). The average overall assessment was a 7.29. Respondents were very positive about Rechtwijzer.nl (see in Figure 25). The majority of the users graded Rechtwijzer with either a 7 (36.5%) or an 8 (38.8%). Only seven of the 88 respondents gave an insufficient grade.

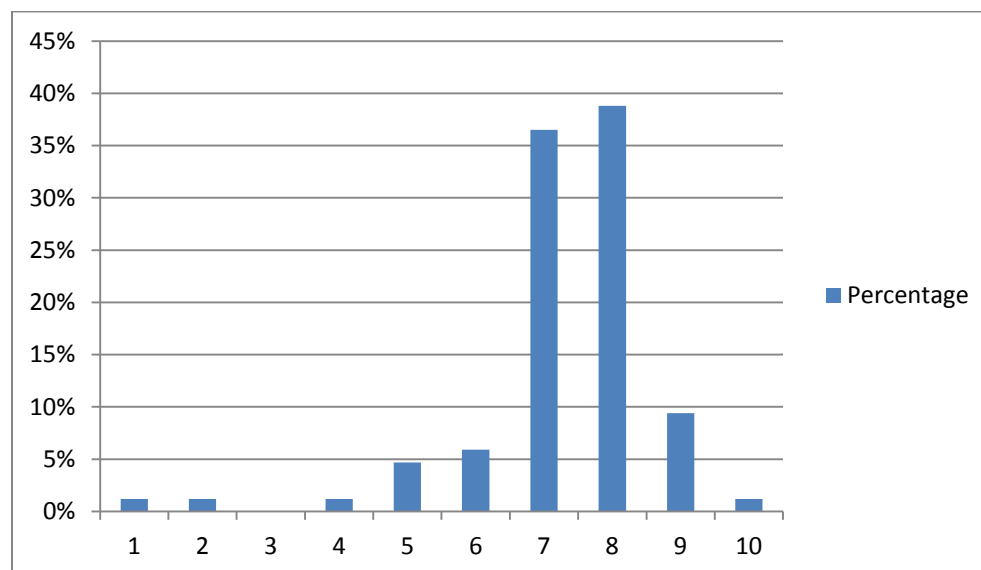


Figure 25. *Distribution of grades Rechtwijzer.nl*

Use

The Rechtwijzer group reported an average of 2.34 visits to Rechtwijzer since the pre-test. The majority of the respondents states to have visited Rechtwijzer once or twice (see Figure 26). Note that a substantial amount of the respondents (47.1%) visited the website more than once and seemed to come back, possibly to find links or reread information.

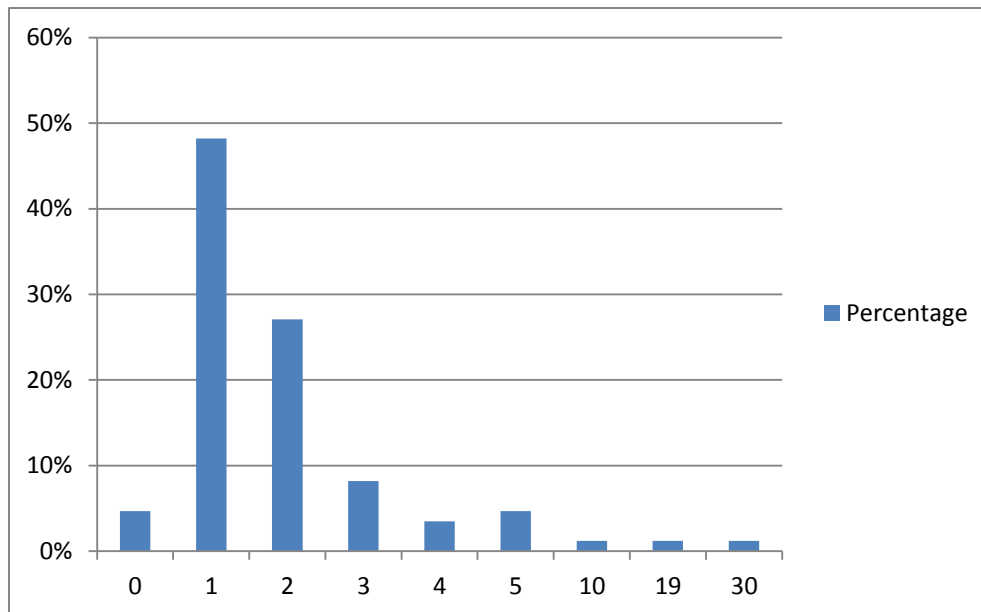


Figure 26. *Frequencies in use of Rechtwijzer*

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group gave an average answer of 5.07 when asked if they would visit the website again, and an average answer of 5.14 when asked if they would recommend the website to others. These alternative indicators of user satisfaction rates show a positive evaluation of Rechtwijzer, and a positive intention to use the website again (see Figure 27).

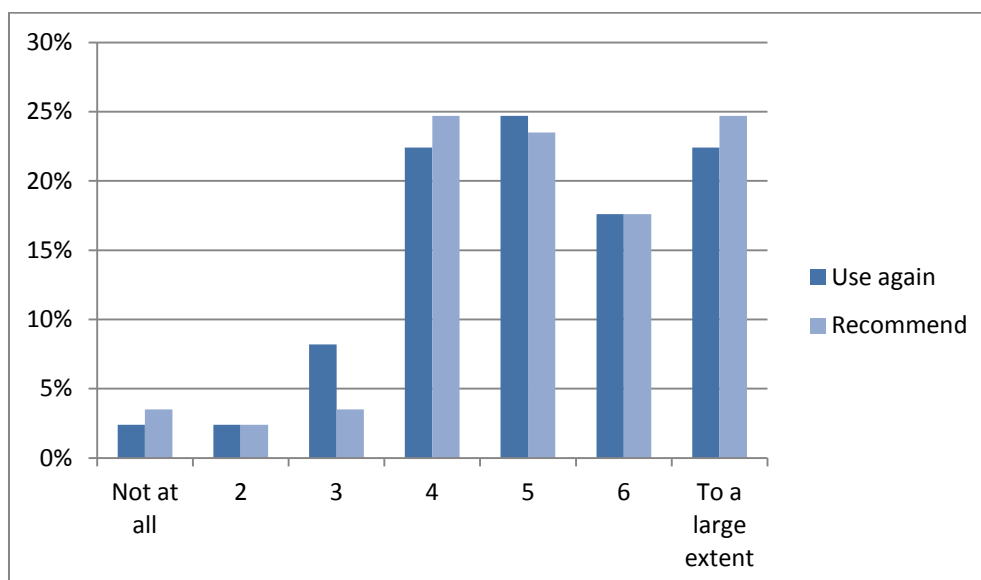


Figure 27. *Intention to use again and intention to recommend*

Rechtwijzer tools

As can be seen in Figure 28, the results show that more than one third (30.6%) of the respondents would use the 'extra information' (with information on rules and procedures in consumer conflicts) again. The 'form for creating a letter to the seller'¹¹ would be used again by 22.4% of the respondents. Overall, respondents were less determined to use the 'help in preparing conversations with the seller' again (12.9%). A relatively large part of the respondents was not familiar with the provided tools.

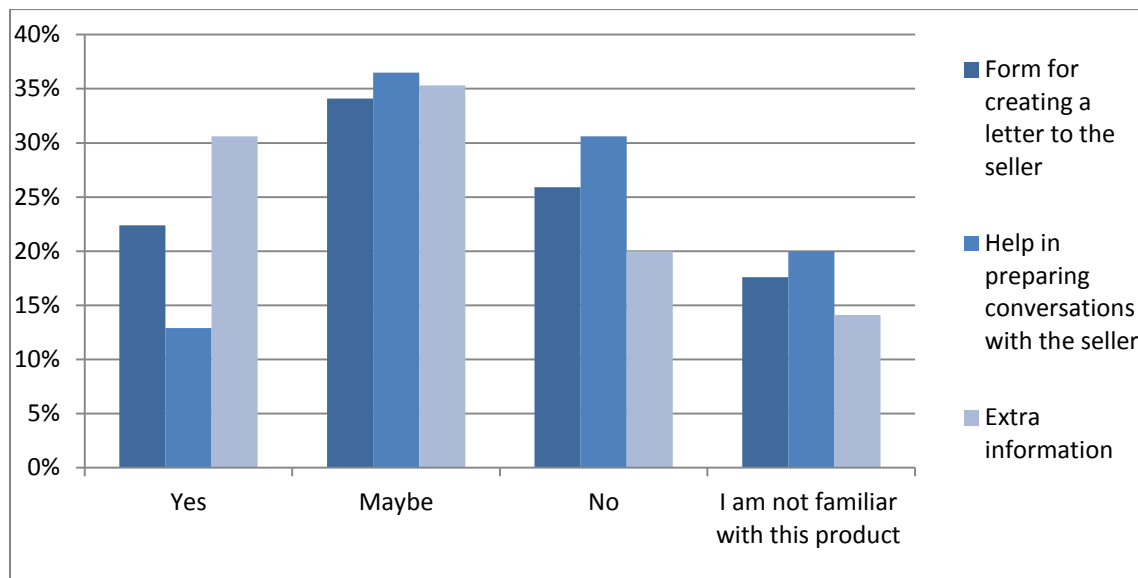


Figure 28. Use of tools *Rechtwijzer*

Advice

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the *Rechtwijzer* group gave an average answer of 4.38 when asked to what extent they perceived the advice as attainable, and an average answer of 4.25 when asked if they had the intention to follow the advice. Respondents indicated the extent to which they had faith in the given advice with an average answer of 4.49. Figure 29 shows that all three questions were answered modestly positively. Only a small number of people perceived the given advice to be unattainable and untrustworthy and was thus not inclined to follow the given advice.

¹¹ The 'form for creating a letter to the seller' is a tool *Rechtwijzer* offers. It automatically creates a letter concerning their conflict that consumers can send to a seller, by asking a limited amount of questions regarding their conflict.

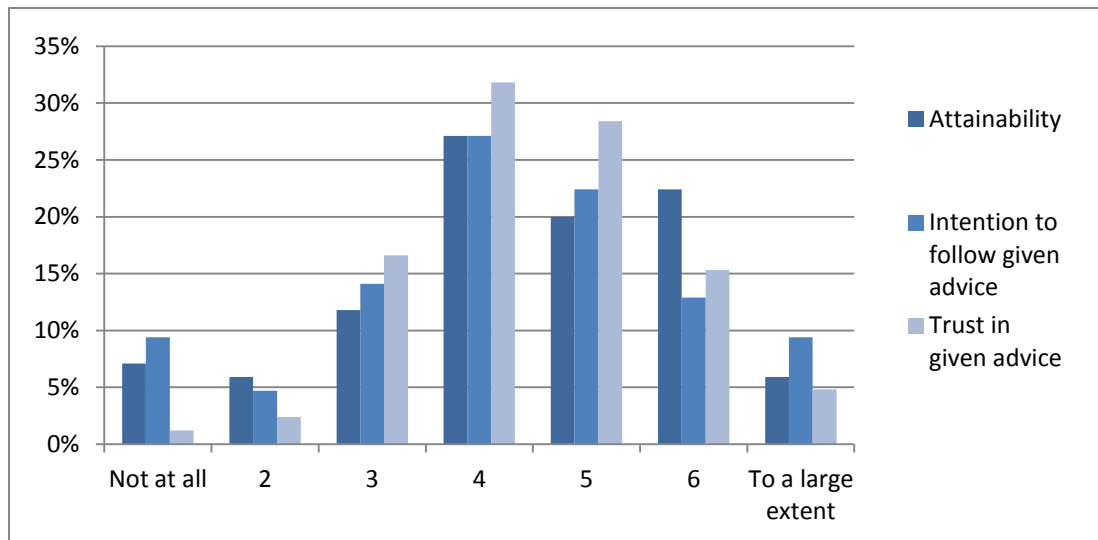


Figure 29. *Quality of given advice*

3.2.2 Individuals

In the following sections we will describe the seven core questions of the 7-i-model.

Knowledge about consumer conflicts

Only a small part of the Rechtwijzer group indicated to have experienced a consumer conflict before (15.0%). This means that for the majority, the level of prior knowledge about consumer conflicts was probably quite low.

Self-efficacy

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 6 (to a large extent), the general self-efficacy level of the Rechtwijzer group was 3.92, indicating that they had a moderate level of general self-efficacy. Average self-efficacy in relation to the consumer conflict was 4.05. This difference of 0.13 was not significant.

In the first post-test, the Rechtwijzer group reported their level of self-efficacy related to the consumer conflict with an average answer of 3.93. This slight decrease with respect to the first measurement was not significant, meaning the level of perceived self-efficacy did not change in the period between both tests.

When asked directly whether their level of self-efficacy had changed, the Rechtwijzer group answered with an average of 3.44, which means respondents perceive their self-efficacy to have changed only slightly (see Figure 30). However, it is interesting to see that the majority of the respondents did feel some improvement in their self-efficacy, whilst this improvement did not show when analysing the indirect measurement of self-efficacy change. It might be that using Rechtwijzer, thinking about the conflict, and being presented with a step by step clear and clickable action plan which explains procedures, shows what actions can be taken, and where to get help, gives Rechtwijzer users a short term experience of higher self-efficacy which dissipates quickly after the step by step plan is no longer fresh in their memory. This would explain why respondents indicate to experience a positive change in their self-efficacy when asked directly, although this was not reflected

in the difference between before and after measurements of self-efficacy. When comparing these results to the results in the divorce section, it becomes evident that respondents in the divorce section perceived more self-efficacy and more self-efficacy change. Whereas almost none of the visitors to the Rechtwijzer section on divorce (21.4%) reported no changes in their self-efficacy (scores of 1 or 2), 78.2% of the visitors to the consumer section did.

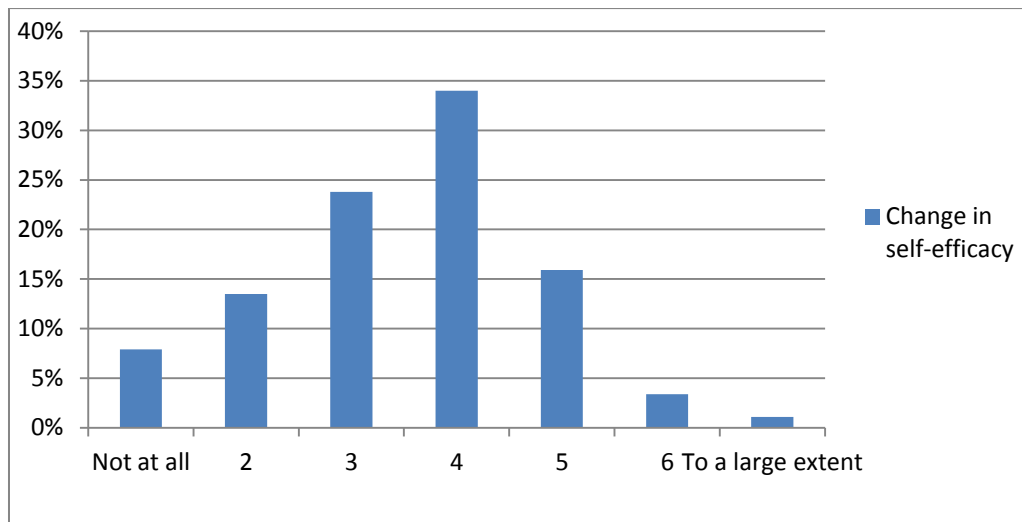


Figure 30. *Self-efficacy change*

3.2.3 Interdependence

Certainty about being right

On a scale from 1 (insecure) to 5 (very secure), respondents were very confident to be in the right about their claims towards the vendor (average answer of 4.30).

*Legal expenses insurance*¹²

More than a third of the Rechtwijzer group (34.8%) indicated to have legal expenses insurance, meaning slightly less than two-third (65,2%) did not.

A large part of the control group (63.0%) had legal expenses insurance. This is a significantly larger portion than in the Rechtwijzer group, and suggests that costless or relatively low-priced information resources and aid bodies, such as Rechtwijzer, are important alternatives to legal expenses insurance.

¹² Legal expenses insurance is not relevant for divorces, since such insurance does not cover legal expenses made in a divorce.

Conflict ended or ongoing

A large part of the respondents (38.6%) reported in the first post-test that their conflict was solved or had ended without a solution. Percentages in each category were comparable between the Rechtwijzer group and the control group and can be found in Table 4.

State	Rechtwijzer group	Control group
Still ongoing	56 (63.6%)	368 (61.0%)
Solved	14 (15.9%)	130 (21.6%)
Ended, but not solved	18 (20.4%)	105 (17.4%)
Total	88	603

Table 4. *Current state of the conflict*

3.2.4 Issues

Type of product

The majority of the consumer conflicts of the Rechtwijzer group were about new products (72.7%). This means that almost a third of the conflicts were about second-hand products (27.3%). The Rechtwijzer group most frequently purchased the product either online (47.7%) or at a shop or market stall (34.1%) (see Figure 31).

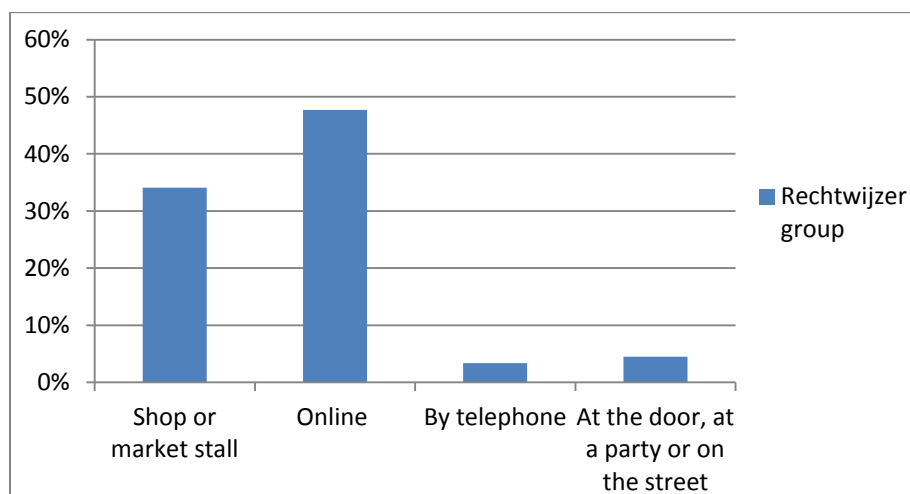


Figure 31. *Purchasing*

The size of the company involved varied from a small company to a large company. A significant part of the Rechtwijzer group did not answer this question (23.9%). However, almost half of the Rechtwijzer group indicated to have a conflict with a small company (44.3%) (see Figure 32). This could be because a considerable amount of respondents bought second-hand products or products from individuals via the internet. The rest of the respondents had a conflict with either a middle-sized company (11.4%) or a large company (20.5%).

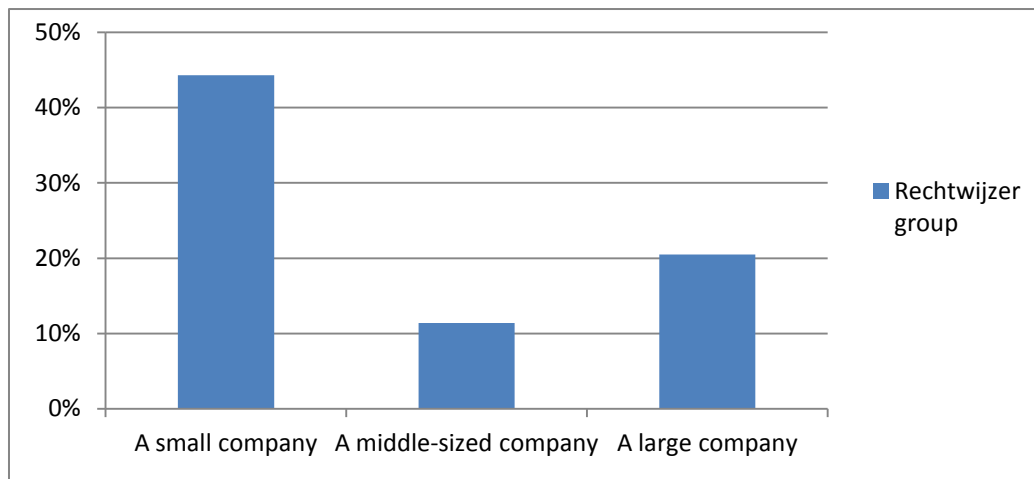
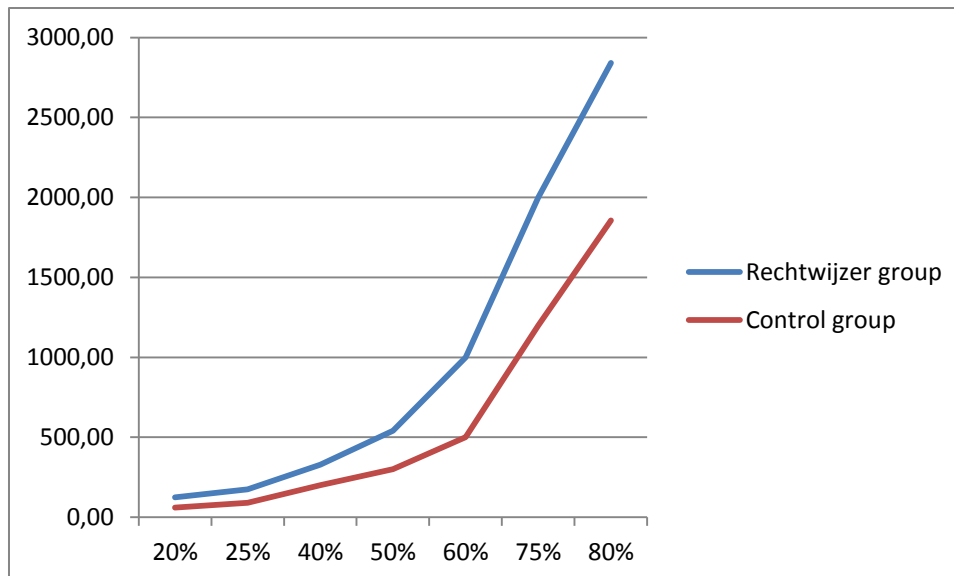


Figure 32. *Size of the company involved*

The control group differed significantly from the Rechtwijzer group when it comes to the size of the company involved and whether or not the product was second-hand. Results showed that, overall, the control group dealt with bigger companies than the Rechtwijzer group, but their conflicts also involved more second-hand products.

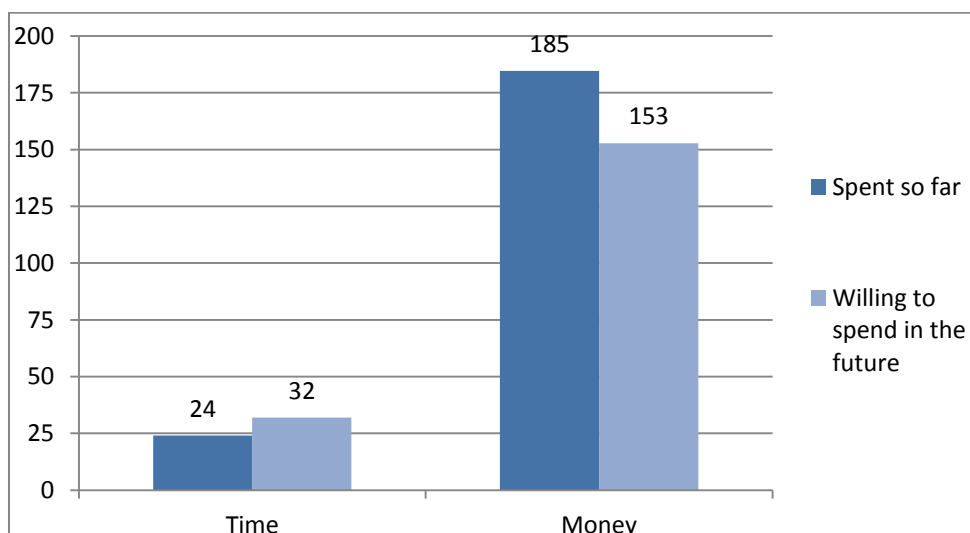
Financial stakes

The average amount of money involved in the conflicts of the Rechtwijzer group was €2.727. The amount mostly ranged from €0 to €35.000, but there was one outlier of €130.000. Of the Rechtwijzer respondents, 75% indicated to deal with an amount of money between €0 and €2.000 (see Figure 33). A total of 10% had a conflict in which more than €5.000 was at stake and in 5% of the cases this was more than €10.000. On the other side of the range, 46% of respondents had a conflict involving less than €500, and in 18% of the cases less than €100 was at stake. These results show that Rechtwijzer visitors mostly had conflicts in which relatively low amounts of money were at stake but that some respondents were dealing with high stakes conflicts, in which large amounts of money were involved. The average amount of money involved in conflicts of the control group was not significantly different, but 75% had a conflict involving less than €1.000, meaning there were more conflicts involving lower amounts.

Figure 33. *Financial stakes*

Efforts

The results shown in Figure 34, where time is presented in hours and money in Euro's, illustrate that respondents in the Rechtwijzer group were willing to spend more time on their conflict in the future, than they had done so far. However, they were not willing to spend as much money in the future as they had done to that point. Notably, on average respondents are not willing to spend much money on their conflict, especially compared to the average amount of money involved, but they are willing to spend a lot of time to solve the problem.

Figure 34. *Efforts*

Importance of a solution

On a scale from 1 (unimportant) to 5 (very important), respondents in the Rechtwijzer group indicated to find it very important to solve their problem (average answer of 4.61). This implies that dependence of the buyer on the vendor is high, since achieving a solution for the problem involves both the

consumer and the vendor as they both have to accept made agreements, for example about replacement or reparation of a faulty product.

3.2.5 Institutions

Social support

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), respondents perceive a relatively high level of social support (average answer of 5.53).

No one from the Rechtwijzer group indicated to perceive an extremely low level social support (a score between 1 and 2) and only 7.3% perceive a relatively low level of social support (a score between 2 and 3). These results show that respondents dealing with a consumer conflict experience notably more social support than respondents dealing with a divorce.

The control group was comparable. Only when considering respondents that had already finished their conflict, a significant difference between the control group and the Rechtwijzer group was found. Respondents in the Rechtwijzer group that had already finished their conflict experienced more social support than respondents in the control group that had already finished their conflict.

3.2.6 Interventions

Use of third parties

Results show that at the time of their Rechtwijzer visit, the majority of the Rechtwijzer group (65.2%) had not (yet) consulted a third party. When respondents did seek the help of a third party, they approached, on average, two third parties. As shown in Figure 35, the Juridisch Loket (Legal Counter)¹³ was approached most often (16.4%), whilst none of the respondents had contacted a mediator.

¹³ The Juridisch Loket/Legal Counter is a Dutch organization financed by the Legal Aid Board, which provides free legal advice for all citizens, especially those with low incomes.

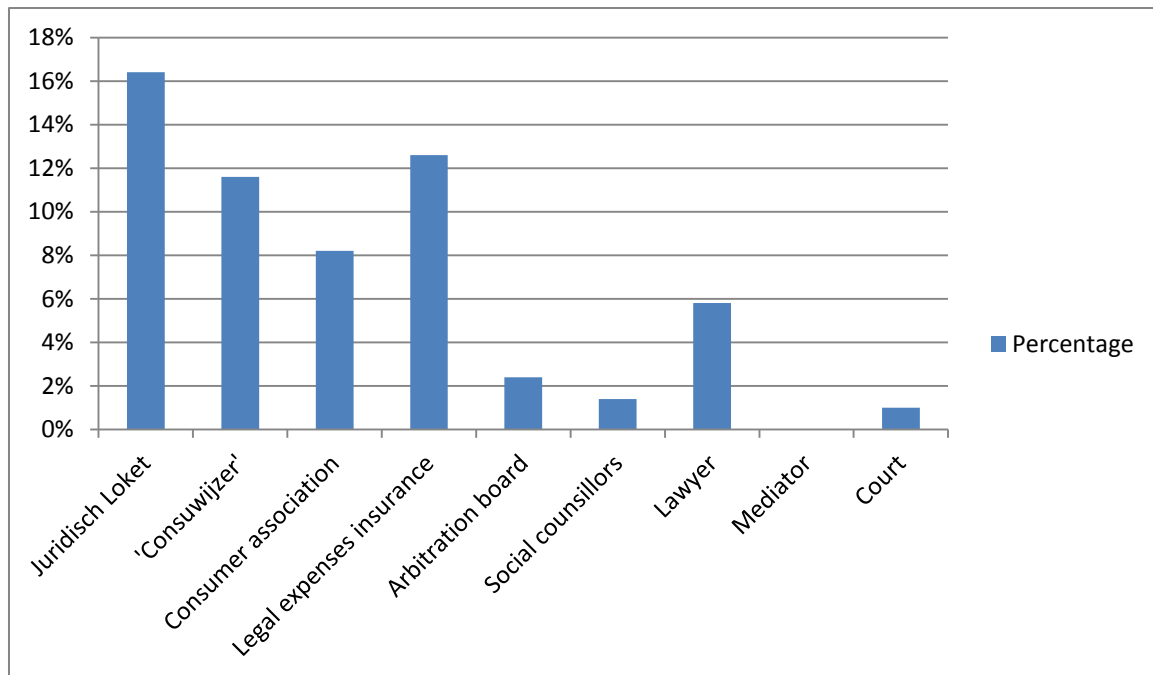


Figure 35. *Third party help*

Having legal expenses insurance appears to have a significant influence on which third parties people approach. Respondents with legal expenses insurance were relatively less inclined (9.7%) to ask help of the Juridisch Loket than respondents who did not have this insurance (20.0%). Whereas people with legal expenses insurance might ask their insurance company for information, the Juridisch Loket provides similar help for people without legal expenses insurance. As expected, of respondents with legal expenses insurance, 29.2% had contacted their insurance company. Only 3.7% of those without insurance had contacted an insurance company.

Need for a legal professional

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), when asked to what extent they would like the help of a legal professional or expert in their conflict, the Rechtwijzer group gave an average answer of a 5.16. However, a significant difference was found between respondents who had and respondents who had not ended their conflict. Respondents who had not yet finished their conflict felt a higher need, namely an average of 5.55, for assistance from a legal expert than respondents that had already finished their conflict, namely an average of 4.47 (see Figure 36).

The control group reported a much lower average preference (3.36) for involvement of a legal expert than the Rechtwijzer group.

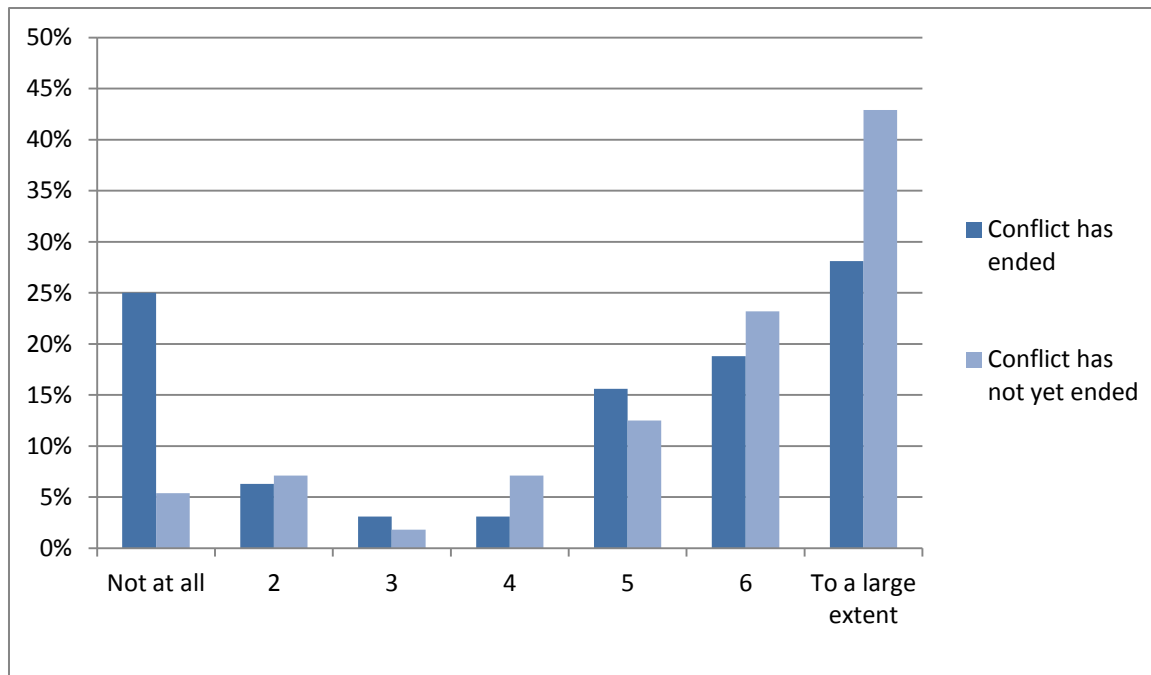


Figure 36. *Need for a legal professional*

Needs for help

With an average of 5.71 on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent) the need for problem-focused empowering help was significantly higher than the need for social-emotional help with an average of 4.26. The control group felt a significantly lower need for problem-focused empowering help, namely an average of 5.11, than the Rechtwijzer group.

Female respondents (5.86) indicated a higher need for problem-focused empowering help than male respondents (5.53). There was no significant difference in the need for social-emotional help between female and male respondents.

3.2.7 Interactions

Communication with vendor

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group reported a very low amount of mutual trust between them and the seller of the product (average of 2.51). Almost half of the Rechtwijzer group (45.9%) indicated to experience no to a very low amount of mutual trust (a score between 1 and 2).

On a scale from 1 (almost no contact) to 7 (a lot of contact), the Rechtwijzer group indicated to have a moderate amount of contact at the moment of responding, namely an average of 4.07, but estimated to have much less contact in the future, namely an average of 1.75.

In the first post-test, the Rechtwijzer group answered the same question with an average of 2.81. This was a significant difference compared to the pre-test, meaning the amount of contact with the vendor decreased considerably (-1.26) in the period between both tests. The same analysis was done for the control group, which showed that they experienced a significant decrease in the amount of

contact with the vendor as well (-0.74). The difference between the Rechtwijzer and control groups was explained by a difference in those who had already solved their conflict at the time of the first post-test. Respondents in the Rechtwijzer group who had already solved their conflict, indicated to have had significantly more contact with the vendor of their product (3.50) than respondents in the control group who had already solved their conflict (2.59). This might indicate an effect of Rechtwijzer, which could have incited consumers to talk to or write to the vendor in order to find a solution.

In the first post-test, respondents were asked how they would characterize the communication with the vendor of their product. They could describe the communication using 6 two-sided scales ranging from -2 (negative/low quality) to +2 (positive/high quality). The Rechtwijzer group gave an assessment of their communication with the vendor -1, which is fairly negative.

Steps taken

The majority of the Rechtwijzer group (39.8%) had already sent a letter to the vendor, but had not yet sent their case to the Consumer Complaints Boards. Compared to the control group (26.7%), more respondents in the Rechtwijzer group sent a letter to the vendor, possibly because Rechtwijzer offers a special tool to create such a letter.

3.2.8 Implications

Satisfaction

In the Rechtwijzer group, respondents were generally slightly unsatisfied with how the conflict process was going. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), respondents in the Rechtwijzer group who had not finished their conflict yet gave an average answer of 2.27 when asked how satisfied they were with process. This was significantly different from the answer of respondents in the Rechtwijzer group that had already finished their conflict. They gave an average answer of 3.00. The control group showed a similar pattern, namely respondents that had already finished their conflict were more satisfied with the process than respondents that had not. For respondents whose conflicts were ongoing, there was no difference between the control group, who gave an average of 2.43, and the Rechtwijzer group, who gave an 2.27. However, respondents in the control group who had already finished their conflict gave an average answer of 3.85 when asked how satisfied they were with the process. This was significantly higher than respondents in the Rechtwijzer group who had already finished their conflict, since they gave an average answer of 3.00. The exact results are presented once more in Figure 37.

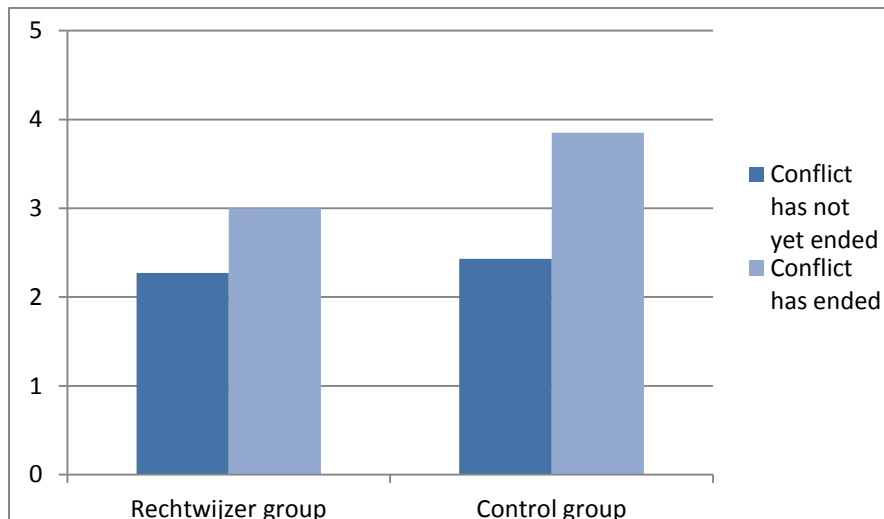


Figure 37. *Level of satisfaction*

Level of stress

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to a large extent), the Rechtwijzer group reported an average stress level of 4.57. This means they perceived a moderate amount of stress during their consumer conflict. A total of 23% of the Rechtwijzer group indicated to experience very high levels of stress, namely a score between 6 and 7.

In the first post-test, the Rechtwijzer group indicated their level of stress with an average of 3.83. There was no significant difference between respondents that had and respondents that had not yet finished their conflict. When examining the difference scores between the first and second measurement, this difference between both measurements proved to be significant, indicating level of stress of the Rechtwijzer group decreased considerably (-0.73).

The same analysis was done for the control group. Respondents in the control group who had already finished their conflict gave an average answer of 2.68 when asked for their level of stress. This was significantly less than respondents in the control group who had not finished their conflict yet, since they gave an average answer of 3.23 (see Figure 38).

To see whether these results could be characterised as a difference of Rechtwijzer, we compared the control group to the Rechtwijzer group. These comparisons showed no significant results, meaning the decrease in level of stress was not significantly different for the control group compared to the Rechtwijzer group (see Figure 38). Perhaps the reason that the perceived level of stress decreased for both groups might be that merely being heard, venting or reflecting on the conflict, by filling in the questionnaire, already offers some form of emotional help and therefore reduces the level of stress. This makes it difficult to purely measure the effect of Rechtwijzer, but indicates that being heard could be an important factor in decreasing stress levels.

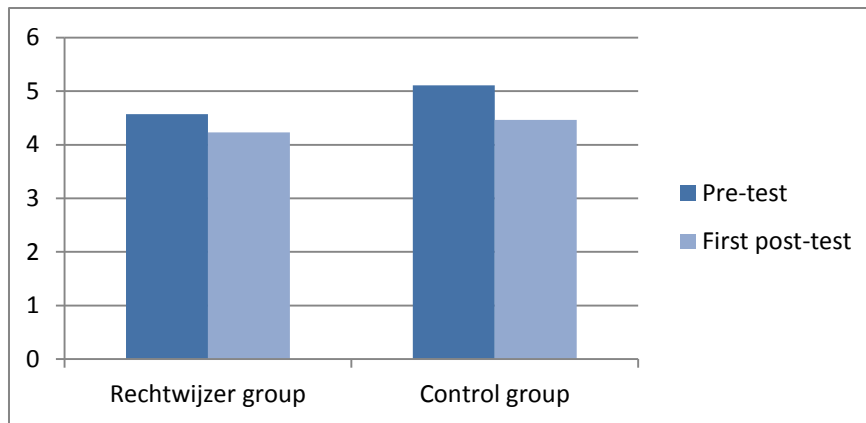


Figure 38. *Perceived levels of stress*

Level of escalation

The average level of conflict escalation of respondents in the Rechtwijzer group was 2.83 (on a scale from 1 to 5), which means that their conflicts were moderately escalated. We also asked whether the problems in the conflict were increasing or decreasing, with the help of a 5-point scale ranging from 'much smaller' (1) to 'much larger' (5). The average answer was a 3.54, indicating the problems of the Rechtwijzer group were getting larger over time. In the Rechtwijzer group, 6.8% experienced a highly escalated conflict, and 10.6% indicated that their problems were rapidly escalating. When comparing the Rechtwijzer group to the control group, results show that the conflicts of the latter group are less escalated than the conflicts of the Rechtwijzer group, both in phase and direction of the conflict.

In the first post-test, results showed that the Rechtwijzer group indicated to be in a significantly less escalated phase in their conflict, with an average answer of 2.58. The direction of the escalation differed between respondents that had already finished their conflict in the first post-test, who gave an average answer of 2.28, and respondents that had not, who gave an average answer of 3.16. However, both experienced significantly less escalation compared to the pre-test.

The control group experienced a significant decrease of escalation in their conflicts as well. However, there was a significant difference in the size of the decrease between respondents that had already finished their conflict (-0.70) and those who had not (-0.22). Respondents who had already finished their conflict indicated they were in a significantly less escalated phase in their conflict than in the pre-test. This difference was not significant for respondents who had not finished their conflict yet.

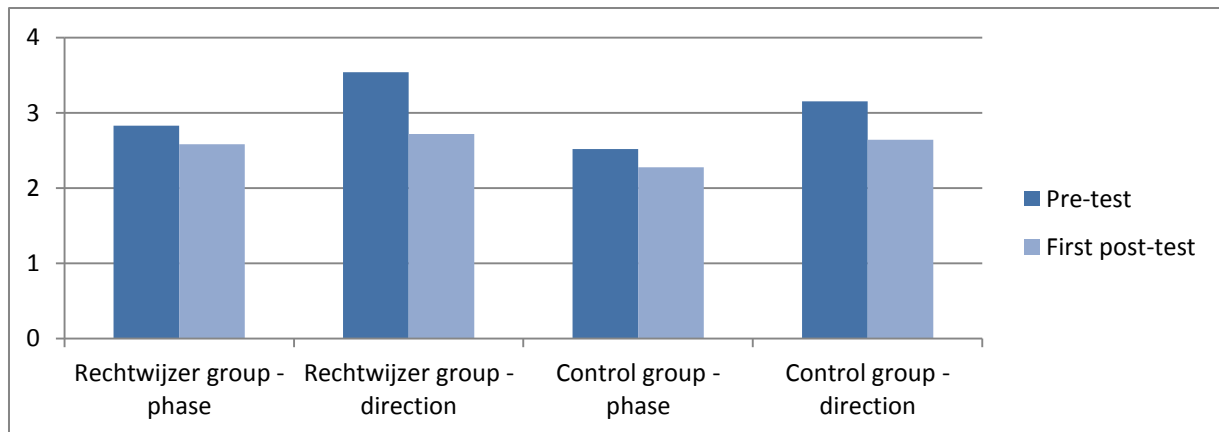


Figure 39. *Levels of escalation*

Comparing these results to the results in the divorce section shows that respondents with a consumer conflict did experience a less escalated phase in their conflict in the first post-test, whereas respondents dealing with a divorce did not. This might be because a substantial amount of the consumer conflicts take less time to solve than divorces, making it possible to already reach a less escalated phase after the short amount of time between both tests.

3.2.9 Conclusion

To conclude, the Rechtwijzer group gave a positive evaluation of Rechtwijzer. Respondents graded the website very positively with an average grade of 7.29, were inclined to recommend the website to others and were positive about the given advice. Respondents seemed to come back to the website and were willing to use the website again. We measured an increase in self-efficacy when measured directly, as opposed to indirectly, which suggests a short term effect of Rechtwijzer on self-efficacy beliefs related to the conflict process.

The visitors of Rechtwijzer's consumer section were dealing with relatively high stakes conflicts, involving large amounts of money. Although the majority of the respondents had not asked for the help of a third party yet, the Rechtwijzer group indicated a significantly higher need for the help of a third party than the control group. The most frequently contacted third party was the Juridisch Loket. In the Rechtwijzer group, the majority of the respondents did not have legal expenses insurance. As expected, those with legal expenses insurance often used this resource to gain information or help in their conflict. In the Rechtwijzer group, there were more uninsured respondents than in the control group. This suggests that Rechtwijzer fills an important gap. The Juridisch Loket and Rechtwijzer thus seemed to succeed in providing information and legal aid to their target groups, for instance people with low incomes.

We also looked at risk factors in consumer conflicts, such as stress and escalation. The consumer conflicts in this study tended to generate a considerable amount of stress. About a quarter of the respondents experienced extremely high levels of stress. Participants reported a decrease in stress between the first and second measurement. This could have been an effect of participating in the study, which could have generated an opportunity for venting, reflection or have created the effect

of being heard (by the researchers), but will have to be looked into further. Also, the conflicts in the Rechtwijzer group were significantly more escalated than in the control group. However, this level of escalation did decrease during the period between the two measuring moments. Respondents indicated a higher need for problem-focused empowering help than for social-emotional help.

The Rechtwijzer group and the control group did not differ on most important variables, which means we can compare these groups to test for effects of Rechtwijzer as we did for the short term effects in this report. Results did indicate, however, that the Rechtwijzer group might be dealing with more escalated conflicts than the control group.

4 GENERAL CONCLUSION

The results presented in this report were part of a research project on online interventions in legal conflicts. A total of 1553 respondents dealing with either divorce conflicts or consumer conflicts filled in three digital questionnaires. The goal of this report was to give a user-evaluation of the Dutch website Rechtwijzer.nl and a characterisation of Rechtwijzer visitors, as well as to examine developments of legal conflicts. The results presented in this report include data from the first two measuring moments. The final report will also include the third measuring moment.

Overall, the results showed that Rechtwijzer visitors positively evaluated the website. Both respondents dealing with a divorce and respondents dealing with a consumer conflict gave the website a very positive grade (respectively a 7.51 and a 7.29) and would use the website again. They were positive about the given advice and would thus recommend the website to others. Strikingly, respondents dealing with a consumer conflict felt a lower level of self-efficacy, and thus felt less capable of influencing the conflict process and solving the conflict themselves, compared to respondents in a divorce. For both groups, results suggest a positive short term effect of Rechtwijzer on self-efficacy beliefs, related to the conflict process.

Another interesting result is that Rechtwijzer visitors were relatively in the beginning of their conflict process. Both in divorce and in consumer conflicts, respondents were in an early stage of their process, and mostly had not consulted a third party yet. This difference with the control group might indicate that Rechtwijzer is especially useful in the early stages of a legal conflict, when parties are orienting themselves and are gaining information about the conflict process.

Results showed that especially respondents with very complex conflicts or high needs for legal aid visited Rechtwijzer. The majority of the conflicts was characterized by high levels of conflict-related stress and escalation, and involved high stakes, such as large amounts of money or additional concerns, for example concerns about children involving child protective services. Conflict parties with risk factors such as low income or education were also frequent visitors of Rechtwijzer.

In the divorce condition, most respondents were married and had children under the age of 21. This made them more dependent on their (ex-)partner, increasing the need to end the relationship on good terms. Moreover, participants going through a divorce experienced a high level of dependence asymmetry, meaning they felt more dependent on their (ex-)partner than vice versa. Women were more likely to be disadvantaged in terms of dependence than men. The high conflict stakes were also reflected in the relatively high percentage of respondents who reported additional concerns besides their divorce, mostly financial concerns such as an impending decline in income or serious debts.

Consumer conflicts generally involved a large amount of money (on average €2727). The majority of the respondents in the Rechtwijzer group did not have legal expenses insurance. This meant that costless or relatively low-priced information resources and aid bodies, such as Rechtwijzer, seemed especially important to them.

Social support from personal networks is an important predictor of how well individuals are able to cope with conflicts (Abbey, Abramis & Caplan, 1985; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lepore, 1992). Respondents dealing with a consumer conflict felt a higher level of social support from their personal networks than respondents going through a divorce, possibly because social support often comes from social connections that people share with their partner. These connections might become insecure when getting divorced, as people might not want to choose sides (Duffy, 1993; TNS NIPO, 2012). Despite the importance of social support, the importance of problem-focused procedural and informational help aimed at empowering parties cannot be underestimated. Both those in divorce and those in consumer conflicts indicated a higher need for problem-focused help than social-emotional help.

Consumer conflicts showed a decrease in level of escalation between both tests. This pattern was not found for divorce conflicts, most likely because consumer conflicts often take less time to solve and are less likely to reach high levels of conflict escalation.

In both groups, the majority of the respondents had not yet contacted a third party for help. The most frequently contacted third party was the Juridisch Loket. The Juridisch Loket and Rechtwijzer might be important sources of information and legal aid at the start of the conflict process, especially for low income groups.

Taken together, these results indicate that particularly people dealing with serious conflicts, which are characterized by high levels of escalation and stress, seem to find their way to Rechtwijzer. In addition, respondents evaluated Rechtwijzer very positively. First results suggest modest effects of Rechtwijzer on self-efficacy beliefs. This indicates that Rechtwijzer is a source of legal aid and support, especially at the outset of conflicts and for low income groups.

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