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Double standards in identifying child abuse: How stereotypes and uncertainty affect teachers' interpretation

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**Universiteit
Leiden**

Double standards in identifying child abuse

**How stereotypes and uncertainty affect teachers'
interpretation**

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For the master's degree in Public Administration at Leiden University, I did research in the period February-June 2021. For my master's thesis, I researched how primary school teachers interpret child abuse signals and how double standards and uncertainty influence their judgement.

I really enjoyed conducting this research and learned a lot during the process of writing my thesis. I have conducted interviews among sixteen primary school teachers, each of whom I would like to thank for the time they set aside for this interview and their effort to carefully answer my questions. Without them, I would not have been able to conduct this research.

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Samira Rotteveel

Abstract

Street-level bureaucrats are characterized with discretionary power as a result of which they develop coping mechanisms. Consequently, street-level bureaucrats are often led by stereotypes, which serve in reducing the uncertainty of a situation. Besides, research indicates that street-level bureaucrats tend to use double standards when interpreting signals from citizens of different social classes. However, whether this is limited to uncertain situations remains unknown. This thesis investigates how double standards affect teachers' interpretation of child abuse signals, and how information uncertainty plays a role. A qualitative vignette study is used to investigate how teachers interpret child abuse signals from a high social class family and from a low social class family. In addition, it is investigated how the degree of uncertainty of these signals influences the presumed use of double standards by teachers. The analysis shows that teachers indeed use double standards when interpreting signals of child abuse. When the family belongs to a low social class, the teachers are inclined to take more drastic measures than when the family belongs to a high social class. This difference gets smaller as the degree of uncertainty decreases. Moreover, teachers appear to reason differently about a family from a high social class than about a family from a low social class. Teachers also seem to use double standards for uncertainty, as one bruise is seen as an uncertain signal for a family from a high social class and as a more certain signal for a family from a low social class. In addition, the value teachers attach to a child's statement also seems to influence their interpretation of uncertainty. Finally, teachers experience various obstacles that complicate identifying and reporting child abuse, as a result of which they experience even more uncertainty. This thesis contributes to academic literature on street-level bureaucrats and the double standard theory.

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1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the research topic and works towards the research question. The research question is explained, after which it is briefly explained how this question is answered. Subsequently, the scientific and social relevance of this thesis is explained. Finally, a reading guide is provided.

1.1 Background information

Over 119.000 children are abused every year in the Netherlands (CBS, 2019; Het klokhuis, 2013). This concerns physical and emotional neglect and abuse, sexual abuse, or witnessing violence between parents. According to the Dutch Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport, an average of one child in every classroom is neglected or abused at home, and each year dozens do not survive (Elings, 2019). A teacher may suspect that a child's family deals with domestic violence or child abuse (Kaspers, 2018). After all, during class they can receive signals that a child is dealing with child abuse at home, for example when the child acts different than normal. By reporting their suspicions of child abuse or neglect, teachers can make an essential contribution to the early detection and prevention of abuse (Goebbels et al., 2008). The Mandatory Reporting Code Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Act lays down the obligations of professionals who work with children (Kaspers, 2018). This law has been in force since 2013 and lists various steps to be taken in the event of a suspicion of child abuse. Since 2019, all steps are mandatory for professionals working with children. Part of the national reporting code is that every school complies with these national laws and, therefore, must draw up its school-specific reporting code (Kaspers, 2018; Onderwijsgeschillen, 2019).

Since 2019, every school, care institution, and municipality must report a serious suspicion of child abuse to the 'Safe at Home' organisation¹. The aim is to discover victims at an earlier stage and provide help faster (Elings, 2019). However, despite these stricter reporting codes teachers rarely report child abuse. The number of reports from teachers remains remarkably low. According to the CBS (the Dutch central statistical office), this concerns only four percent of all reports in 2019.

Multiple studies show that teachers are often reluctant to report their suspicions (Goebbels et al., 2008; Greytak, 2009; Kenny, 2001). However, when they do, mostly it concerns cases of low social class children (Lefebvre et al., 2017). Research indicates that there are significantly more reports of child abuse of children from a low social class than of children from a high social class. Moreover, belonging to a low social class seems to be seen in society as a risk factor for child abuse (Lefebvre et al., 2017; Slachtofferwijzer, 2021). As a result, one could say it seems high social class gets in the way of child protection (Nicolas, 2015). The affluent status and assertiveness of upper social class parents pose a challenge to professionals working with children (Nicolas, 2015). For example, these professionals perceive a father who is a lawyer or a company director as powerful and intimidating. In the child protection arena, it is relatively unusual to be working with a family that is

¹ Translated from Dutch. Original: Veilig thuis. This is the Dutch national organization where child abuse must be reported.

considered to be high-class (Nicolas, 2015). However, that is not to say that high social class parents do not abuse their children. These children simply are identified as abused less often (Nicolas, 2015). Teachers, therefore, seem to use double standards in the interpretation of child abuse signals (Foschi, 2000). This means that child abuse signals concerning a child of a high social class are interpreted differently compared to a child of a low social class, even when it concerns the same information.

Street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) are public service employees who have direct contact with citizens in the course of their work, and who have considerable discretion in the execution of their jobs (Lipsky 1980). SLBs are often forced to find ways to make abstract policies work for concrete situations and problems, while having limitations in terms of time, energy, financial resources and information (Bartels, 2013). Lipsky (1980) showed that in response, SLBs develop coping mechanisms, which take the form of mental shortcuts such as stereotypes and moral beliefs that categorize clients and often perpetuate unequal treatment. According to Lipsky (1980), SLBs shape policy to a certain extent, through the meaning they assign to it and the interpretation they give to policy and its implementation. The implementation of public policy depends on how SLBs interpret it and exercise discretionary judgment (Zacka, 2017). SLBs are often forced to work with rules and legislation that are vague. In combination with a high degree of discretion and room for interpretation, vague rules and legislation often result in high uncertainty for the SLBs (Raaphorst, 2018). Different forms of uncertainty can be distinguished. However, this research focuses solely on information uncertainty.

The street-level bureaucrats, in this case the teachers, are supposed to be the mandated reporters of child abuse. However, social class categorization could create tension between the expected and actual outcomes of child abuse policies (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). Teachers are often one of the most important social contacts that children have, making it essential that they have the ability to identify child abuse. As mentioned earlier, teachers' prejudices and opinions about children and their parents are believed to influence their judgment of child abuse signals. Due to high workloads and limited resources, teachers seem to use stereotypes as signals to reduce uncertainty (Lipsky, 1980). This mechanism could result in the use of double standards (Foschi, 2000). However, it remains unclear whether the use of double standards is limited to situations of high uncertainty or whether double standards will continue to play a significant role in clearer situations.

1.2 Research question and approach

This research combines insights from two research fields: the double standards theory and street-level bureaucracy. The combination of these two research fields is used to answer the research question, which is as follows:

“How does uncertainty affect primary school teachers' use of double standards in interpreting signals of child abuse?”

This research question is answered based on a qualitative vignette study. Sixteen in-depth interviews are used to determine how teachers interpret signals of child abuse. The vignette study determines whether the same signals are interpreted differently when the family belongs to a high or low social class. Therefore, the respondents are divided into two groups, one with low social class vignettes and one with high social class vignettes, after which both responses are compared. In addition, each respondent is presented with two vignettes that vary in degree of uncertainty. Based on the teachers' responses, it can be determined how teachers interpret signals from low social class and high social class families and how uncertainty could influence this.

1.3 Social and scientific relevance

In this section the social and scientific relevance are clarified. As aforementioned, street-level bureaucrats often have to make quick decisions with little information in which stereotypes can play a significant role. Stereotypes act as tools to reduce uncertainty in ambiguous situations in which SLBs often find themselves (Lipsky, 1980). The consequences of stereotypes in the discretionary decisions of street-level bureaucrats can be enormous. The use of these stereotypes by SLBs often results in the disadvantage of one population group compared to another population group (Lipsky, 1980). However, the knowledge about how these stereotype mechanisms work and when they are triggered is limited (Harrits, 2018). This study, therefore, contributes to the knowledge about stereotype mechanisms and how this affects the interpretation of signals by street-level bureaucrats.

Several studies show that children from low social classes are over-represented in the reports of child abuse (Lefebvre et al., 2017; Slachtofferwijzer, 2021). A serious case review conducted by London researchers concluded that parents' social class influenced when and which signs of child abuse teachers took seriously (Nicolas, 2015). This study found that teachers had difficulty recognizing child abuse because they struggled to focus on the child as they focused more on the parent's social background. Perceptions and assumptions about the social class of the parents and the attitude of the mother and father towards the teachers appear to have a significant influence on the approach that teachers took towards signals (Nicolas, 2015). However, this study consists of one case, which means that a vignette study on this matter fills a gap in the existing literature. In addition, recent international research shows that the number of child abuse reports by teachers in England is remarkably higher than in the Netherlands (Elings, 2019). This raises the question of how such stereotyped processes play a role in the assessment of child abuse signals by Dutch teachers.

Previous studies have shown that social typologies serve as shortcuts that influence the interpretation of signals (Harrits, 2018; Harrits & Møller, 2014; Raaphorst, Groeneveld & Van de Walle, 2017; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018). These studies involve various types of street-level bureaucrats, including teachers. A vignette study shows that teachers make decisions based on social stereotypes when categorizing citizens (Harrits & Møller, 2014). Another vignette study has also indicated that social class stereotypes are activated among teachers (Harrits, 2018). However, this

study demonstrates no difference in the activation of stereotypes between teachers who live in social homogeneous or heterogeneous communities, while this was the case with other types of SLBs (Harrits, 2018). Thus, the use of stereotypes by teachers does not seem to be influenced by the degree of social heterogeneity in their community, meaning that knowledge about which factors contribute to the use of stereotypes by teachers remains limited. This research fills the gap in the literature by examining the role of uncertainty in this.

Additionally, in order to achieve ambiguous and conflicting goals with limited resources, SLBs often develop coping mechanisms (Lipsky, 1980). One study indicates that teachers' use of stereotypical coping mechanisms is affected by the number of resources, such as time (Andersen & Guul, 2019). In this case, reducing teachers' workload could reduce stereotypical decision-making. Which other contextual factors may influence the activation of stereotypes by teachers remains unclear. A potentially important contextual factor is uncertainty, which is considered one of the primary explanations of why stereotypes are used (Lipsky, 1980; Raaphorst, 2018). By using stereotypes, street-level bureaucrats would try to reduce the degree of uncertainty. Therefore, a high degree of uncertainty encourages them to make use of such coping mechanisms (Severijns, 2019).

In addition, there is limited research into teachers' judgment of signals of child abuse in the existing literature on street-level bureaucracy. This also applies to research into the influence of uncertainty on the activation of stereotypes. When stereotypes serve as tools to reduce uncertainty, it is assumed that the use of stereotypes will diminish as the situation becomes clearer (Lipsky, 1980). However, another vignette study indicates that street-level bureaucrats interpret similar signals differently from clients from different social classes (Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018). Stereotypes would, therefore, also affect the standards that SLBs use. These findings align with the double standards theory, which provides a mechanism for differences in the interpretation of similar information. However, whether the use of double standards is limited to uncertain situations, as would be expected in a street-level bureaucracy, has not yet been studied. This study thus fills a gap in the literature. Hopefully, this research can contribute to a higher number of reports of child abuse by Dutch teachers. Understanding how these stereotyped processes work in the minds of teachers could lead to better teacher support in this signalling process.

This thesis will contribute to the understanding of what conditions possibly have an influence on stereotypical decision-making. As aforementioned, the number of reports of child abuse by teachers in the Netherlands is remarkably low. In 2019, this concerned only four percent of all reports (Elings, 2019). By way of comparison: the number of child abuse reports by teachers in England is about 25 percent and in Germany 21 percent of all reports (Elings, 2019). In those countries, the threshold for reporting child abuse for teachers is apparently much lower. Since the number of child abuse reports in the Netherlands is considerably low, this thesis could contribute to a solution to this social problem. This study contributes to understanding how primary school teachers use stereotypes in assessing possible signals of child abuse. Multiple studies show that teachers aren't ready to act as mandated

child abuse reporters, so this research could contribute to better training of these teachers with a focus on the main issues faced by teachers in making such judgments. This could contribute to an improved detection process for child abuse in the Netherlands. This research thus proves its social and scientific relevance.

1.4 Reading guide

In the second chapter of this thesis relevant concepts are further elaborated. This chapter analyses how social class can play a role in a street-level bureaucracy, how uncertainty appears to influence this, and how the double standards theory should be understood in this thesis. Consequently, the intersection between insights from both research fields is highlighted and the expectation of this thesis is determined. The research method is explained in the third chapter, with a closer look at the vignette study. Subsequently, the research findings are discussed in the fourth chapter. Finally, the conclusion answers the research question and discusses how social class plays a role in the interpretation of child abuse signals by teachers and how uncertainty influences this. This final chapter also provides recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter takes a closer look at the theory that forms the guiding principles in this research. First, it analyses how social class can play a role in decision-making by street-level bureaucrats, including teachers. Subsequently, the use of double standards when interpreting child abuse signals is explained. Then it is analysed how uncertainty appears to influence this process. Finally, the expectation of this thesis is determined.

2.1 Street-level bureaucrats

Lipsky (1969) introduced the term street level bureaucrat to refer to all those government and public sector officials who interact with citizens on a daily basis and can have a significant impact on those citizens. Through their daily work, SLBs influence what the government means to citizens and in this way shape the government. Street-level bureaucrats are characterized by discretionary power (Lipsky, 1980). This discretionary power results from the multiple, ambiguous, and often conflicting goals that SLBs must fulfil with limited resources under uncertain and unpredictable circumstances (Zacka, 2017). To do their jobs reasonably and efficiently in a responsive manner, they are expected to exercise discretion and balance competing policy goals. Street-level bureaucrats must apply guidelines that are often vague and ambiguous, often subjecting them to a significant margin of discretion (Bartels, 2013; Lipsky, 2010). That is why they must be sensitive to the demands of the public sector: efficiency, fairness, and responsiveness. Street-level bureaucrats are expected to balance these demands while ensuring the morality of policy implementation (Zacka, 2017).

The discretionary space of street-level bureaucrats allows them to form their own judgment and make decisions based on their own autonomy (Lipsky, 1980; Zacka, 2017). As a result, decisions of street-level bureaucrats are person-dependent, and individual street-level bureaucrats can give substance to their discretion in different ways. In addition to the fact that street-level bureaucrats largely interpret the general rules individually, they also develop their own routines under pressure from multiple requirements and as a result of unclear, contradictory goals and rules (Zacka, 2017). It is argued that street-level bureaucrats compare new situations with known cases and use this to arrive at their moral reasoning in policy implementation (Zacka, 2017). In order to arrive at concrete decisions, SLBs try to identify morally striking similarities and differences in cases. To accomplish the multiple conflicting goals with limited resources, SLBs develop coping mechanisms that simplify reality (Lipsky, 1980).

2.2 Street-level bureaucrats as policymakers

Actual policy implementation and originally formulated policy objectives and rules of government agencies often deviate from each other (Lipsky, 1980). SLBs make policy to a certain extent by giving meaning and substance to the policy and its implementation. Lipsky (1980) attributes this policy-making by SLBs to views that SLBs develop about their work and citizens in order to make policy

manageable and enforceable. Due to the freedom of action that SLBs enjoy in their profession, the implementation of child abuse policy can be guided by the uniqueness of individual SLBs. Policy would, therefore, coincide with the conceptions of policy developed by individual SLBs (Lipsky, 1980). Interpretation in the daily work of SLBs seems inevitable because policy in itself often does not do full justice to the concrete situations with which SLBs, such as teachers, are confronted (Zacka, 2017). Policy is often abstract or vaguely formulated, which, in combination with the fact that citizens' situations are often uncertain, means that teachers are forced to perform their own translation into concrete situations. In order to act responsively in individual cases and unique circumstances, interpretations of the policy are unavoidable in making policy enforceable (Zacka, 2017). The interpretation would be driven by the personal background, values, and beliefs of the SLB. Since the policy interpretation is person-related (Zacka, 2017) and the conceptions of the policy that SLBs develop 'make' the policy (Lipsky, 1980), interpretation seems to play an essential role for teachers when dealing with signs of child abuse. In addition, previous research indicates that suspicion of child abuse often stems from teachers' gut feeling that something is wrong, which would imply that teachers' interpretation of signals is indeed key to identifying child abuse (Stolper et al., 2020).

Thus, policies are shaped during the implementation process by SLBs as they develop routines and shortcuts to perform their day-to-day tasks. When street-level bureaucrats are faced with limited resources, time, or knowledge, they often (un)consciously use coping mechanisms to make quick decisions and implement abstract policies in specific situations (Lipsky, 1980; Tummers et al., 2015). However, coping strategies can lead to discrepancies between policy goals and policy implementation. To manage demand for services, keep clients in line, and spend their time sparingly, SLBs act routinely and simplify reality (Lipsky, 1980). Because SLBs try to control their workload in this way, clients are not approached as individuals but placed in a box (Lipsky, 1980). Clients are narrowed down to a number of characteristics that fit and are then categorized. Because of this method of street-level bureaucrats and the labelling of citizens, there is hardly any attention to the individual circumstances of citizens.

In addition, street-level bureaucrats seem to experience different kinds of uncertainty (Raaphorst, 2018). The type of uncertainty that is considered in this study is information uncertainty. Information uncertainty leaves teachers in the dark about what is happening (Raaphorst, 2018). Uncertainty, in this case, is related to the available information in a situation. Information uncertainty is uncertainty about the weight to be given to the available information or the lack of information (Raaphorst, 2018; Severijns, 2019). In order to still be able to make decisions, SLBs develop mental 'shortcuts' and standardize their working method to keep the uncertainty they experience in terms of the available information manageable. These coping mechanisms will now be explained.

2.2.1 Stereotypes in frontline work

Using stereotypes is a form of coping for SLBs to give meaning to and deal with their work. Stereotypes can activate mental shortcuts in street-level bureaucrats, resulting in irrational choices and bounded rationality. The use of social stereotypes is an important mechanism in shaping the judgments of SLBs (Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Soss et al., 2011). A stereotype is a set of often unconscious beliefs about a group's characteristics, which may or may not be based on facts (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2013). Stereotyping is the attribution of characteristics to someone based on a stereotype. Because of the associative effect of stereotypes, deep-seated prejudices influence SLB's decision making to reduce uncertainty (Tversky & Kahneman, 1972). This leads to the tendency to draw incorrect conclusions from little information. If someone has a group characteristic, they will automatically belong to this group (Tversky & Kahneman, 1972).

Stereotypes can facilitate decision-making on how to act in uncertain situations, which SLBs often have to deal with (Raaphorst, 2018). Societal stereotypes would simplify social life and consequently reduce uncertainty (Bovens et al., 2016). At the same time, these stereotypes evoke group formation in society, which can have negative consequences (de Zwart, 2005). Stereotypes emphasize differences between specific groups, which evokes (unjustified) prejudices (Bovens et al., 2016). The societal stereotype to which citizens belong serves as a frame that influences the interpretation of signals (Verloo, 2009). This means that street-level bureaucrats could interpret the same kind of signals, such as neglect or abuse, differently when citizens belong to a high or low social class (Foschi, 2000; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018). SLBs could thus use social class stereotypes when interpreting information and making decisions (Harrits, 2018).

Simplified assumptions are thus more likely to be activated (unconsciously) when SLBs are confronted with citizens from a particular social background. Street-level bureaucrats' choices seem to be influenced by their unconscious and conscious assumptions about the citizens they turn to for policy action (Soss et al., 2011). These assumptions, developed in cultural discourse, act as common shared cognitive frameworks used by street-level bureaucrats to identify problems. Social class stereotypes support inequality through various routines (Durante & Fiske, 2017). These stereotypes describe people with a lower social status negatively (less competent) and sometimes positively (more warm-hearted than citizens from a high social class). These stereotypes possibly contribute to SLB's use of double standards.

2.3 Double standards theory

The double standards theory is central to this study because it can be used to ascertain whether double standards are used in precisely the same situations when there is a difference in the social class of citizens (Foschi, 2000). It focuses on different interpretations of the same signals. Based on this theory, it can be traced how stereotypes play a role in interpreting child abuse signals by teachers. Since the literature on the use of stereotypes by street-level bureaucrats often focuses on the

uncertainty-reducing function of stereotypes, the double standards theory offers an additional mechanism to the street-level bureaucracy literature. This theory provides an explanation for different standards of SLBs, which would mean that teachers have different standards in interpreting child abuse signals from high social class families than from low social class families. Therefore, the use of stereotypes does not seem to be limited to situations involving a high degree of uncertainty. Thus, according to the double standards theory, SLBs use different standards for low social class citizens than for high social class citizens. In this case, this would mean that no matter how clear the signals are, teachers use different standards in interpreting child abuse signals when the family is of a high or low social class. In short, the double standards theory and the uncertainty-reducing theory are combined in this research.

Double standards are a common form of exclusion in decision-making processes. Double standards make it possible to interpret the same outcome differently using filters (Foschi, 2000). These filters are often based on stereotypes, such as differences between high and low social class citizens. The double standards theory is often used in the context of applying different standards of severity to infer competence depending on who the performers are. In most cases, the difference in status is the basis for the differences between performers (Foschi, 2000). Indication has been found in previous studies for higher standards for citizens of low social classes than for high social class citizens, when both perform at the same level (Raaphorst et al., 2017; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018).

According to the double standards theory, low social status citizens must perform better than high social status citizens in order to be judged equal (Foschi, 2000). As a result of different performance expectations towards low and high social class citizens, different standards for assessing their capabilities are activated. Therefore, the ability of low social class parents to take care of their children is expected to be more rigorously evaluated due to stereotypes. At the same time, the same kind of signals will be less rigorously evaluated when the parents belong to a high social class. It is expected that low social class parents have to put in more effort to prove that they do not abuse their child compared to high social class parents. Thus, even when the same types of child abuse signals are taken into account, high social class parents are less likely to be judged as child abusers than low social class parents (Foschi, 2000). Thus, the double standards theory provides a theoretical mechanism that is examined in this study, namely whether and how teachers' use of double standards is affected by the degree of uncertainty of the situation. This study examines how and when double standards are used by teachers when interpreting signals of child abuse.

2.4 Uncertainty and double standards: the context of teachers

This section zooms in on key concepts in this thesis, namely uncertainty of signs of child abuse and parental social class. Subsequently, the expectations of this thesis are explained.

2.4.1 Social class

The basic idea behind “social class” in social science theory is that a social class distinguishes a group of people with an equal or equivalent economic position and / or possession who exhibits homogeneous or coherent behaviour in a large number of behavioural areas and is distinctive from other classes (Louwen & van Meurs, 2016). It is often assumed that high social class positions aside from financial benefits also improve physical and mental health, while low social class positions often undermine these benefits (Kraus & Park, 2014; Wingen et al., 2020). Low social status positions are thus often associated with negative characteristics and consequences, while high social status positions are associated with positive characteristics (Bjornsdottir & Rule, 2020; Louwen & van Meurs, 2016). These ideas in society about low and high social status seem to encourage the use of double standards by teachers. These social stereotypes contribute to teachers’ belief that low social class parents are less able to take care of their child than high social class parents, which could lead to a more rigorous assessment of child abuse signals when the family belongs to a low social class.

A previous vignette study examined how a citizen's social class influences the services provided by SLBs, including teachers (Harrits & Møller, 2014). In this vignette study, the researchers used citizens' names and occupations as indicators of social class. Additionally, in research into the effects of socioeconomic status, the Dutch government generally uses the indicators: education, income, or occupation (Rijksoverheid, 2021). Occupation, therefore, seems to be a recurring indicator for measuring social status (APA, 2015; Darin-Mattsson, Fors & Kåreholt, 2017). Other studies also emphasize that occupation is most often used as the stratifying principle to identify social class (Christoph, Matthes & Ebner, 2020; Paulus & Matthes, 2013). This can be distinguished in occupations depending on ownership, for example, between employers and employees, and in occupations depending on size and type of organizations, skills requirements, power relations, and working conditions. Besides, social class is associated with income security. It is argued that the minimum to measure occupation is a set of two standardized questions: a question regarding occupation and a question regarding the industry (Christoph, Matthes & Ebner, 2020; Paulus & Matthes, 2013).

2.4.2 Uncertainty

The bureaucratic context SLBs work in is often characterized by uncertainty (Lipsky, 1980; Raaphorst, 2018; Zacka, 2017). Sources of these uncertainties are an unknowable truth and the ambiguous nature of rules and regulations, which are both characteristics of SLBs’ day-to-day work (Lipsky, 1980; Raaphorst, 2018; Zacka, 2017). The less information that is available to SLBs, the more uncertainties that arise for them in their day-to-day work (Raaphorst, 2018). Due to a high

degree of information uncertainty for SLBs, they are forced to use coping mechanisms in order to translate vague rules and legislation to concrete situations (Lipsky, 1980; Tversky & Kahneman, 1972; Zacka, 2017). To reduce uncertainty in their daily work SLBs appear to use stereotypes. Because of this, the core assumption in this study is that stereotypes matter less if there is a higher degree of certainty.

As mentioned earlier, the type of uncertainty that is considered in this study is information uncertainty. Uncertainty, in this case, is related to the available information in a situation (Raaphorst, 2018). The vignettes presented to teachers vary on information provided to them about the family situation. The low-uncertainty vignettes contain several clearer signals of child abuse, while the high-uncertainty vignettes contain only two more obscure signals of child abuse.

2.4.3 Expectation

As aforementioned, this study’s main assumption is that teachers’ use of double standards when interpreting child abuse signals decreases when the degree of uncertainty decreases. Therefore, it is expected that teachers do indeed use double standards when interpreting child abuse signals but that they do so in particular to reduce uncertainty. The vignettes characterized with a high degree of uncertainty will, therefore, show more use of double standards than the vignettes containing more information and thus a higher degree of certainty. As a result, it is expected that teachers will respond differently to the same signals when it comes to a family of high social class than when it comes to a family of low social class. In addition, this difference is expected to reduce along with the degree of uncertainty. Figure 1 shows this general expectation. In the upcoming chapters it is investigated how teachers interpret the different vignettes, how uncertainty may play a role in this process, and how these mechanisms work exactly.

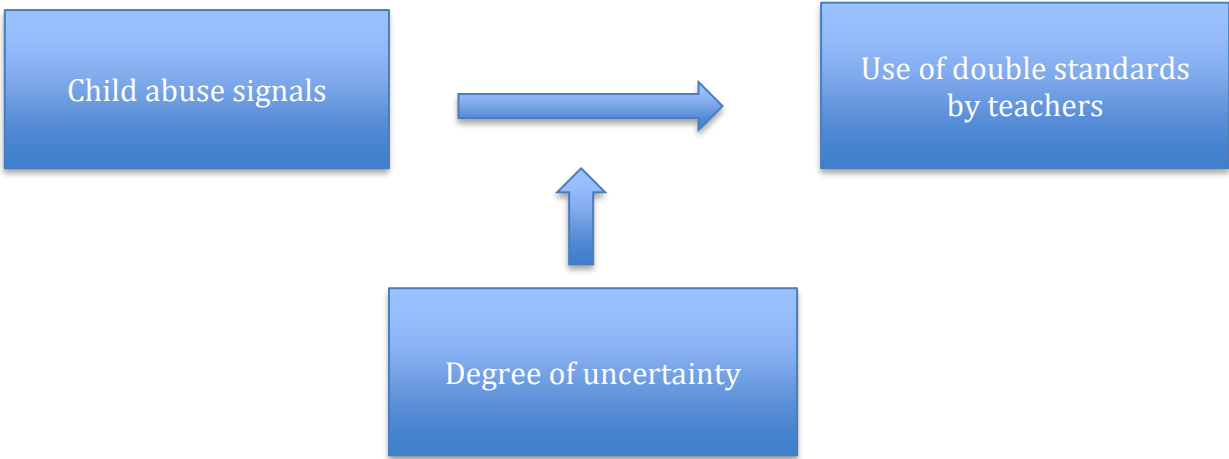


Figure 1: conceptual model

2.5 Sub-conclusion

Chapter 2 explained the main concepts of this thesis, combining insights from the street-level bureaucracy research field and the double standards theory. According to the double standards theory, teachers use double standards when interpreting signals of child abuse. Teachers would judge the same signals of child abuse more severely when a family belongs to a low social class than when a family belongs to a high social class. However, according to literature on street-level bureaucracy, teachers would mainly use social stereotypes to reduce uncertainty. Combining these insights, the expectation of this study is that teachers use double standards when interpreting signals of child abuse, but the use of these double standards decreases with the degree of uncertainty. This expectation is examined in chapter 4, but first chapter 3 explains how exactly this is investigated.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the research design, method, and data collection method used are discussed. The qualitative vignette study is explicitly discussed. In addition to a vignette study, this research made use of in-depth interviews. The choice of these data collection methods is reasoned on the basis of the research question. Subsequently, the respondent selection is explained. Thereafter, the operationalization of the key concepts is explained, and the analytical procedure section explains how the findings were analysed and coded. Finally, the validity and reliability of this research are discussed.

3.1 Research design

The research design of this study is a small N design. Small N analyses compare a smaller number of units through careful case selection (Toshkov, 2016). It focuses on comparison design by carefully choosing cases and being mindful of these cases' values and the conditions. The strength of a small N design is that it can be used to generate and sharpen theoretical ideas, test theoretical expectations and study mechanisms (Toshkov, 2016). Such a design is especially powerful to explore the internal validity of conclusions. In this case, the small N design focused on comparing two designed groups, low and high social class vignettes. In addition, a strategic respondent selection was used, meaning that the selected respondents are considered relevant to answer the theoretical question. Thus, a theoretically informed case selection was used. In paragraph 3.2, more information is given about the respondent selection

The research design of this study is both deductive and inductive. The deductive element of this research is that expectations were established beforehand, which were tested during the vignette study (Toshkov, 2016). It was expected that social class and insecurity would influence respondents' response to the vignettes. Additionally, double standards were expected to affect the low social class adversely, and uncertainty was expected to reduce the use of these double standards. The vignettes have been constructed deductively, as the indicators of uncertainty and social class were considered in advance and based on existing theories (Toshkov, 2016). Thus, deductive expectations have been formulated based on existing theories. However, there were no theoretical expectations as to exactly how uncertainty plays a role in this process. This lends itself well to an inductive approach, which was, therefore, also applied in this research. It was yet unknown how respondents reason about this mechanism, which makes this the inductive element of this research. This reasoning of respondents is central to this study. Since this part has an inductive character, it may also turn out that the reasoning and interpretations of teachers are different than expected. Therefore, prior to analysing the results, it was checked whether the vignettes have been interpreted as expected. If this was not the case, the analysis was adapted to how the respondents actually interpreted the vignettes. This way internal validity is guaranteed (Harrits & Møller, 2020; Toshkov, 2016). With this research the extent to which

the degree of uncertainty experienced by teachers influences the use of double standards is being investigated. Therefore, it is essential to know how teachers interpret uncertainty.

The inductive character of this study ensures that the exact reasoning of teachers was taken into account (Harrits & Møller, 2020; Toshkov, 2016). In addition, inductive research was used to find out how teachers experience child abuse signals in their daily work and how they give meaning to this. The in-depth interview questions are, therefore, part of the inductive element of this research. As a result, this research is partly explorative. Explorative means that prior to the research, it was relatively unknown to the researcher(s) what results would be found (Bryman, 2015). This is the case in this study since a similar study into the interpretation of child abuse signals and the role of uncertainty in this has not been carried out before. Consequently, this research fills a gap in knowledge on this topic.

In addition, this research primarily consists of a vignette design, which makes it a form of quasi-experimental research (Toshkov, 2016). The vignettes were not entirely randomly assigned to the respondents, which means that complete random assignment is not met. This could threaten the internal validity of causal inferences. In this study, however, this does not pose an obstacle because it does not focus on whether there is an effect and the strength of this effect. This research focuses on teachers' interpretations and reasoning. Combining vignettes with a semi-structured interview offered the opportunity to ask further questions and discover these mechanisms, thereby increasing internal validity (Toshkov, 2016).

This research has a qualitative character, which means that the respondents' reasoning was further questioned during the interviews. Certain incentives were built into the vignettes to which teachers responded, but questions were also asked about other matters that might be important in the vignette. This thesis aims to find out how mechanisms work, meaning the focus is not on demonstrating a causal effect.

Furthermore, qualitative research methods were applied to answer the research question. Qualitative research methods can be used to gain insight into the perceptions and interpretations of respondents, in which an in-depth interview is an important method. The insights obtained from in-depth semi-structured interviews partly form the basis of the research results. Qualitative research is flexible and promotes spontaneity, giving respondents the opportunity to interpret the interviews questions in their own way (Mack, 2005). Each respondent constructs his or her own reality and through in-depth interviews the meaning that teachers give is discovered (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2012). Consequently, this research has an interpretive character, meaning that qualitative research was used to investigate how teachers interpret signals of child abuse in different situations in terms of social class and uncertainty.

3.2 Interviews and respondent selection

An in-depth interview is a form of field research, which is a qualitative research method that collects new data and is also known as empirical research (Toshkov, 2016). The researcher collects this data by means of their empirical observations, after which this data is analysed and interpreted. In-depth interviews were used during this research to gain insight into how teachers interpret certain situations (Mack, 2005). What makes qualitative research powerful is that it could be used to give meaning to the daily work of the selected teachers in the form of comprehensive textual descriptions (Toshkov, 2016). The in-depth interviews formed the basis for the results of this research and consisted of questions related to child abuse, social class, and uncertainty. For example, it was ascertained whether the teachers have experiences with cases of child abuse, what the characteristics of this specific case(s) were, how they acted at the time, and what they consider the best course of action.

The actors at the centre of this research are primary school teachers. Sixteen in-depth interviews are conducted with selected primary school teachers (Table 1, Appendix 3). All interviews were conducted in April 2021, after which the data analysis started at the beginning of May. A convenience sample was used to select respondents. This means that the sample was drawn in a convenient way because the respondents chosen were accidentally available, which means that the research findings cannot be generalized (Toshkov, 2016). This selection method fits well with this research and forms no obstacle, as the aim is to discover mechanisms and not demonstrate effects. Most of the respondents were recruited through an appeal for primary school teachers on social media. In addition, a number of respondents were recruited through a snowball effect via respondents who already participated in the study. The respondents all work as primary school teachers at various primary schools in the Alkmaar region.

Open-ended questions were asked, which increased the flexibility of the interviews (Toshkov, 2016). A topic list was drawn up prior to the interviews that served as a guideline during the interviews (Appendix 1). This topic list ensured that the same types of questions were asked during each interview so that the outcomes could be compared. The main themes from the topic list were based on the research question. Using in-depth interviews and vignettes, it was investigated how the selected teachers interpret signals of child abuse, how this is influenced by social class and how uncertainty plays a role in this. In-depth interviews provided insight into how primary school teachers give meaning to reality (Harrits & Møller, 2020). The success of child abuse policies largely depends on how the teachers perceive reality and interpret the policies, which makes teachers' perceptions valuable. In order to make optimal use of the research results, it was essential to transcribe and code the interviews so that it could be analysed. The interviews were recorded in agreement with the respondents. Finally, the anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed. An informed consent form was drawn up prior to the interviews, which each respondent has signed (Appendix 5).

Due to the obstacles caused by the Coronacrisis, all interviews were conducted through Teams.

3.3 Vignettes

The interviews consisted of two parts: a number of general/personal questions and vignettes. The vignettes are a structured element of the interview. All interviewees were presented with two vignette cases (Appendix 2). This research focuses on the way teachers think and reason about their daily work and how they categorize children when interpreting child abuse signals. The vignette study was chosen to conduct the research because it is ideal for investigating choice behaviour (Harrits & Møller, 2020). This vignette study examined how parents' social class influences teachers' interpretation of child abuse signals and how uncertainty plays a role in this. A vignette study is a form of quasi-experimental research in which imaginary situations (vignettes) are used in which the situations' degree of uncertainty (high or low uncertainty) can vary and in which characteristics of the children and their parents (high or low social class) can be systematically varied, which subsequently can be used to determine the extent to which these characteristics influence the considerations and choice behaviour of teachers (Harrits & Møller, 2020). It is argued that vignette research is less sensitive to socially desirable answers than traditional questionnaire research (Jenkins et al., 2010). It can be used to explore and gain insight into interpretation processes and considerations that play a role in determining how to act in a given situation (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2010). The main goal of this research method is to find out how teachers judge child abuse signals and in what way social class and uncertainty affect this judgement in unclear and clear situations. This research method is especially strong in terms of internal validity, as the researcher manipulates the variables in the vignettes.

As mentioned earlier, this research aims to find out how teachers give meaning to their daily work with children and how they interpret child abuse signals. Semi-structured interviews combined with vignettes provide access to discourses and arguments in the minds of teachers. This way it has been determined how teachers think, reason, and substantiate their discretion. In addition, the extent to which discretions are influenced both discursively and cognitively by perceptions of social stereotypes and the role of uncertainty involved in this was investigated.

The respondents were proportionally divided into two groups. One group was presented with two vignettes about children with a high social class, varying in uncertainty. The other group of respondents was presented with two vignettes about children with a low social class, also varying in uncertainty. The respondents were first presented with the one vignette to which they had to respond. After they had responded, they were presented with the second vignette. The order in which the vignettes, which varied in degree of uncertainty, were presented to the respondents, varied per respondent. The interviewees were asked what they think of both cases and how they would act when faced with similar situations in practice. Subsequently, both groups were compared so that both the influence of social class and uncertainty was traced. So, comparisons were made between the groups as well as within the groups. Ideally, the respondents were divided into four groups, with each respondent being presented with one vignette, and also varying degrees of uncertainty between the

groups of respondents. However, it was decided not to study four separate groups because this was not feasible in the time frame in which the study was to be conducted. In order to be able to make good comparisons between four different groups, twice as many interviews should have been conducted, which was not feasible in this case. The social class in the vignettes has been kept constant per group of respondents to limit the chance of socially desirable answers as much as possible.

The vignettes describe a situation of a child and his/her parents and portray a realistic situation. The vignettes are comparable in all other aspects than family background and uncertainty. The situation in the vignette with a low degree of uncertainty includes signals that are most indicative of child abuse and includes multiple signals. The situation in the vignettes with a high degree of uncertainty includes less information and more unclear signals of child abuse. The uncertain situation can be viewed as both a minor problem that is not eligible for intervention and as a potential problem that is eligible for intervention, depending on the interpretation by the teacher.

3.4 Operationalizing concepts

3.4.1 (Un)certain child abuse signals

When children are abused, they can send out signals (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Most signals, however, are stress indicators, which indicate that something is wrong with the child (JSG, 2020; NJi, 2019; Persoon, 2020). This can also have other causes than child abuse, such as divorce, death of a family member. Bruising is the most common finding in physical child abuse (NJI, 2011). In addition to physical injuries, signs of other forms of child abuse can sometimes also be observed, such as neglect (physical and affective, pedagogical) and psychological abuse (JGZ, 2016; NJI, 2011). Consequently, it is not only about psychical characteristics but also about the behaviour and treatment of the child (JSG, 2020; NJi, 2019). Almost all signals can have other causes. However, the more signals a child sends out, the greater the chance that child abuse actually occurs (Nji, 2019; NVK, 2016). Therefore, the low uncertainty vignettes contain more signals of child abuse to reduce uncertainty. These vignettes describe a child with a bruise. The child displays shy and withdrawn behaviour and never takes a classmate home after school. In addition, the child hangs in the playground before school until very late after school. Finally, the low uncertainty vignettes describe a parent showing little interest in and empathy for their child. The most important signal is a sudden change in behaviour of a child, which is consequently included in the low uncertainty vignette (JSG, 2020; NJi, 2019). The high uncertainty vignette describes neglect, and only two signs of it; the child looks tired and tells a story in class that may indicate neglect. Prior to this study, several real-life cases were analysed, which served as inspiration for the vignettes (Augeo, 2019; NJi et al., n.d.; NJi, 2019; NVK, 2016; Persoon, 2020).

Uncertainty in the vignettes was deductively constructed. However, prior to the analysis uncertainty was constructed based on an inductive analysis of what uncertainty means to respondents. This thesis is interested in how the degree of uncertainty, experienced by teachers, influences the use of double standards, which makes it essential to know how teachers interpret uncertainty. If this had

not been done inductively, no valid statements could have been made. If the deductive operationalization of uncertainty had been adhered to, there was a risk that insight would not be obtained into uncertainty, but into other aspects of the vignettes. Since this research is interested in the degree of uncertainty experienced by teachers, each respondent was asked what they perceive as an uncertain signal, which led to the inductive operationalization of uncertainty. As a result, there was a chance that some respondents would interpret uncertainty differently than had been constructed deductively. In order to be able to make valid statements, it is crucial to be sure that the experience of uncertainty has been investigated through the vignettes. Since the experience of uncertainty is the core mechanism of this research, it was essential to first examine how each respondent experiences uncertainty in order to make valid statements. The vignettes were thus used to get the respondents to talk to discover these mechanisms.

3.4.2 Social class

As mentioned earlier, often-used indicators to measure social class are occupation, income, and education. As income and education are less feasible to implement in a vignette study, occupation seems to be the most appropriate indicator to insert in the vignettes. This means that high social class parents are characterized with a stable job in a high status company and high status within this company (Christoph, Matthes & Ebner, 2020; Paulus & Matthes, 2013). At the same time, low social status parents are characterized in the vignettes with a short-term job in a lower status company and a low rank within this company. Subsequently, it was determined which professions have the highest and lowest prestige in the Netherlands, on which the profession of the parents in the vignettes is based. Several research reports on the prestige of professions in the Netherlands have been analysed (JOBAT, 2018; Korsten, 2017; NPR, 2014). Finally, the use of names as indicators of social class has also been considered. However, this has been omitted as it risks that teachers will associate certain names with issues unrelated to this study, which could harm the study's validity.

3.5 Analytical procedure and coding process

The sixteen in-depth interviews were transcribed and coded with the approval of the respondents. Subsequently, the interviews were analysed and interpreted. First, each interview was read in full and then coded into text fragments, which is the open coding part (Byman, 2015). The next step in the coding process was axial coding. Axial coding means that all codes are compared and grouped together. The codes are merged into overarching codes, resulting in more precise sub-codes (Bryman, 2015). The subcodes were formulated in an emic perspective, meaning that they are based on the subjective reality of the respondents (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2012). The sub-codes were then grouped again into the main codes (Table 2, Appendix 4). The main codes were formulated in both etic and emic perspectives, as the findings are partly deductive and inductive. However, the findings are largely data-driven and thus inductive.

Subsequently the last stage of the coding process, called selective coding, was applied. In this phase a hierarchy was created within the codes (Bryman, 2015). The findings are largely driven by the data collected, meaning that the findings and codes are primarily inductive. However, in the final stage of coding, some theoretical concepts came into play. This stage examined how social class and uncertainty influence the interpretation of signals. These codes were formulated in an etic perspective, which means that these codes were based on objective theoretical concepts, namely degree of uncertainty and social class. Relationships were established between the data and codes, which subsequently provided the basis for the findings (Bryman, 2015). This means that the data was interpreted, and then the theoretical mechanism was analysed and explained (Toshkov, 2016).

At this final coding stage, respondents' responses to the vignettes were compared, and it was examined whether teachers reacted differently to the vignettes about low social class families than to the vignettes about high social class families. It was traced to which information in the vignettes the respondents responded to and on which signals they based their actions. In addition, teachers' responses to the vignettes that vary in the degree of uncertainty were compared, and an analysis was made of how these responses differ from each other. Atlas.ti, a computer program for qualitative data analysis, was used for this coding process.

3.6 Validity and reliability

It is essential in this study to observe its reliability and validity. Reliability means the degree of random errors in the research (Bryman, 2015; Geertz, 1973), which is easy to measure in a quantitative study. This is more difficult in a qualitative study such as this one. Reliability is substantiated in qualitative research by a thorough description of the context in which the research took place (Geertz, 1973). In order to arrive at reliable results, it is vital to know the correct context of the interviews. From what position does someone speak, and what interests play a role for a respondent in answering the questions in an interview? When this is clear, answers can be interpreted and become more reliable. This is in accordance with the principle of thick description, which means a comprehensive picture is given of circumstances, situations, mechanisms, and other relevant topics within the research (Geertz, 1973). Reliability is about how consistently a method measures something. The results must be the same if someone repeats the entire study in precisely the same way. Clearly describing the context of an interview, therefore, contributes to the reliability of the research results. Because the background and working environment of the teachers were repeatedly asked during the interviews, the context and position of the teachers were determined, which was then included in the data analysis. This ensures the reliability of this research.

Additionally, a distinction can be made between internal and external validity of a study (Bryman, 2015; Toshkov, 2016). External validity means the degree to which the results can be generalized to the target population, which can be achieved by randomly selecting respondents from the target population. This ensures that the results are generalizable to the population to which the

conclusions are drawn. This study strives for external validity, with a focus on theoretical and analytical generalizability. However, the focus is mainly on internal validity since it was traced and explained how mechanisms work in respondents' minds. Internal validity says something about the quality of the research design (Toshkov, 2016). Was actually measured what was intended to be measured? If the research results are internally valid, the conclusion has been drawn correctly based on the findings (Toshkov, 2016). Qualitative research methods, of which this study consists, serve to promote the internal validity of the research (Toshkov, 2016). An investigation is internally valid if the reasoning within the investigation has been carried out correctly.

In order to maximize internal validity, it was decided to assign the respondents proportionally to the different vignettes (high and low social class). In addition, the vignettes varying in degree of uncertainty were in a random order presented to the respondents to exclude that the order of the vignettes influenced the teachers' response. In addition, the respondents were continuously asked why they reacted the way they did. In this way, internal validity is substantially increased because the mechanisms in the minds of the respondents can be identified and explained.

However, there is a chance that teachers will provide socially desirable answers during the interviews. This means that there is a chance that the results do not correspond to reality, which affects the validity of this research. In order to minimize socially desirable answers, it was decided to present each respondent with only the vignettes about a family from a high social class or only the vignettes about a family from a low social class. Finding out the motivations and reasoning of teachers will also minimize the chance of socially desirable answers.

4. Results

The findings of the study are explained in this chapter. First of all, it is checked whether the vignettes have been interpreted as expected by the respondents. It is analysed how the teachers give meaning to uncertainty and to the signals from the vignettes. In addition, it is inductively constructed which actions teachers would take in response to the signals from the vignettes. Three different gradations of action in response to the signals are constructed inductively. These gradations are thus based on the answers of the teachers. Subsequently, the answers of the teachers who were presented with the vignettes about high social class families are analysed. This paragraph analyses how these teachers react to the vignettes they perceive as clear and less clear situations. In the following paragraph, the answers of the teachers presented with vignettes about low social class families are analysed. Here too, the difference in answers to the clearer or less clear situation is considered. The reaction and reasoning of the groups are compared. Finally, we zoom in on obstacles that teachers experience in their daily work when they identify signals of child abuse.

4.1 No consensus on uncertainty

Prior to the interviews, the vignette consisting of several signals including a bruise was constructed as the most certain situation. This expectation was established because it is assumed that the more signals a child shows, the greater the chance that the child is actually abused (NJI, 2019; NVK, 2016). The vignette, which consists of only two signals, including statements by a child about the home situation that may indicate neglect, was constructed as the most uncertain situation. As aforementioned, different forms of child abuse can be distinguished (JGZ, 2016; NJI, 2011). The original most certain vignette includes both signals of physical abuse and signals of neglect, while the most uncertain vignette contains only a signal of neglect. Consequently, it was expected that each respondent would experience the same vignette as a situation with a high degree of certainty and the other vignette as an uncertain situation. However, this does not appear to be the case. About half of the respondents indicated that the case intended to outline certain signals was more uncertain than the case intended to outline a situation with a high degree of uncertainty. These respondents experienced the case intended to describe a situation with high uncertainty as a situation with clear signals. There appears to be no consensus among the respondents about clear and unclear signals of child abuse. Respondents apparently have different ideas about uncertainty, which seems to play a significant role in identifying child abuse and interpreting signals. The mechanisms that explain the difference in interpretation of the degree of uncertainty of signals are now discussed.

4.1.1 The credibility of a child's statement

As mentioned earlier, it is checked whether the vignettes have been interpreted as expected by the respondents and analysed how they give meaning to uncertainty. Half of the respondents indicated that they do not simply take a child's statement seriously. This group of teachers emphasized that children often make up or exaggerate stories in order to act tough to classmates. Consequently, these respondents indicated that they perceived the vignette in which a child told a story, which could indicate neglect, as an unclear case. This is in line with expectations as this vignette was originally constructed as the most unclear situation. These respondents actually interpreted the vignette with multiple signals, which was intended as a clearer situation, as a clearer situation. However, the other half of the respondents emphasized that when a child makes such a statement, something should be done about it immediately. These respondents interpreted the vignette in which a child makes statements in the classroom and intended as a vignette with high uncertainty as a very clear situation. At the same time, this group interpreted the vignette containing several other signals, which was intended to be the clearer situation, as less certain. The latter group of respondents, therefore, interpreted the vignettes differently than expected. The following two interview excerpts also illustrate this difference in interpretation:

This case is a bit more serious because of the bruise, and the other case is more like a kind of neglect. (Respondent 5, low social class group; vignette with multiple signals)²

I really think this case is a lot clearer because the child actually pointed this out and told it himself. It's difficult when something is wrong at home, but the child does not tell you, but you can tell. (Respondent 12, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

An explanation for this difference in interpretation of uncertainty appears to be in the different values that respondents attach to a child's statement. The degree to which teachers considered a child's statement credible appears to have a major influence on the interpretation of signals and the assessment of uncertainty. The respondents who considered the vignette, which was initially intended as an uncertain situation, to be clearer, found the statements of a child very valuable. These teachers repeatedly emphasized that children are often honest and are very well able to indicate what is going on at home. According to these teachers, if a child were to say such a thing in class, it should be acted upon immediately. At the same time, when respondents indicated that they did not take children's statements very seriously, they experienced this vignette as very unclear. Most teachers, in this case,

² For each interview excerpt, it is indicated to which vignette the respondent responds. 'Vignette with multiple signals' stands for the vignette, which was initially constructed as a low uncertainty situation, and 'Vignette with few signals' stands for the vignette, which was initially constructed as a high uncertainty situation

felt that children often want to brag to their classmates and, therefore, exaggerate their stories or come up with things. Consequently, teachers' views on children's credibility seem to play a significant role in the process of interpreting child abuse signals. As illustrated by the following two interview excerpts, respondents disagree about the credibility of a child's statement:

You notice neglect in children's stories in the classroom. Children will talk about neglect.
 (Respondent 13, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

You have to consider very carefully what is true and what is not. Sometimes children say all kinds of things, you have to be careful with that. For example, it could also be that this little boy is fantasizing. (Respondent 3, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

The respondents were continuously asked why they perceived a vignette as certain or uncertain, as a result of which this mechanism was discovered. Since this research is qualitative in nature, it lends itself well to such inductive adjustments. During the analysis of the findings, it was, therefore, continuously examined which case each individual respondent interpreted as a certain and which as an uncertain situation (Table 3). As a result, the analysis of the findings has deviated from the original dichotomy of certain and uncertain vignettes. This is done inductively because choosing to stick to the deductive distribution would result in the mechanism not being properly tested (Harrits & Møller, 2020). That is why the interviews were used to examine how the respondents experienced the signals from the vignettes. This inductive analysis of the vignettes was performed to determine whether what is actually being investigated is consistent with what was intended to be investigated. This was done by explicitly asking for the respondents' reasoning and asking them which cues they relied on most. Based on this inductive analysis of teachers' interpretations, it appears that some respondents interpret uncertainty differently than expected (Table 3).

Table 3: the interpretation of uncertainty

Interpretation of uncertainty	Vignette with multiple signs of child abuse, including a bruise (intended low uncertainty vignette)	Vignette with only two signs of neglect, child telling a story in class (intended high uncertainty vignette)
High social class group N=8	5 out of 8 respondents interpreted this vignette as the most uncertain situation	3 out of 8 respondents interpreted this vignette as the most uncertain situation
Low social class group N=8	3 out of 8 respondents interpreted this vignette as the most uncertain situation	5 out of 8 respondents interpreted this vignette as the most uncertain situation

As mentioned earlier, all sixteen respondents were presented with two vignettes varying in degree of uncertainty. Subsequently, each respondent indicated which vignette they experienced as the most uncertain situation, whereby the respondents, therefore, experienced the other vignette as most certain. This ultimately resulted in eight respondents in the high social class group who experienced one vignette as more uncertain and the other vignette as more certain, and in eight respondents from the low social class group who experienced one vignette as more uncertain and the other vignette as more certain. Table 3 shows that, contrary to expectations, most teachers from the high social class group experienced the vignette initially intended as the clearest situation as the most unclear situation. At the same time, most teachers from the low social class group experienced the vignette that was intended as the most unclear situation, in fact as the most unclear situation. Half of all respondents, a total of eight out of sixteen, interpreted uncertainty in the vignettes differently than expected. Respondents from the high social class group have a larger share in this.

In addition, at the end of the interview, each respondent was asked how he or she experienced the vignettes. Each respondent indicated that the vignettes were realistic. Respondent 2 explains:

I thought it was very realistic. In that second case I also had to chuckle a bit because I thought 'oh that is recognizable'. I experienced that once that there was such a child in my class with such parents. (Respondent 2, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

A small number of respondents also indicated that they experienced both vignettes as uncertain or experienced both vignettes as clear. However, these respondents always indicated which vignette they experienced as the situation with least or most uncertainty.

To summarize, half of the respondents interpreted uncertainty in the vignettes differently than expected. This seems to be partly explained by the value a respondent attaches to a child's statement, which seems to influence which vignette they perceive as uncertain and certain.

4.2 Different gradations

Based on the double standards theory, primary school teachers are expected to use double standards when interpreting signals of child abuse. This would mean that the respondents presented with the vignettes about a family from a low social class would be more inclined to take more drastic action than the respondents who were given the same vignette about a family from a high social class. Whether this expectation is supported in the analysis is now explained.

First, three gradations of actions were inductively constructed based on the interviews. These categories are based on the severity of the vignettes in the respondents' eyes. Based on the responses of all respondents, three different gradations of actions have emerged that teachers would take when they encounter similar cases in their daily work (Figure 2). If teachers indicated that they are still too uncertain about the seriousness of the situation, they would observe the child for the time being in

order to be able to identify all signals better. Moreover, most respondents emphasized that they usually discuss this with colleagues or sometimes present their suspicions to an IB'er (intern counsellor) and hear their opinion. The following interview excerpts illustrate what teachers indicate they would do in a doubtful situation:

You should keep a close eye on it before doing anything further with it. You first want to map everything a little more clearly for yourself. (Respondent 10, high social class; vignette with multiple signals)

I would discuss this with a colleague and ask their opinion. (Respondent 2, high social class; vignette with few signals)

In other cases, the teachers indicated that they find the signals worrying, but it is still too unclear whether there may be other causes for these signals. When this is the case, most teachers indicated that they would talk to the child and in passing ask him about the signals. In addition, several teachers in these cases would informally approach parents about the signals they have noticed in order to sound the parents about this. The actions teachers would take in a suspicious situation are illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

Such things can often be said informally to parents in the schoolyard and then it is often resolved. (Respondent 9, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

I would talk to the child and ask how he experienced it. (Respondent 14, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

Finally, a number of respondents indicated that the vignette is really alarming and that they would, therefore, invite the parents to a formal conversation at school, which would often also involve the IB'er. All respondents indicated that in this case, they would await the parents' reaction and see whether parents are willing to admit what is going on at home and accept help. Some respondents emphasized that they would offer parents help in such a conversation with problems at home and with parenting, while other respondents indicated in this case that their goal is to hold up a mirror to parents and thus hope that parents realize that they need to make a change. As illustrated by the following two interview excerpts, the respondents have different approaches when speaking with the parents:

During such a meeting, you can indicate that if parents cannot resolve the matter, they can make use of aids, and I would emphasize that they can talk to the youth and family coach to find a solution. (Respondent 3, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

I would talk to his parents and have them come to school. I think someone needs to hold up a mirror to the parents, and it's still up to them to decide what to do with it. (Respondent 6, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

Based on the parents' response during these conversations, several respondents would continue discussions with the IB'er to investigate which following steps can be taken and report this situation to the 'Safe at Home' organisation. In addition to reporting to 'Safe at Home', a number of respondents also indicated that they would like to use help from the municipality, for example, by calling in a family coach. One respondent from the low social class group explains:

Some parents just can't understand that you are worried about their child, such parents say: "mind your own business." Then we try to ask questions like: "Maybe you need help?" Of course there are also authorities for that. Then you start exploring what is most useful for this family and what you can help them with. (Respondent 4, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

However, some respondents, from the high social class group in particular, emphasized that it is up to the parents themselves what they do with it and that this help is without obligation. This line of reasoning is illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

I don't know how the parents react to such a conversation, whether they are open to it or feel like: 'Mind your own business and we just do it like that'. That is of course also possible. In principle, help is without obligation. (Respondent 10, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

Based on the interviews, six actions are distinguished, subdivided into three gradations: doubtful, suspicion, alarming (Figure 2). These gradations are hence established inductively.

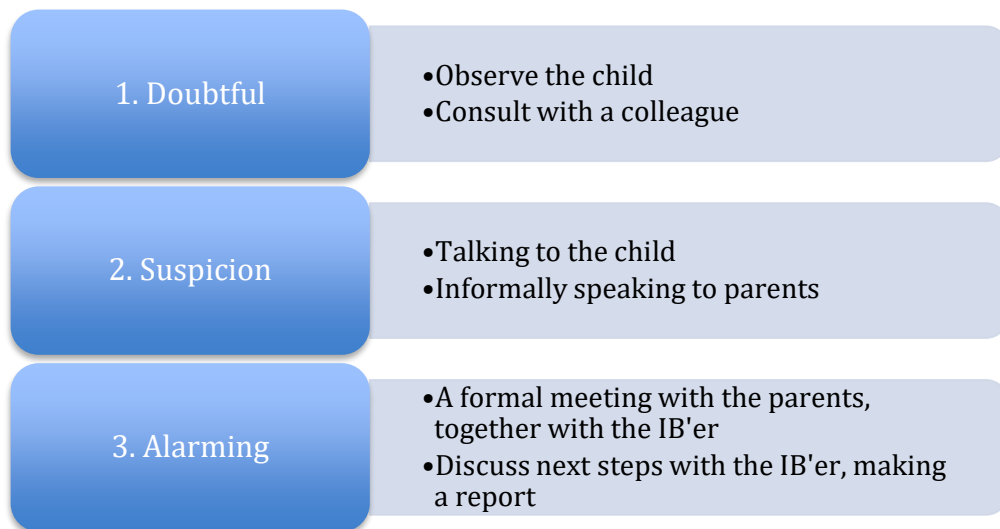


Figure 2: three different gradations

This way it is ascertained whether respondents use double standards and would, therefore, act more drastic when the family is of a low social class than when the family is of a high social class. To be able to compare the average response of the respondents of the high and low social class groups, points are granted to the three gradations concerned; doubtful is given a one, suspicion a two, and alarming a three. Subsequently, it is examined which actions each respondent indicates to take, and each respondent receives 1, 2, or 3 points based on these actions. Many respondents indicate that they would take multiple actions, but only the most drastic action of the respondent is incorporated in the outcome. This action is assigned to a gradation based on how seriously the respondent speaks about the vignettes. All these points are added together in both groups, subsequently the average of each group is taken and thereafter both groups are compared with each other. The higher the group average, the more drastically this group reacted on average to a vignette. In addition, a distinction is made between the action in response to the more certain case and the more uncertain case. Based on these averages, it can be ascertained whether the respondents use double standards in uncertain and certain situations.

The analysis results in the average response of the high and low social class groups to both the, in their view, more certain case and the case with a high degree of uncertainty (Table 4). Both groups consist of eight respondents. Since this is a small number of respondents, the statements made on the basis of these averages are to be taken with great caution. However, the predominant aim of this research is to discover mechanisms and teachers' reasoning. Grades are assigned to qualitative data with a limited number of respondents, and then words are used to illustrate what this difference contains. Because the analysis is based on a small N, no associations can be attached to these numbers. However, the table below illustrates exploratory patterns for understanding the data. The data in Table 4 serve as support to subsequently indicate the differences qualitatively.

Table 4: respondents' mean scores

Teachers' actions	High uncertainty	Low uncertainty
High social class group	1,625	2,75
Low social class group	2,25	3

Table 4 shows that teachers' responses to the same signals are more drastic when the family belongs to a low social class than when the family belongs to a high social class. Based on this analysis, the expectation is supported, which means that respondents seem to use double standards when interpreting child abuse signals. Respondents who have been presented with the vignette about a family from a low social class are inclined to act in a more drastic way, which is in line with the double standards theory. However, this difference is greater when there is a higher degree of uncertainty. The difference in response remains, but the difference decreases along with the degree of uncertainty. The difference between the two groups decreases when there is less uncertainty, which is also in line with expectations. The use of double standards is thus demonstrated, as is the reduction of these double standards when there is less uncertainty.

The types of measures that the teachers would take are presented in Table 5. This table shows the differences in strategies cited based on which the figures in Table 4 were determined. Table 5 thus shows how teachers give meaning to the vignettes and what the difference in this meaning looks like.

Table 5: respondents' actions

Teachers' actions	High uncertainty	Low uncertainty
High social class group	Most respondents would observe the child and discuss the signals with colleagues	Usually a formal conversation with the parents, but sometimes only a conversation with the child
Low social class group	A conversation with the child at all times and with the parents, usually in an informal way.	A formal conversation with parents at all times.

Table 5 shows that teachers are more reserved when the family belongs to a high social class than when the family belongs to a low social class. In the case of a family from a low social class, teachers would, in an uncertain situation, always talk to the child about the signals they have identified. Moreover, all these teachers would discuss the signals with the parents, often informally at first. At the same time, in such an uncertain situation, teachers would only observe the situation and discuss the signals with a colleague when the family belongs to a high social class. However, when the teachers experience less uncertainty, this difference in action becomes smaller. In a certain situation, teachers from the low social class group would enter into a formal conversation with the parents at all times. The teachers from the high social class group are often also inclined to enter into a formal meeting with the parents if they experience little uncertainty. In contrast to the other group, however, this is not

the case for all teachers. In the case of a family from a high social class, some teachers indicate that they would only talk to the child.

In addition, teachers reason in a different way when presented with a case about a family of low social class than when they are presented with the same case about a family of high social class. The exact way in which these mechanisms work is now explained. The reasoning of the respondents and differences in this reasoning are highlighted. The teachers' reasoning is explained in the following paragraphs. First the results for the high social class group are discussed, then the results for the low social class group are discussed, after which both findings come together and are compared.

4.3 High social class

First, this paragraph explains how respondents generally reasoned about high social class families. The first sub-paragraph then zooms in on how the respondents from the high social class group reasoned when they experienced the vignette as a situation with a high degree of uncertainty. The second sub-paragraph explains how this group of respondents reasoned when they experienced the vignette as a situation with a low degree of uncertainty.

When respondents were presented with vignettes about a family from a high social class, they repeatedly suggested that parents seem to be busy with their careers and consequently seem to lose sight of their child. Some respondents emphasized that some matters are part of parenting and therefore not the school's responsibility. Many respondents in the high social class group described these types of parents as willing parents who want the best for their child and offer a stable home situation. These teachers emphasized that a busy job can sometimes get in the way of sufficient attention and involvement with the child, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

Nowadays it is common for both parents to work full time and have almost no time for anything else because they are busy with work. And maybe that's just normal at their house, so there's not much you can do about that. (Respondent 2, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

According to these respondents, a busy job could be a stressor to the home situation, which could lead to problems in the family, such as neglect of the child. One respondent from the high social class group explains:

Maybe there is a lot of stress in the family because the parents are both so busy with work and the stress makes things like that happen. (Respondent 10, high social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

Besides, a small number of respondents emphasized that parents from a high social class often have no regard for their child and, therefore, raise their child in a materialistic way and show little love for their child. According to these respondents, such parents prefer their careers over their children, causing them to pay little attention to their children. However, these respondents indicated that they cannot change the situation much in such cases and that it is a matter of parenting that school has little to do with. This line of reasoning is illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

You can say very little about the home situation if the child goes to bed late. You can mention that you have heard that he is sleeping late. But if he is doing fine in class, then who are you to judge, I guess. You can mention it to the parents, but that's where it ends.
(Respondent 13, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

Additionally, some respondents suggested that mental abuse or neglect appears to be more common in high social class families and that physical abuse is more common in low social class families. These respondents argued that high social class parents often make little time for their children because they are busy with their careers. Moreover, parents from a high social class, according to these parents, put more pressure on their children to perform and won't settle for school performance below expectations. In this case too, respondents indicated that there is not much they can about the situation because this is due to the parenting choices of the parents, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

Maybe this is just very common at their home, so there's not much you can do about that. Who am I to say that's not right. (Respondent 2, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

Consequently, most respondents interpreted the cases of high social class families as socio-emotional abuse and assumed that there was no physical abuse involved. A number of respondents also emphasized that this form of abuse is more difficult to detect. Since teachers often assumed that high social class families are subject to neglect and not physical abuse, this may mean that child abuse among high social class families is less often reported. One respondent explains:

Neglect is very hard to spot, because I think it really comes down to feeling. Teachers may feel that a child is being neglected, but the parents may have a very different view. So it is very difficult to communicate with parents about this. (Respondent 13, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

Finally, according to some respondents, parents from a high social class should also be approached differently from parents of a low social class when there are suspicions of child abuse or neglect. Respondents often made such statements when they responded explicitly to the professions of the parents in the vignettes. Parents from a high social class are said to be more demanding, ask more difficult questions and adopt a less accessible attitude towards teachers. Parents from a low social class, according to these respondents, are more likely to accept help from school or other organisations. The following interview excerpt illustrates this line of reasoning:

For parents of a lower social class, teachers are the professionals. And with parents who are better educated, as a teacher you have to come from good classes especially on the verbal level to outdo them. I think there is a difference in that. (Respondent 7, high social class group)

This reasoning of teachers could lead to teachers being more reserved towards parents from a high social class than towards parents from a low social class.

4.3.1 High social class: High degree of uncertainty

This sub-paragraph discusses how the respondents from the high social class group reasoned when they perceived a vignette as a situation with a high degree of uncertainty. Most respondents who were presented with the vignettes about a high social class family interpreted the vignette that had been operationalized prior to the interviews as the clearer situation, as the most unclear situation (5 out of 8). These teachers interpreted uncertainty and the vignettes thus differently than expected. The vignette in which several signals of child abuse were described, including a bruise, was experienced as most uncertain by these respondents. Most of these respondents did not take the bruise seriously and felt that the described behavioural change of the child was too unclear to take action. These teachers offered alternative explanations for these signals, such as the death of a grandfather and grandmother. In addition, these respondents emphasized that children often have bruises, so they could not draw any conclusions from this. Two teachers from the high social class group explain:

I wouldn't immediately throw everything on the table. If it happens once, if he has bruises once. How worried should you be? Because he is a child, the boy is nine, so that is not surprising. (Respondent 13, high social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

The child indicates that he has fallen, that is possible. And you want to know where that behavioural change comes from, but something may have happened in the home situation. A grandfather is ill or a grandmother is in the hospital or dad is away for a few days. (Respondent 7, high social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

The other respondents actually interpreted the vignette that was originally operationalized as most unclear as the most unclear situation. These respondents perceived the signals in this vignette as unclear because they feel that children often make up or exaggerate stories. Most of these respondents emphasized that children's stories are often exaggerated because they want to appear tough to their classmates. They found that statements made by a child could not simply be believed and that the situation was, therefore, still too uncertain for taking further steps. Respondent 9 explains:

How seriously should you take this? You shouldn't take everything literally, of course. Sometimes children say they could stay up all night while only staying up an hour or so after bedtime. (Respondent 9, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

In these uncertain situations, most respondents from the high social class group would only keep an extra eye on the child or discuss the signals with colleagues. A small number of respondents would engage in a conversation with the child about the signals or informally address the parents about the signals they have identified. However, most teachers were reluctant to undertake action in a situation in which they experience a high degree of uncertainty, as illustrated in the following interview excerpts:

I don't immediately link a bruise to child abuse, so I would at least keep an eye on the child before taking any further steps. I would like to clarify that for myself first. (Respondent 10, high social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

It's good that you spot the bruise in this case and notice the behavioural change, but to call mother right away is a step that you cannot make that easy, I think. If his behaviour changes and he is a bit quieter in class and you are concerned, you can always talk to a colleague about it. (Respondent 13, high social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

One reason for this group of respondents to be more cautious about taking further steps is that they do not want to damage the parents' trust and want to be entirely sure before taking any steps. Furthermore, a number of respondents emphasized that as teachers, they cannot change the home situation or that it is a matter of parenting teachers have to refrain from. Some teachers also felt that a conversation with parents would be of little use because parents aren't likely to change. This is also a reason for several teachers only to keep an eye on the situation and not take any further steps, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

This is difficult because this is also part of parenting and we as a school are really for education. (Respondent 2, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

In addition, a number of respondents got the idea that the parents are not aware of what is going on with their child when they are not at home and that, therefore, the parents cannot be blamed. These teachers seem to assume the innocence of the parents. Consequently, the respondents intended to point out to parents what their child tells in class, but these respondents had no real suspicions of child abuse or neglect. Respondent 1 explains:

I have the feeling that this is happening behind the back of the parents and that they are not aware of it. (Respondent 1, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

The more reserved attitude of teachers towards a high social class family thus seems to be partly explained by the fact that some teachers seem to assume the innocence of these parents.

4.3.2 High social class: Low degree of uncertainty

This sub-paragraph explains how respondents from the high social class group reasoned when they experienced a vignette as a situation with a low degree of uncertainty. Five out of eight respondents presented with the vignettes about a high social class family interpreted the vignette initially intended as most uncertain as the situation with most certain signals. They interpreted the vignettes and uncertainty differently than expected. These respondents hence interpreted the vignette about a boy making statements in class that could indicate neglect as the most certain situation of child abuse. The respondents who considered this vignette to be more certain, all emphasized that what a child says should always be taken seriously and that something should be done with it right away. In addition, these teachers considered the fact that the child looked tired in class an important signal. The line of reasoning of these teachers is illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

I find this case clearer. Because the child tells this himself, you have more facts to make clear to his parents when you start a conversation. Those are some of the things I think of, yes it is easy in the sense that it is very clear to indicate to parents during a conversation. (Respondent 7, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

The respondents who considered the other vignette, which was initially intended as the most certain situation, to be more worrisome, relied mainly on the child's behavioural change. Most respondents saw the bruise as a separate signal and found that not much could be done with it at the moment. A change in the child's behaviour, such as withdrawn behaviour in the classroom, was the clearest signal of child abuse for these respondents. The teachers who mainly focused on the behavioural change of the child often emphasized their willingness to offer help to parents in this regard. However, this would only be initiated when parents themselves are open to this. In addition, the absence of parents during school conversations and the limited interest in their child in this vignette are also perceived as

alarming by some teachers. These teachers were particularly concerned that parents did not seem to show any interest in their child. Moreover, the teachers suggested that they found it unpleasant when there is no good contact between parent and teacher, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

If parents do not show up for school meetings, it is a signal. The fact that you cannot make good contact with parents is a clear signal that something is wrong. (Respondent 1, high social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

Almost every respondent of the high social class group would talk to the parents in such certain situations about the signals they have identified. At the same time, most of them indicated that there is not much else they can do if parents were to deny this. The teachers indicated in this case that their goal is to hold up a mirror to parents and thus hope that parents realize that they need to change something. The following two interview excerpts illustrate this line of reasoning:

In any case, I would have a conversation with parents, and I do not know how they react to such a conversation and whether they are open to it or have the feeling 'Mind your own business, we just take care of it like this '. That is of course also possible. (Respondent 10, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

If you were to engage in a conversation with parents and they immediately deny it, there is very little you can do with it because it is a parent's word. (Respondent 12, high social class group; vignette with few signals)

In a situation with low uncertainty, most teachers are thus inclined to talk to parents about the signals they have identified. However, a number of teachers from the high social class group would, in such a situation, only have a conversation with the child and monitor the situation for the foreseeable future. One reason these teachers give is that they do not think they can achieve much by talking to parents because they feel like they have insufficient evidence of their suspicions. In addition, a small number of teachers emphasized their fear of losing the parents' trust if they are too quick to discuss such suspicions with them. These teachers said that they would talk to parents if the signals were to occur more often. The following interview excerpt illustrates the reticence of these teachers:

It is very difficult because so many other things can be the cause, and otherwise you just assume the worst. In such a situation you are more likely to choose not to take that step than to take it. Otherwise you very quickly create distrust. (Respondent 2, high social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

Finally, there are also some teachers from the high social class group who indicated that depending on the parents' reactions during their conversation, they would take further action. If parents would be uncooperative during such a conversation, these few teachers would discuss the most appropriate next step with the IB'er or advise parents, still without obligation, to contact a youth and family coach. In addition, one respondent suggested that she would continue to talk to parents and schedule follow-up appointments with them to see if they in the long-term can come to an agreement with the parents and to uncover the cause of the signals they have identified. Respondent 1 explains:

If the parents take a standoffish attitude, then other steps need to be taken. I think I would let it rest for a while and then talk to my colleagues, the IB and director about how we should proceed. (Respondent 1, high social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

4.3.3 Sub-conclusion

To summarize, the respondents presented with the vignettes about a family from a high social class take the bruise less seriously and focus in particular on a behavioural change of the child or statements made by a child in class. These teachers do not seem to perceive physical abuse as a likely option when dealing with a high social class family. Several teachers also indicated that there is a dichotomy between physical and mental child abuse and that physical abuse often occurs in low social class families while mental abuse would be more common in high social class families. These teachers seem to value the word of the child in particular, but at the same time also highly value the trust of the parents. As a result, teachers seem to be somewhat more reticent in the case of a family from a high social class. Especially in case of uncertain signals, the teachers would observe the situation for the time being because they feel that they still have too little evidence. Several teachers suggested that there may be alternative causes for the signals they have seen in the child, or they feel that it is not the school's job to interfere in parenting.

When these teachers interpreted the vignette as a certain situation, most teachers indicated that they would talk to parents and offer them help. However, this help would be non-committal, and the teachers would await the parents' response. In addition, a number of teachers would for now only talk to the child because they experienced that there was still too much uncertainty to talk to the parents. In the case of a high social class family, teachers seem more likely to think that there are alternative explanations for the signals or that it is a matter of parenting that has nothing to do with school. This makes teachers more reticent and less likely to take action. In cases where teachers would talk to parents, most teachers would only take further steps if parents were open to this themselves.

4.4 Low social class

First, this paragraph discusses how respondents generally reasoned about low social class families. The first sub-paragraph then zooms in on how the respondents from the low social class group reasoned when they experienced the vignette as a situation with a high degree of uncertainty. The second sub-paragraph explains how this group of respondents reasoned when they experienced the vignette as a situation with a low degree of uncertainty.

Respondents presented with the vignettes about a family from a low social class often reasoned that parents probably do not know how to raise their child properly and that the parents should receive help with this. Teachers from the low social class group tended to assume that these parents do not know how to properly parent and, therefore, need support and guidance. They emphasized that these parents want to take care of their children but simply do not know how, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

These types of parents are really trying to do their best to keep things going at home, but some parents just don't really know how to do it and I think this is such a situation. You can already see it in the profession, which is also a negative factor. That plays a role. (Respondent 16, low social class group)

According to teachers from the low social class group, these kinds of parents want the best for their child but they sometimes just do not know what is best for them. Most respondents, therefore, suggested that it is not unwillingness on the part of these parents when they abuse or neglect their child, but that the parents are not able to cope with the parenting or simply do not know how. According to the respondents, these parents thus need more help. In contrast to the high social class group, the respondents from the low social class group emphasize that this help is not without obligation. In case the family belongs to a low social class, the teachers emphasized the importance of the cooperation of the parents. However, if such parents would not cooperate, most teachers of the low social class group would involve external parties. This line of reasoning is illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

Some parents just have a slightly lower IQ, which sometimes makes them unable to handle parenting. Then we ask the parents questions like: 'Is everything okay at home? You may need help with your upbringing and of course there are agencies for that.' This gives you a clear picture and then you see what you can help the family and the child with. (Respondent 4, low social class group)

According to several teachers, this would be a case of parental powerlessness. These respondents mentioned that some parents come from a weak social environment and have not been given a good

example in their own childhood. This would often result in impotence in parenting. In addition, there seems to be disagreement among the respondents about the approach teachers can best apply when approaching parents from a low social class about signals they identify in a child. Some respondents indicated that such parents are less easy to approach, while other respondents disagree and experienced that these parents are more approachable. However, according to most respondents, this depends on the degree to which parents are open to help. When parents are open to help, most teachers indicated that they want to do this together with the parents. At the same time, when parents go on the defensive and in denial, most teachers would take further steps and involve external parties. The following interview excerpts illustrate the different types of reasoning of teachers from the low social group:

Families from a weak social circle are easily personally offended. Those parents cannot understand that you are worried about their child and then say 'mind your own business'. (Respondent 4, low social class group)

Such parents often respond very well, and are willing to admit that they cannot cope at home. (Respondent 8, low social class group)

If parents don't respond or aren't open to help, I would try another way, through an external agency. (Respondent 15, low social class group)

Additionally, various respondents considered a low social status as a risk factor for child abuse. The reasoning for these statements is often that such parents more often have debts or problems in the home situation, which causes stress. Every respondent considered stress a prominent risk factor for child abuse. These respondents most often mentioned money problems and financial debts, which they often associated with a low social status. Parents dealing with multiple problems, such as debt, unemployment, or an addiction, could take this stress out on their children. According to the teachers, problems in the home situation are, therefore, the greatest risk factors for child abuse. A number of teachers specifically indicated that debt and stress appear to be significant risk factors for child abuse and that these risk factors are often associated with parents from weaker social backgrounds, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

Such a low profession is of course also a negative factor. If parents are so poorly educated, that says a bit more than parents that, for example, work in an office. (Respondent 16, low social class group)

The fact that some teachers perceive a low social class as a risk factor for child abuse, partly explains why teachers are more likely to take action if a family belongs to a low social class.

4.4.1 Low social class: High degree of uncertainty

This sub-paragraph discusses how respondents from the low social class group reasoned when they experienced a vignette as a situation with a high degree of uncertainty. Most respondents who were presented with the vignettes about a low social class family interpreted the vignette that had been operationalized prior to the interviews as most uncertain, as the most uncertain situation (5 out of 8). These respondents thus interpreted the vignettes and uncertainty as expected. These respondents experienced the vignette about a boy making statements in class that could indicate neglect as very uncertain. The respondents who perceived this vignette as uncertain argued that children's statements cannot always be taken seriously and that children often want to act tough towards their classmates. Respondent 3 explains:

Sometimes children say anything, so you have to be very careful with that. Of course it could be that this little boy is fantasizing. (Respondent 3, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

However, many teachers found the vignette worrying enough to take steps. Most teachers felt that there was some truth in the child's story, but that the child in this vignette was exaggerating. Consequently, these teachers experienced this vignette as the most uncertain, but still certain enough to take action, as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

I do find it worrisome, because it is clear that those parents are not there for him at the weekend. (Respondent 5, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

The other respondents experienced the vignette that described multiple signals of child abuse and a bruise as the most uncertain situation. These respondents suggested that one should not draw a conclusion based on one bruise. These respondents all indicated that they would have an informal conversation with the parents about the signals from this vignette or talk to the child to obtain more information about the situation. A teacher from the low social class group explains:

Well, that is a bruise once; of course you should not hang anything on it. But that could of course become even more in the future. So pay close attention to what happens during gym classes. You can't really prove this yet, but you do have to talk to the parents. I would talk to the parents about it in a ten-minute conversation. (Respondent 4, low social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

When teachers from the low social class group were presented with what they thought was an uncertain case, they all indicated that they would discuss with the parents whether they are doing well and how things are going at home. Most of them would first informally approach the parents. These teachers emphasized that, in such cases, parents should first be given the opportunity to explain themselves and that following steps are taken based on their response during such a conversation. Most teachers wanted to offer help to parents and find out how they feel about this. This line of reasoning is illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

Sometimes it can also be helplessness of parents, that they do this because of their helplessness. That is really not allowed, but it is too soon to immediately call in child protection and report it. (Respondent 3, low social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

Additionally, in such an uncertain situation, almost every respondent from the low social class group would first enter into a conversation with the child in order to obtain more information. The majority of these teachers would also address the parents, usually first in an informal setting. However, the teachers emphasize that they consider the child's trust very important and that it is essential that a child feels safe at school. Before these teachers would address the parents about the signals, they would, therefore, first discuss this with the child. Finally, some respondents from the low social class group indicated that they would also seek advice from the IB'er in such an uncertain situation. Respondent 16 explains in the following interview excerpt why it is valuable to consult an IB'er in such a situation:

I would contact the IB'er because she is more specialized in problem children. She knows who can provide support and how to keep an eye on the family at this point. (Respondent 16, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

In short, even in uncertain situations, teachers from the low social class group were always inclined to talk with the child and subsequently often immediately address the parents about the signals. At the same time, in such an uncertain situation, teachers from the high social class group would often merely observe the situation for the time being or discuss the signals with a colleague. Teachers thus take more drastic action and perceive the situation as more serious when it comes to a family from a low social class. So the use of double standards appears to be present.

4.4.2 Low social class: Low degree of uncertainty

This sub-paragraph explains how respondents from the low social class group reasoned when they experienced a vignette as a situation with a low degree of uncertainty. Five out of eight respondents presented with the vignettes about a low social class family interpreted the vignette initially intended as a case with more certain signals, actually as the most certain situation. Thus, these respondents

interpreted the vignette containing multiple signs of child abuse, including a bruise, as a more certain situation of child abuse. These teachers take the bruise in particular seriously and consider it sufficient to take action. In addition, a number of teachers got the idea that the child in this vignette has bruises more often. While the teachers from the high social class group often did not assume physical abuse and did not take the bruise seriously, teachers seem more likely to assume physical abuse when it comes to a family from a low social class. These teachers seem to interpret uncertainty differently. Most teachers from the high social class group experienced bruising as an uncertain signal. In comparison, most teachers from the low social class group experienced bruising as a certain signal. This indicates that double standards are used in the interpretation of uncertainty. As the following interview excerpt illustrates, most teachers from the low social class group took a bruise quite seriously:

I think this case is more serious because there are also bruises involved. And then it is not only neglect but also abuse. This is actually physical child abuse. (Respondent 5, low social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

These respondents immediately took the bruise seriously and interpreted the vignette as possible physical abuse. Another element from this vignette that triggered most respondents to take action was the fact that the parents do not seem to show any interest in their child. Almost every respondent emphasized that good contact with parents is of great importance. These teachers interpreted the vignette in such a way that they felt that this was not the case. They experienced this as an alarming signal. In addition, some respondents emphasized that in such cases, children often show loyalty to their parents and are, therefore, less likely to admit that they have been abused. A child's word seems to be taken less seriously by this group of respondents because they feel that children often want to protect their parents. In contrast to the respondents from the high social class group, these teachers seem to assume that children do not readily speak out honestly about abuse. This line of reasoning is illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

The fact that the teacher saw the bruise and that child got on the defensive is loyalty. That is a loyalty issue, of course, and then there will be few children who would immediately tell this about their parents. They will try to disguise it. (Respondent 15, low social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

The fact that the child in the vignette denied everything and did not want to tell anything about the bruise was, therefore, a reason for a small number of teachers to experience this vignette as a less certain situation. Consequently, these respondents perceived the other vignette, in which a child tells a story in class, which could indicate neglect, as the more certain situation of child abuse. They

experienced this vignette as more certain situation because the child makes statements about the home situation. These teachers emphasize that few children would admit to being abused at home, so if they make such statements at school, it should be addressed immediately. Respondent 15 explains:

When he tells such a story it is very clear. (Respondent 15, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

The respondents who perceived this vignette as more certain often believed that the child was not properly cared for because the parents had money problems or were unsure how to structure their children. These teachers often assumed that parents had to work a lot because they probably have little money and that the child is, therefore, left alone a lot. The respondents believed that parents are assigning the child too much responsibility and that actual parenting is disappearing. While in the case of high social class families, the emphasis was on the parents' careers, here the emphasis is on financial problems of parents and the stress that this entails. This line of reasoning is illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

When parents work so much due to limited financial resources, children are left on their own. I think that is very bad. Those children no longer get enough structure and regularity. (Respondent 15, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

This often prompted teachers to offer such parents help from external organisations, such as family coaches. Each teacher from the low social class group would, in such a certain situation, invite parents for a formal conversation at school and involve the IB'er in this. When the teachers from the low social class group experienced a vignette as certain, each of them indicated that they would immediately call the parents to make a formal appointment together with the IB'er. In this case, too, most teachers would discuss this with the child first and indicate to the child that they are going to have a conversation with his parents. As illustrated by the following interview excerpt, teachers seem suspicious of parents who belong to a low social class:

I would take further steps, and especially since the mom has already been called and curtly replied and said all the kids have bruises so she already knows what it's about. Apparently the mother already knows that he has a lot of bruises. (Respondent 5, low social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

The teachers emphasized the importance of the IB'er's presence during such a conversation. They indicated that they feel better supported when the IB'er is present and that they are better informed of all the possibilities in such cases. In addition, according to the teachers, it comes across more seriously

to the parents when the conversation is conducted together with the IB'er. During the conversation with parents, a number of respondents would mention the reporting code and indicate that they have noticed signals. Most respondents would first ask parents whether things are going well at home to get a better picture of the home situation. In addition, these teachers would offer help to parents. This would usually be help from external organizations, such as a youth and family coach or other resources from the municipality.

During such a conversation, most respondents from the low social class group would first mention the behavioural change they noticed in the child and then would mention the bruise to parents. For these teachers, the combination of a behavioural change with a bruise was the clearest sign that something is wrong. The teachers emphasized that the response of the parents determines the course of the conversation. Based on the response of the parents, the teachers would take further steps. When parents are willing to accept help, the teachers will guide them in this process. The teachers would then work together with the IB'er and the parents to determine what help they need and how this can be arranged. However, when parents get on the defensive, deny it or become angry, the teachers indicate that they will report to 'Safe at Home'. In addition, some respondents suggested that some parents would like to change, but that this possibility is not always there. According to the teachers, this occurs when the parents themselves were raised in the same way and consequently do not know any better. When this is the case, teachers believe a report must also be made to 'Safe at Home' because this would be unsafe for the child. As illustrated by the following two interview excerpts, some respondents from the low social class group have little faith in such parents:

Some parents are willing to change, but you don't know whether it will all work out.
(Respondent 11, low social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

If the conversation with parents does not work out and parents react angrily, I would point out that we are legally obliged to work with the reporting code and that this falls under abuse.
(Respondent 3, low social class group; vignette with few signals)

Additionally, some respondents suggested that it seems wise to have someone come home to the family to see what the home situation is like in such a case. This would be an external organisation that guides the family at home with parenting. Respondent 16 explains:

At a certain point you just know, this is not enough, it is really because of the home situation. And then you really have to engage such an organization that comes to their home.
(Respondent 16, low social class group; vignette with multiple signals)

4.4.3 Sub-conclusion

In conclusion, when teachers were presented with the vignettes about a family from a low social class, most of the teachers reacted particularly to the bruise. These teachers felt that a bruise is a sign that more is going on, and often found it reason enough to talk to parents and take follow-up steps. In addition, these respondents perceived the child's behavioural change as another important signal. In the case of the vignette with a high degree of uncertainty, most teachers would first informally address parents about the signals and talk to the child. These teachers thought the situation was suspicious but first wanted to give parents the opportunity to explain themselves.

If these teachers interpreted the vignette as a situation with a high degree of certainty, they would all immediately invite the parents for a formal meeting at school. In addition, the teachers would involve the IB'er in this conversation and would jointly look at what help can be offered to parents, often from external parties. The following steps are determined based on the parents' response. When parents are open to help, teachers will arrange this together with parents and the IB'er, but when parents are not open to help, they would take further steps and report it to 'Safe at Home'. The teachers perceived a low social class as a risk factor for child abuse and emphasized that children are often loyal to their parents and do not always tell everything honestly. Finally, each teacher stressed the incompetence of such parents to take good care of their children. According to them, parents from a low social class are sometimes unable to parent or do not know how. This makes it essential for these teachers that such families receive the right help.

4.5 Double standards: Different types of mechanisms

When the teachers experienced a high degree of certainty in the case of a family from a low social class, they all suggested that there are probably multiple problems in the family's home situation and that there is possibly parental incompetence which makes these parents need help. At the same time, in the case of high social class parents, the teachers argued that the parents seem busy with their careers. Some teachers would offer such parents help but indicate that it is up to them to accept this help. For parents from a low social class, teachers hence seem more likely to assume that compulsory help is needed at home and that the parents are unable to cope. So it appears that double standards are being used. Teachers are less reserved in the case of families from a low social class and take more drastic actions. Every teacher presented with the vignette about a family from a low social class indicated that they would immediately talk to parents in a situation that they experienced as certain. At the same time, in the case of parents from a high social class, this was not the case for every teacher, and when they did start talking to parents, these teachers were more reserved about further steps.

When the teachers experience a higher degree of uncertainty, this difference in actions becomes greater. When the teachers experience a high degree of uncertainty in the case of a family from a high social class, they would only observe the child for the time being and discuss the signals with a colleague. When the family belongs to a low social class, on the other hand, in such an uncertain

situation, the teachers would often talk directly to the child and address the parents (often informally at first) about the signals. In addition, in the case of a family from a high social class, the teachers often came up with alternative explanations for the signals. In contrast, in the case of a family from a low social class, teachers immediately assumed that there were problems in the family. This led to more drastic action in the case of low social class families. The use of double standards thus becomes more significant as the degree of uncertainty increases.

Additionally, the teachers did not seem to perceive physical abuse as a likely option when dealing with a high social class family, while teachers do consider physical abuse as a serious option when dealing with a family from a low social class. The respondents presented with vignettes about a family from a low social class interpreted the vignette in which a bruise was included as more certain than the group of respondents presented with vignettes about a family from a high social class. Moreover, teachers from both the high social class group and the low social class group make the argument that 'parents work a lot'. However, teachers from the high social class group often interpreted this as a matter of neglect, while teachers from the low social class seem to assume that there is physical abuse. Double standards thus also appear to be used when it comes to the interpretation of uncertainty. When it comes to a family of a high social class, teachers seem more likely to assume that there is no physical abuse but focus more on mental abuse. Several teachers also indicated that there is a dichotomy between physical and mental child abuse, and that physical abuse often occurs in low social class families while mental abuse is more common in high social class families. Therefore, these stereotypes seem to encourage the use of double standards in teachers' interpretation of uncertainty of signals.

4.6 Faced obstacles

Most respondents emphasized that they feel sufficiently supported at school to discuss suspicions of child abuse with colleagues or professionals. However, many teachers experienced a number of obstacles to reporting these suspicions and signals of child abuse. According to these respondents, the biggest obstacle is the high administrative burden involved in reporting suspicions. When a report is made to the 'Safe at Home' organisation, a lot of administration is required of teachers. For example, various forms of 'Safe at Home' must be completed and, according to the teachers, this is insufficiently tailored to the administration of their school. It is challenging for the teachers to have all administration in order because the different school systems and 'Safe at Home' are not properly coordinated. Respondent 12 explains:

In such cases, you have to build up an entire file before you can get started with youth care. So it's a lot of work. And to type out every gut feeling, it just takes a lot of time. (Respondent 12, high social class group)

Several respondents also indicated that they are reluctant to take any further steps because the procedure at their school is too lengthy. They experienced the procedure as an obstacle to actually doing something with child abuse signals. The teachers said they are not given enough time to work properly with the reporting code and any suspicions of child abuse. According to the respondents, no time and space are offered during their daily work to be able to do this sufficiently. In addition, communication between the 'Safe at Home' organisation and teachers seems to be poor. These teachers experienced that reaching 'Safe at Home' is often not easy and that action is often not taken immediately. According to several respondents, 'Safe at Home' does not listen carefully to teachers when they suspect child abuse. According to them, action would only be taken when many multiple reports have been made about a family, so that a report by a teacher seems to have little effect. As illustrated by the following interview excerpt, some teachers feel that they are not taken seriously enough when it comes to this topic:

I think teachers should be taken a little more seriously in this regard, we have of course studied for it. (Respondent 16, low social class group)

A few respondents also indicated that they would not take any further steps if they suspected child abuse, because they were not confident that anything would actually be done about it. According to these teachers, this could be due to parents who do nothing with the advice and help offered by 'Safe at Home' on the one hand, and because of poor communication with 'Safe at Home' on the other. They felt that this brings the process to a standstill. This line of reasoning is illustrated in the following two interview excerpts:

You mention in such a conversation that the child itself indicates that he or she is not sleeping well. But then the parents' reaction is simply: we'll keep an eye on it. But it's no more than that and that's where it ends. (Respondent 13, high social class group)

It is very annoying because you can file your report and then 'Safe at Home' does an investigation and then they tell you later that there is nothing wrong. I have a lot of trouble with that and then the confidence and motivation to make the next report diminishes. (Respondent 7, high social class group)

In addition, many teachers emphasized that the reporting procedure could be organized more efficiently, and clear guidelines or a step-by-step plan are lacking at their school. These teachers say they would have been helped by clear guidelines of when to take which steps. According to the teachers, this step-by-step plan should consist of clear guidelines on when to report and when to invite

parents for a meeting at school. In addition, a number of teachers would have been helped with a clear list of risk factors of child abuse. Respondent 13 explains:

What I miss at school are clear guidelines. Clear guidelines on what to write down and what not to write down, what risk factors are, when to notice something and when to file a report. There are no clear guidelines for that. (Respondent 13, high social class group)

Finally, several teachers indicated that it often comes down to a teacher's feelings about the situation. The teachers argued that suspicions of child abuse are often based on gut feeling. The teachers indicated they would discuss such feelings with their colleagues or the IB'er. Respondents particularly emphasized the importance of a teacher's impression of the family, which is usually formed by a rough estimate. Possible follow-up steps are taken based on teachers' assessment of the family.

To summarize, most teachers indicated that they experience a high administrative burden in the process of reporting child abuse signals. In addition, a number of teachers argued that there are unclear guidelines at their school about when to take which action and what risk factors are. Since it is assumed that a high degree of uncertainty increases the use of double standards and stereotypes by SLBs, the ambiguity about the process of reporting child abuse signals could encourage primary school teachers to use stereotypes (Lipsky, 1980; Raaphorst, 2018; Severijns, 2019). In addition, since these teachers are often forced to rely on gut feeling, the degree of uncertainty is even greater, which increases the chance of using stereotypes even more. The lack of clear guidelines for teachers leads to a high degree of uncertainty in their daily work, which could partly explain the use of double standards in interpreting child abuse signals. Child abuse signals are often characterized by a high degree of ambiguity and it seems to be made even more uncertain for teachers by the lack of clear guidelines on how to interpret these signals. As a result of the obstacles teachers experience, they are even more led by stereotypes.

5. Conclusion & discussion

In the following chapter, the research question is answered, it is reviewed how double standards affect teachers' interpretation of child abuse signals and how uncertainty influences this mechanism. Subsequently, some suggestions to strengthen the reliability and validity of this research are provided. Finally, some suggestions for further research and practical recommendations are given.

5.1 Conclusion

The main question of this research is as follows: "How does uncertainty affect primary school teachers' use of double standards in interpreting signals of child abuse?".

The expectation was that teachers' use of double standards negatively affects parents from a low social class. In addition, teachers' use of these double standards would decrease when the degree of uncertainty is reduced. Both expectations are supported in the analysis.

When teachers interpreted child abuse signals, they used stricter standards when it concerned a family from a low social class than when it concerned to a family from a high social class. This means that the same child abuse signals were assessed more rigorously and that the respondents are inclined to take more drastic actions when the family is from a low social class. The analysis shows that the respondents were inclined to take more drastic actions when the family comes from a low social class than when the family comes from a high social class.

In an uncertain situation, the respondents from the low social class group would enter into a conversation with the child and, often informally at first, address the parents about the signals they have identified. The emphasis was always on offering help to parents, which external parties would often carry out. At the same time, the teachers from the high social class group indicated in an uncertain situation that they would observe the situation for the time being and talk to a colleague about the signals they have identified. In addition, these teachers considered parents' trust to be of great importance, and a number of teachers believed that some matters belong to parenting and that school should not interfere.

However, the use of double standards decreased when the degree of uncertainty of the situation decreased. When the respondents perceived the situation as certain, almost all of them indicated that they would immediately invite parents to school for a formal meeting. However, this is the case for all teachers presented with the vignettes about families from a low social class, while this is only the case for the majority of the teachers from the high social class group. In a certain situation, some respondents would only talk to the child if the family belonged to a high social class, and refrained from taking further action.

In addition, the approach to such a conversation was different. In the case of a family from a low social class, the teachers emphasized on offering help to the parents and argued that these parents sometimes do not know how to raise their child or are less capable. At the same time, the emphasis in the case of high social class families was that parents are likely to be busy with their careers and

consequently make too little time for their children. Therefore, the teachers also wanted to hold a mirror to these parents to make them aware that their child is suffering from this. The respondents who were inclined to invite parents from a high social class to school for a formal conversation, often emphasized that this conversation and any subsequent steps would be without obligation. In addition, the teachers were more likely to assume that a bruise in families from a high social class means little, while the teachers often took the bruise seriously in families from a low social class. This observation also supports the expectation that stereotypes are used. In the case of a family from a high social class, teachers were more inclined to assume that there is no question of physical abuse and, therefore, focus more on signals of neglect. At the same time, in the case of a family from a low social class, the teachers were more likely to assume that there is physical abuse and consequently they attach a greater importance to a bruise. In addition, external parties are more likely to be involved when the family comes from a low social class.

The difference in gradation between the actions that teachers tended to take thus became smaller when the degree of uncertainty in the situation decreased. In a certain situation, most teachers, from both the low social class and the high social class groups, were inclined to invite parents to the school for a formal meeting. However, the teachers were more reluctant to take further steps following such a formal conversation when the parents came from a high social class. Thus, double standards were used even in a situation of a high degree of certainty. These findings are in line with the double standards theory. Teachers reacted more strictly in cases where the family comes from a low social class. Additionally, when the degree of uncertainty increased, the difference in those standards got bigger. This is in line with the idea that stereotypes mainly occur when there is a great amount of uncertainty.

Finally, high administrative burdens and unclear guidelines seem to be obstacles for teachers to report suspicions of child abuse. Unclear guidelines on when to take what action and the lack of a clear list of child abuse risk factors, seem to create confusion and feelings of uncertainty for teachers regarding this process. This lack of clarity seems to encourage teachers to use stereotypes. Child abuse signals are often characterized by a high degree of ambiguity. Apparently teachers also lack clear guidelines on how to interpret these signals, making it even more uncertain for them. These obstacles experienced by teachers make them even more led by stereotypes. This is in line with the theoretical expectation that double standards are used in situations of high uncertainty.

In short, the theoretical expectation is confirmed. Teachers apply double standards when interpreting signals of child abuse, with low social class families being judged more harshly. The use of these double standards decreases as the degree of uncertainty of the signals decreases. Thus, uncertainty appears to have a significant influence on teachers' use of double standards when interpreting signs of child abuse. At the same time, teachers also employ double standards in the interpretation of uncertainty, making this mechanism more complex.

5.2 Reflection on methodology

In this study, a small number of threats to validity are identified. Various teachers from the Alkmaar region have been interviewed. However, there may be differences between teachers in other regions in the Netherlands. There is a chance that different regions will need a different approach. In that case it becomes a challenge to arrive at a reliable outcome for the general problem. In addition, there could be a chance of selection bias, which could form a threat to internal validity. Respondents are selected via social media by means of a convenience sample. This creates the risk that teachers who voluntarily participated in this study responded differently than teachers who did not participate (Toshkov, 2016). However, this selection method fits well with this research, as the aim is to discover mechanisms and not demonstrate effects. The qualitative nature of this research guarantees that the teachers' reasoning was actually examined, thus guaranteeing internal validity.

Finally, in order to construct uncertainty inductively, the vignettes have been mixed up. Thus, the deductive distribution of the vignettes and the deductive construction of uncertainty have not been adhered to. As a result, different types of signals have also been mixed, which may have affected teachers' reasoning. However, the in-depth analysis guarantees that teachers' experience of uncertainty has been investigated. This made it possible to find out, for example, that when respondents experienced a vignette as more uncertain, they consequently displayed more restraint. It was essential to find out the real reasons and motives of the respondents. In order to answer the research question and to ensure internal validity, it was essential to ensure that teachers' experience of uncertainty was examined.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

The findings of this study partly confirm what was already known, namely that street-level bureaucrats use double standards for different social classes (Raaphorst et al., 2017; Raaphorst & Groeneveld, 2018). Existing insights and literature are confirmed. However, this research adds the intersection of uncertainty and the double standards theory. This thesis combines insights from street-level bureaucracy and double-standard theory. Literature on street-level bureaucracy shows that SLBs use stereotypes to reduce the degree of uncertainty in a situation (Lipsky, 1980; Raaphorst, 2018; Severijns, 2019). However, the way in which uncertainty influences the use of double standards has not been studied before. This thesis indicates that the degree of uncertainty influences the use of double standards, which is a valuable theoretical addition to existing theories. The use of stereotypes and double standards diminishes along with the degree of uncertainty. In addition, this study contributes to the knowledge about how stereotype mechanisms work, when they are triggered and how this affects the interpretation of signals by street-level bureaucrats. This research indicates how uncertainty matters, which contributes to scientific knowledge about the double standards theory and research about stereotypes in public administration. The influence of the degree of uncertainty on the use of double standards by street-level bureaucrats has not been investigated before, which made this

study well suited for exploratory qualitative research. However, the external validity of this study remains limited, as it consists of a small number of respondents. As a result of this research, further research can be carried out in the form of an experiment with a larger number of respondents.

In addition, this research indicates that double standards are also used in the interpretation of uncertainty. The extent to which the respondents experienced a vignette as uncertain, on the one hand, had to do with the extent to which they took a child's statements seriously, but on the other, it had to do with social class. Future research should investigate these mechanisms further in the form of an exploratory design. Moreover, future experimental research should not assume that uncertainty is interpreted in the same way, as there is variation in social class. The experience of uncertainty appears to be person-specific and may be influenced by a number of reasons, like social class and the degree to which respondents value statements made by individuals. This is in line with the double standards theory, which states that combinations of signals can have a completely different meaning than other combinations (Foschi, 2000). Therefore, the same uncertainty signal can mean something different when the family belongs to a low social class than when the family belongs to a high social class. It thus seems essential that more research is done on the double standards theory in the future. Not only do signals seem to have a different meaning for different social classes, but uncertainty also means something different for different social classes. This research has shown how uncertainty can play a role, which future research should keep in mind.

Finally, in the case of a high social class family, teachers tended to assume that the child is neglected, while in the case of a low social class family, they were more likely to assume that there is physical child abuse involved. In both cases, teachers made the same argument, namely: parents work a lot and have little time for their children. So it seems that teachers attached different labels to the same argument. Future research may examine how exactly teachers' reasoning works in this case. Teachers seemed to assume that neglect is more common in high social class families and that physical abuse is more common in low social class families. Further research is needed on this mechanism.

5.4 Practical recommendations

This research shows how uncertainty may play a role in the use of double standards by teachers when interpreting child abuse signals. Practical recommendations based on these findings are that schools and public organizations should pay attention to the use of stereotypes in order to reduce it. For example, teacher training on identifying child abuse could focus more on the use of stereotypes, especially in unclear situations. Such training should address the use of stereotypes in unclear situations and how teachers can avoid the use of double standards. These training courses could also already be offered to student teachers. In addition, schools could pay extra attention to formulating clear guidelines for teachers about when they should take, which action, in case they identify signals of child abuse. There seems to be a demand from teachers for clear guidelines and a clear list of risk

factors. The respondents stated that they experienced this as unclear and that it often comes down to gut feeling. The unclear nature of guidelines and risk factors encourage the use of stereotypes. Clarifying this for process teachers seems to reduce the use of double standards. Although, even with clear guidelines, child abuse signals continue to be accompanied by ambiguity, providing clear guidelines partially removes this uncertainty. Guidelines that make clear when teachers should take which actions could therefore partly eliminate the use of stereotypes. Finally, it seems essential that the administrative processes of the 'Safe at Home' organisation and schools with regard to reporting child abuse signals are better coordinated. This would reduce the workload and make it more accessible for teachers to report their suspicions.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Information interview

- Respondent:
- Date and time:
- Locatie/Location:

Introduction

My name is Samira Rotteveel and I am currently completing my master's degree in Public Administration at Leiden University. To complete this master's degree, I am conducting a study into the signals primary school teachers look for to make assessments about child abuse. In this first part of the interview I present two cases to you, which I then ask you to respond to. In the second part of the interview I will ask you a few more questions about your daily activities and experiences with child abuse. Would you mind if I record our conversation? This is only for the elaboration of the interview and will not be shared further. Your answers will also remain anonymous and the research results will only be shared with my thesis supervisors. Afterwards I can explain some more about the research and answer any questions. Do you agree and can I start the interview?

Would you like to introduce yourself first?

- How long have you been working as a teacher?
- How did you get into education?

Vignette questions:

- What do you think of this case?
- What would you do here? *Research into specific concerns and interventions, as well as reasons for worry and intervention.*
- What are you basing this decision on? How do you see that, why do you think that?
- What information do you consider, what is important and why?
- What does it take to get you to take more action? Can you explain?
- What kind of image do you have of this family and why?

Interview questions

Characteristics of children and parents

- Without lumping everyone together, can you say something about the families you meet in your daily work? *Assessment of different families, equally easy or difficult to deal with.*

Uncertainty

- What do you think are clear signs of child abuse?
- Can you think of a reason not to report child abuse despite suspicions?
- Can you describe a situation where there could be child abuse, but it is too uncertain to report. Do you have experience with that?
- How do you deal with such uncertain situations, or how would you deal with them?

Child Abuse Signals

- When you meet new families or children, is there something you always want to know? *Find out whether systematic procedures are used to detect child abuse.*

Child abuse

- Do you have experience with child abuse (signals)? What was going on and what did you do?
- To what extent are the procedure and follow-up steps clearly known to you and your colleagues in the event of suspected child abuse? Is there a standard procedure at your school?
- What do you think of the child abuse policy at your school? Do you feel sufficiently supported in this? Why/why not?
- In your view, are there typical characteristics of a family where child abuse seems to be more common?

Finishing the interview

- Describe yourself as a teacher (focus on strengths and weaknesses, on good and difficult elements of the work).
- What did you think of the vignettes? Did you think it was realistic or is essential information missing to make a good estimate?

I would like to send you an informed consent form with the request to put your initials on it and fill in your name. The aim of the study is to find out which signals primary school teachers look at in order to make estimates about child abuse, the way in which they interpret these signals and what obstacles they may encounter. This involves investigating how social typologies play a role and how the degree of uncertainty of the signals plays a role.

If you have any questions, I'll be happy to answer them.

Appendix 2: Vignettes

High social class, vignette with multiple signals (intended as low uncertainty)

Imagine a boy in your class, his name is Daan and he is 9 years old. His mother is 39 years old and the owner of a hotel chain, and his father is 41 years old and a manager at Shell. Daan gets good grades, always pays attention and does his homework. He is at school every day at 8 o'clock and often hangs out in the schoolyard after school.

The rest of the class is a little restless, and students are often expelled from the classroom. These students demand a lot of attention and their parents are regularly invited to school. But Daan does not have conversations with professionals at school, except for discussions about his study results. His parents are not always present at report evenings, but after all, he gets good study results and pays attention in class.

However, you have recently noticed that in class he is quieter and shyer than before, and that he never takes a classmate home after school. In addition, once during gym class you noticed that he had a bruise on his arm. When you asked him about this, he said he fell while playing outside. You doubted the situation and called his mother. His mother had little time to talk, reacted curtly and emphasized that all children sometimes get hurt while playing.

High social class, vignette with few signals (intended as high uncertainty)

Imagine a boy in your class, his name is Daan and he is 8 years old. His mother is 39 years old and the owner of a hotel chain, and his father is 41 years old and a manager at Shell. Daan is a popular boy and seems to have many friends. In class, Daan is often noisy and very present.

You've noticed that he's often not focused and looks tired (pale face and bags under the eyes). One day, Daan enthusiastically tells his classmates about the weekend: "I can stay up very late on Saturdays. Mom and dad are often away and only come home at night. Then I am with my older sister (13 years old) who looks after me. Friends of hers come to visit often. We watch scary movies, eat a lot of sweets and drink soda. My sister's friends drink beer. Sometimes I don't go to bed until 2 am. Especially when my sister is in her room with her friends, she tends to forget the time. On Sundays I wake up early and Mom, Dad and my sister are often still asleep. Then I go outside to play with my neighbour. I come home at the end of the afternoon, and then we eat pizza or fries." The classmates react very enthusiastically and a classmate asks if he can come over and stay overnight, because he wants such a nice weekend.

Low social class, vignette with multiple signals (intended as low uncertainty)

Imagine a boy in your class, his name is Daan and he is 9 years old. His mother is 39 years old and a cleaning lady at a local hotel, and his father is 41 and a part-time gas station worker. Daan gets good

grades, always pays attention and does his homework. He is at school every day at 8 o'clock and often hangs out in the schoolyard after school.

The rest of the class is a little restless, and students are often expelled from the classroom. These students demand a lot of attention and their parents are regularly invited to school. But Daan does not have conversations with professionals at school, except for discussions about his study results. His parents are not always present at report evenings, but after all, he gets good study results and pays attention in class.

However, you have recently noticed that in class he is quieter and shyer than before, and that he never takes a classmate home after school. In addition, once during gym class you noticed that he had a bruise on his arm. When you asked him about this, he said he fell while playing outside. You doubted the situation and called his mother. His mother had little time to talk, reacted curtly and emphasized that all children sometimes get hurt while playing.

Low social class, vignette with few signals (intended as high uncertainty)

Imagine a boy in your class, his name is Daan and he is 8 years old. His mother is 39 years old and a cleaning lady at a local hotel, and his father is 41 and a part-time gas station worker. Daan is a popular boy and seems to have many friends. In class, Daan is often noisy and very present.

You've noticed that he's often not focused and looks tired (pale face and bags under the eyes). One day, Daan enthusiastically tells his classmates about the weekend: "I can stay up very late on Saturdays. Mom and dad are often away and only come home at night. Then I am with my older sister (13 years old) who looks after me. Friends of hers come to visit often. We watch scary movies, eat a lot of sweets and drink soda. My sister's friends drink beer. Sometimes I don't go to bed until 2 am. Especially when my sister is in her room with her friends, she tends to forget the time. On Sundays I wake up early and Mom, Dad and my sister are often still asleep. Then I go outside to play with my neighbour. I come home at the end of the afternoon, and then we eat pizza or fries." The classmates react very enthusiastically and a classmate asks if he can come over and stay overnight, because he wants such a nice weekend.

Appendix 3

Table 1: Background information

Respondent	Age	Years of experience	Gender	Low/high social class group
Respondent 1	53	25 years	F	High
Respondent 2	24	5 years	F	High
Respondent 3	54	31 years	F	Low
Respondent 4	60	41 years	F	Low
Respondent 5	24	2 years	F	Low
Respondent 6	52	8 years	F	High
Respondent 7	57	28 years	F	High
Respondent 8	53	2 years	F	Low
Respondent 9	26	3 years	M	High
Respondent 10	50	30 years	F	High
Respondent 11	55	35 years	F	Low
Respondent 12	32	10 years	F	High
Respondent 13	25	3 years	F	High
Respondent 14	59	40 years	F	Low
Respondent 15	45	15 years	F	Low
Respondent 16	24	2 years	F	Low

Appendix 4

Table 2: List of main codes

Codes	Code content
Administration	Administrative burden, unclear guidelines, communication with ‘Safe at Home’
Bruises	Interpretation of the bruise
Change in behaviour	Interpretation of change in behaviour
A child’s statement	How the respondents talk about a child's statements.
Risk factors	Respondents indicated several risk factors of child abuse
High social class	How respondents talk about families from a high social class, and how they interpret the signals.
Low social class	How respondents talk about families from a low social class, and how they interpret the signals.
Neglect	How respondents talk about neglect, why they feel that the child has been neglected.
Physical abuse	How respondents talk about physical abuse, why they feel that the child has been physically abused.
Doubtful	In this case, respondents would observe the situation and discuss it with a colleague
Suspicion	In this case, respondents would talk to the child and address parents informally about the signals they have identified.
Alarming	In this case, respondents would invite the parents for a formal meeting at school, and in some cases take following steps (for example involving external parties)

Appendix 5: Informed consent

Subject: Research into signals of child abuse. The aim of the study is to find out which signals primary school teachers look at to make estimates about child abuse, the way in which they interpret these signals and what obstacles they may encounter. It is examined whether social typologies play a role and whether the degree of uncertainty of the signals plays a role.

I hereby declare that I have been informed in a manner that is clear to me about the nature, method and purpose of the research.

I understand that:

- I can stop participating in this research at any time and without giving any reason
- Data is processed anonymously, without being traceable to the person
- The recording will be destroyed after the interview has been completed

I declare that I:

- I am willing to participate in this study voluntarily
- The results of this interview may be incorporated into a report
- Give permission to have the interview recorded by means of a voice recorder

Signature:

Name:

Date:

Researcher: I provided verbal explanations about the nature, method and purpose of the research. I declare that I am willing to answer any questions that arise regarding the research into assets.

Signature: SR

Name: Samira Rotteveel

Date: