

Raab, Miriam

Article — Published Version

Negotiating psychological costs: How welfare recipients' perceived interactions with welfare bureaucrats impact their experiences of administrative burden

International Journal of Social Welfare

Provided in Cooperation with:

John Wiley & Sons

Suggested Citation: Raab, Miriam (2025) : Negotiating psychological costs: How welfare recipients' perceived interactions with welfare bureaucrats impact their experiences of administrative burden, International Journal of Social Welfare, ISSN 1468-2397, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ, Vol. 34, Iss. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.70017>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/323889>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Negotiating psychological costs: How welfare recipients' perceived interactions with welfare bureaucrats impact their experiences of administrative burden

Miriam Raab^{1,2} 

¹Research Department Joblessness and Social Inclusion, Institute for Employment Research, Nuremberg, Germany

²Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Erlangen, Germany

Correspondence

Miriam Raab, Research Department Joblessness and Social Inclusion, Institute for Employment Research, Regensburger Straße 104, 90478 Nuremberg, Germany.
Email: miriam.raab@iab.de

Funding information

Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales

Abstract

While it is well established that welfare bureaucrats hold some discretionary power in implementing welfare policies, scholars of the administrative burden concept have only recently begun to consider their individual impacts on welfare recipients' experiences of onerous state encounters. This article aims to explore how welfare recipients' perceptions of personal interactions with welfare bureaucrats shape their experiences of administrative burden, specifically their psychological costs, by drawing on biographical–narrative interviews conducted with 33 (former) welfare benefit recipients in Germany. The results reveal that welfare recipients perceive individual welfare bureaucrats as responsible for reducing, increasing, or creating certain psychological costs they experience and that welfare recipients themselves respond to these costs and negotiate them to some extent. This article contributes to the growing literature on citizens' experiences of administrative burden and expands the concepts of psychological costs and citizen agency by building on theoretical frameworks of coping behaviours in response to stress and psychological costs. The results also confirm a need for policy changes that support, rather than discourage, more case-sensitive approaches to welfare benefits and employment services.

KEYWORDS

administrative burden, citizen agency, psychological costs, welfare recipients

INTRODUCTION

Means-tested welfare programmes are seen as increasingly conditional and focused on activation requirements (Dwyer et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2024). Thus, while welfare benefits provide desperately needed income to

claimants, the demands for receiving such benefits are often considered burdensome. The 'very conditionality' (Bækgaard, Moynihan, & Thomsen, 2021, p. 186) of means-tested programmes is a root cause of administrative burden, that is, experiencing interactions with the state as onerous (Burden et al., 2012). Much of the administrative burden literature focuses on the learning, compliance, and psychological costs citizens face

Abbreviation: SLBs, street-level bureaucrats.

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2025 The Author(s). *International Journal of Social Welfare* published by Akademikerförbundet SSR (ASSR) and John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

when trying to access programmes or claim benefits to which they are entitled (Daigneault & Macé, 2020; Heinrich, 2016). However, when I interviewed former welfare recipients who had participated in subsidised employment programmes about their past experiences with the welfare administration, it was the continuous personal interactions with individual welfare bureaucrats that stood out and seemed to be the determining factor shaping their experiences. Owing to high rates of staff turnover at welfare administration offices, most research participants had been assigned to several welfare bureaucrats over time, which resulted in vastly different experiences, as Luisa explained.

[My] experiences with the Jobcenter [were], I would say, dependent on the caseworker. It changed very often, thus sometimes good ones, sometimes bad ones.

These findings should not be surprising, as it has been well established that street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) have some degree of discretionary power to determine policy implementation and, consequently, the wellbeing of their clients (Lipsky, 2010). Bureaucratic interactions in welfare administration offices, as with most public services, are thus characterised by a personal power imbalance that extends beyond structural factors (*ibid.*). Dubois (2010) noted that ‘neither impersonal bureaucrats nor standardised clients exist: only social agents with individual personalities’ (*ibid.*, p. 4). Thus, frictions during front-line encounters seem almost inevitable. However, while much research on street-level bureaucracy has focused on individual bureaucrats’ discretionary processes (Harrits & Østergaard Møller, 2011; Lavee, 2021; Lotta & Kirschbaum, 2021; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2023; Tummers et al., 2015), only a smaller subgroup is dedicated to citizens’ experiences at the receiving end (Brodtkin & Majmundar, 2010; Dubois, 2010).

Within the literature on the administrative burden framework, on the other hand, where the citizen perspective is prominent, scholars have only recently connected burdensome experiences to the discretionary behaviours of SLBs (Bell & Meyer, 2024; Bell & Smith, 2022; Mikkelsen et al., 2024) and personal interactions between citizens and SLBs (Barnes & Henly, 2018; Masood & Nisar, 2020). Particularly interesting are the findings of Benoit and Marier (2024), Madsen (2024), and Negoita et al. (2023), who concluded that both the SLBs and the citizens in their studies suffered from administrative burdens and that the SLBs’ subsequent behaviours increased the citizens’ onerous experiences.

Building on concepts of coping behaviours employed by SLBs in response to stress (Tummers et al., 2015) and

by citizens during public encounters (Nielsen et al., 2021), this article explores how welfare recipients’ personal interactions with individual welfare bureaucrats shape their experiences of administrative burden. Drawing on biographical–narrative interviews with 33 (former) welfare benefit recipients in Germany, I analyse how their perceptions of individual SLBs’ behaviours impact their experiences of psychological costs and their responses to these costs.

The contributions of this article are twofold. First, it contributes to the empirical literature on citizens’ psychological costs by adding qualitative data from case studies of welfare recipients in Germany, focusing on continuous experiences with the same institution while interacting with different agents. Second, the article expands the literature on citizens’ reactions to administrative burdens both empirically and theoretically by building on concepts of coping behaviours.

STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS’ DISCRETION

The dilemmas faced by SLBs are central to Lipsky’s (2010) work on conflict on the frontlines of public services. While tasked with treating citizens equally when implementing public policies, SLBs possess some discretionary authority to handle each case individually. Therefore, they have a ‘considerable impact on peoples’ lives’ (Lipsky, 2010, p. 4). Time restrictions resulting from staff shortages in public administration as well as performance pressure cause ‘bureaucratic rationing’ (*ibid.*, p. 93), affecting the quality of services.

These coping strategies, as a response to stress, were further developed by Tummers et al. (2015). They distinguished between behavioural coping that moves ‘towards’, ‘away from’, or ‘against clients’ (*ibid.*, p. 1100). SLBs who move towards clients—termed the ‘citizen–agent narrative’ by Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2023)—respond to clients’ demands by bending or even breaking rules (Tummers et al., 2015). This includes SLBs who use their informal resources, such as personal time, money and social networks (Dubois, 2010; Lavee, 2021). Moving away from clients refers to standardised service delivery, which disregards the individual needs or circumstances of clients and the rationing of access to public services for these individuals (Tummers et al., 2015). Finally, SLBs are described as moving against clients when they rigidly follow rules in a controlling and confrontational manner either as a response to clients’ high demands or aggressions or due to their own frustration (*ibid.*).

Organisational constraints force SLBs to move away from at least some of their clients. Therefore, they

categorise (Harrits & Østergaard Møller, 2011; Lotta & Kirschbaum, 2021) clients into those who are deserving and worthy of more time and resources and those who are not.

The tropes of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor have accompanied social welfare states since their beginnings (Lis & Soly, 1979). Jilke and Tummers (2018) differentiated between the three deservingness cues ‘needed’, ‘earned’ and ‘resource deservingness’ that SLBs consider when assessing whom to help. They concluded that SLBs prioritised clients they perceived as needy over those whom they perceived as hardworking and that they disregarded resourceful clients (*ibid.*).

However, citizens are not just passive bystanders, as they contribute to SLBs’ judgements through their interactions with them (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012). Focusing on welfare bureaucrats, Senghaas (2021) found that they based their decisions regarding whether to treat an individual routinely, harshly or in a more supportive manner not only on welfare recipients’ compliance with fulfilling reciprocity expectations but also on their appearance during personal encounters.

Compared with SLBs’ discretion, the perspectives of the citizen at the receiving end are less prominent in the SLB literature (Brodkin & Majmundar, 2010; De Boer, 2021; Dubois, 2010). Dubois (2010) included the citizen perspective in SLB-citizen interactions in a French welfare administration office, highlighting how inconsistent and biased informal practices in service delivery as well as controlling and humiliating behaviours by welfare bureaucrats caused demoralising and burdensome experiences for clients. Brodkin and Majmundar (2010) connected formal and informal organisational practices such as caseload reduction and SLBs’ procedural discretion with respect to increasing the costs of claiming benefits to disadvantaged citizens’ bureaucratic exclusion.

Citizens’ experiences with welfare encounters are also a focus in the literature on bureaucratic disenfranchisement and welfare reform. Lipsky (1984) and Herd et al. (2005) found that retrenchment after welfare reform limited services through complex, intrusive application processes and administrative practices perceived as controlling, humiliating, and discouraging. However, frontline service delivery here is discussed as uniform without considering individual SLB deviations. Thus, it was not SLB discretion but rather the lack of personal interaction due to automated services that was criticised, especially by citizens in need (Herd et al., 2005). Nevertheless, Brodkin and Majmundar (2010) argued that welfare reform did not eliminate SLBs’ discretion but rather shifted it towards ‘procedural discretion’, allowing leeway in how strictly they followed procedures. However, SLBs also face increased surveillance and performance pressure

(Benoit & Marier, 2024; Mikkelsen et al., 2024; Soss et al., 2011).

CITIZENS’ ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS

A rapidly growing stream of literature on the administrative burden framework focuses on citizens’ experiences with public administrations. Experiences of administrative burden were first divided into learning, compliance, and psychological costs (Moynihan et al., 2015). For example, citizens must learn about rights and services, must comply with eligibility requirements, and may suffer discomfort and psychological distress during interactions. Examples of psychological costs include stress, stigma, loss of autonomy, uncertainty, confusion, anger, and frustration (see Halling and Bækgaard (2024) for an overview). Pressure to meet compliance requirements for welfare benefits and the threat of sanctions may cause stress and loss of autonomy (Bækgaard, Moynihan, & Thomsen, 2021). When welfare conditionality is interpreted as distrusting and devaluating, it can elicit stigma-related shame (*ibid.*). In the worst cases, such costs prevent individuals from claiming benefits for which they are eligible owing to a lack of awareness and challenging compliance demands (Daigneault & Macé, 2020). Costs can overlap and reinforce each other (Moynihan et al., 2015). However, these categories have also been criticised for their ambiguity and limitations (Bækgaard & Tankink, 2022; Daigneault, 2024).

Several empirical studies have determined that these costs often result from ‘state factors’ (Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2021), such as policy and administration designs combined with their formal and informal implementation (Burden et al., 2012; Heinrich, 2016; Moynihan et al., 2015). This usually includes frontline service delivery by SLBs without discussing their discretionary power. Herd and Moynihan (2018) viewed administrative burdens as being ‘constructed’ by policy makers, meaning that the causes of citizens’ onerous experiences can be ‘deliberately designed into policies’ (Peeters & Campos, 2021, p. 571). These burdens can be used to determine access to rights and services, including higher barriers for or the exclusion of certain groups, which contributes to social inequality (Benoit & Marier, 2024; Moynihan et al., 2015).

Experiences of administrative burden are subjective and not distributed equally (Burden et al., 2012; Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2021; Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Negoita et al., 2024; Nisar, 2018). Individuals most in need of services, such as ethnic or gender minorities, individuals with disabilities, and senior citizens, have

also been found to face the highest barriers when seeking them (Christensen et al., 2020; Negoita et al., 2024; Nisar, 2018). Apart from intentional or unintentional policy designs and implementations, the amount and intensity of burdens individuals experience also depend on ‘citizen factors’ (Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2021), such as citizens’ characteristics and individual circumstances, as well as their capacities, skills and resources to address the aforementioned costs (Bækgaard & Tankink, 2022; Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2021; Masood & Nisar, 2020).

However, administrative burdens do not simply occur between the state and its citizens; rather, they possess ‘an inherently relational aspect’ (Benish et al., 2024, p. 3). Several studies recognise that SLBs can modify citizens’ experiences of administrative burdens (Bell & Meyer, 2024; Bell & Smith, 2022; Daigneault & Macé, 2020; Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Mikkelsen et al., 2024; Nisar, 2018). Daigneault and Macé (2020) found that frontline agency workers contributed to citizens’ lack of awareness of a welfare programme by intentionally only promoting it rarely. Additionally, SLBs’ attitudes and practices, such as ‘moral policing’ (Nisar, 2018, p. 105) or the adoption of a ‘support role’ mentality (Bell & Smith, 2022, p. 175), can either exacerbate or alleviate citizens’ burdens.

Other scholars have linked citizens’ burdensome experiences with SLBs’ stressful working conditions. Mikkelsen et al. (2024) found that SLBs withheld support when experiencing stress, which led to increased costs among clients. Madsen (2024) confirmed that suffering from red tape negatively affected SLBs’ behaviours towards clients. Similarly, Bell and Meyer (2024) showed that stress-reduction measures could decrease access burdens for groups that had previously been neglected by bureaucrats. Moreover, Benoit and Marier (2024) discussed how SLBs in elderly home care also experienced administrative burdens due to governmental control which forced them to restrict services, causing additional burdens for senior citizens. Similarly, Negoita et al. (2023) indicated that shifting the administrative burden away from citizens and onto SLBs resulted in misunderstandings and frictions, which, again, added to citizens’ burdensome experiences.

Research on welfare benefit recipients revealed their awareness of SLBs’ discretionary power, and that some blamed them for their administrative burdens (Barnes & Henly, 2018). However, Peeters and Campos (2021) argued that welfare recipients had agency and were not merely ‘passive victims of burdens’ (ibid., p. 1012). Their empirical results showed that welfare recipients could actively influence the discretion of some welfare bureaucrats and were thus able to ease some of their administrative burdens themselves. However, the unpredictability

and uncontrollability of SLB assignments made it harder for them to use the mitigating mechanisms they had developed to ‘work’ (ibid., p. 1011) individual SLBs. Masood and Nisar (2020) noted that some citizens used ‘administrative capital’—the ‘understanding of bureaucratic rules, processes, and behaviours’ (ibid., p. 56)—to ease or circumvent burdens.

Finally, Nielsen et al. (2021) identified five types of coping behaviours employed by citizens in public encounters, ranging from inactive ‘accommodators’ over active, prepared ‘co-operators’ to active, opposing ‘resisters’, and active, opposing and prepared ‘fighters’ and ‘activists’. Halling and Petersen (2024) found that communicating psychological costs to frontline employees positively changed SLB decision-making in favour of citizens. However, not only were minorities less likely to voice complaints against unfair treatment (Gilad & Assouline, 2024), but their complaints also had less impact (Halling & Petersen, 2024).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretically, this article builds on the literature on administrative burdens and SLBs’ and citizens’ coping behaviours to approach the impact of street-level welfare interactions on the psychological costs experienced by welfare recipients. I used Tummers et al.’s (2015) categorisation of SLBs’ coping behaviours ‘towards’, ‘away from’ and ‘against’ clients to explain the modification of welfare recipients’ perceived costs, as influenced by SLB-ascribed behaviours, labelling them ‘ascribed supportive’, ‘ascribed disregarding’ and ‘ascribed confrontational behaviours’. Analysing citizens’ reactions to these cost modifications, I was inspired by Nielsen et al.’s (2021) typology of citizens’ coping behaviours in public encounters and identified the passive ‘quietly complying’ and the active ‘resisting compliance’ regarding job proposals, ‘complaining’ to SLBs or their superiors, and ‘initiating cooperation’ with SLBs. The respective coping behaviours and reactions resulted in welfare recipients’ ‘negotiated’ psychological costs.

I chose to concentrate on psychological costs, some of which were derived from compliance costs, as these were the costs communicated by the research participants. Psychological costs are arguably the most impactful and ultimately affect welfare recipients’ health and wellbeing (Bækgaard et al., 2021). Daigneault (2024) argued that, out of learning, compliance, and psychological costs, only psychological costs reflected the experiential essence of administrative burden. Furthermore, learning and compliance costs eventually become psychological costs, as they demand emotional resources (Bækgaard &

Tankink, 2022). Since the research participants described past welfare encounters retrospectively, the psychological distress was what they were still dwelling on. I did not focus on learning costs, as all research participants were able to claim welfare benefits and only exited full welfare receipt to participate in a subsidised employment programme.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

In Germany, unemployed welfare claimants who are deemed fit to work and are not or are no longer entitled to contributory benefits are eligible for basic income support ('Grundsicherung für Arbeitssuchende', which was colloquially known as 'Hartz IV' from 2005 until 2022). This scheme is means-tested, tax-funded and administered by municipalities or jointly alongside the German Employment Agency through welfare administration offices known as 'Jobcenters'. Jobcenters grant and disburse benefits and provide employment services that are implemented by job counsellors with backgrounds in public administration, social work and other professions (Kupka & Osiander, 2017).

Welfare recipients are obligated to attend regular meetings with job counsellors, document their job search efforts and participate in training and job placement. Failure to satisfy these requirements is punishable with financial sanctions. However, while welfare bureaucrats themselves are required to reach performance and outcome targets, they still have leeway regarding the number of monthly job applications, the frequency of meetings and the use of sanctions. They also decide which jobs are 'reasonable' and who is 'fit to work' and can exempt welfare recipients with health problems or other personal issues from these obligations (Senghaas, 2021).

DATA AND METHODS

This article is based on data collected in Germany for the research study 'Biographical case studies', which is part of the evaluation of the 'Participation Opportunities Act' ('Teilhabechancengesetz', §§16e and i of the German Social Code II) (Achatz et al., 2024). This act, which was introduced in 2019, consists of two subsidised employment programmes that target long-term unemployed welfare benefit recipients who have low chances of obtaining regular (re)employment. The original study was based on 62 qualitative interviews with 33 formerly long-term unemployed welfare benefit recipients who had at least temporarily exited full welfare status to participate in subsidised employment.

Research participants were selected on the basis of a cluster analysis of administrative data provided by the German employment agency (Nivorozhkin & Promberger, 2022) and partially through various Jobcenters. Potential research participants were contacted by post and telephone and assured that their personal data would be protected. The interviews were conducted between August 2020 and January 2023, either face-to-face or by telephone (for an overview of the sample, see Table 1).

The initial interview started with the research participants' open biographical narration (Rosenthal, 1995; Schütze, 1983), which was followed by a problem-centred, guide-assisted section (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) that partly focused on phases of unemployment and receipt of welfare benefits. Episodic follow-up interviews (Flick, 2011) were conducted 6–12 months later. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts

TABLE 1 Characteristics of research participants ($n = 33$).

Characteristic		Number of research participants
Gender ^a	Male	20
	Female	13
Age	30–39	11
	40–49	7
	50–59	13
	60 or older	2
Migration background ^b	Yes	7
	No	26
Vocational training	No vocational training	9
	Completed vocational training	24
State of health	Severely disabled	2
	Health-impaired	11
	Not health-impaired	20
Household composition	Single	18
	Single parent	10
	Partnered	2
	Partnered with children	3

Source: Author's own work.

^aThis assessment relies on the binary gender categories used in the administrative data collected by the German employment agency and by Jobcenter staff. Research participants were not asked about their gender or gender identity during the interviews.

^bThis term describes individuals with a first- or second-generation migration experience. Migration background was determined based on information regarding citizenship obtained from the administrative data and research participants' biographical narrations.

TABLE 2 Research participants quoted (in order of appearance).

Pseudonym	Gender	Age group	Migration background	State of health	Vocational training	Household status
Luisa	F	30–39	No	Not health-impaired	Yes	Partnered with children
Hans	M	50–59	No	Health-impaired	Yes	Single
Amir	M	30–39	Yes	Not health-impaired	No	Partnered with children
Otto	M	50–59	No	Health-impaired	No	Single
Karl	M	30–39	No	Health-impaired	Yes	Single
Jelena	F	40–49	Yes	Not health-impaired	No	Single parent
Kristin	F	30–39	No	Health-impaired	Yes	Single parent
Werner	M	50–59	No	Health-impaired	Yes	Single
Susanne	F	30–39	No	Not health-impaired	Yes	Single parent
Hermann	M	50–59	No	Not health-impaired	Yes	Single

Source: Author's own work.

were coded in MAXQDA using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

This article focuses on research participants' retrospective accounts of their interactions with Jobcenters. These codings were subcoded into factors that the research participants felt were responsible for increasing or reducing the psychological costs they experienced—state factors, citizen factors, and interactional factors that pertained to the interactions between the individual welfare recipient and the individual bureaucrat. The empirical results section is mainly based on interactional factors but uses the other factors to contextualise them where needed. All the cases were anonymised, and all the names used in this article are pseudonyms (for the characteristics of the research participants who are quoted in this article, see Table 2).

EMPIRICAL RESULTS: NEGOTIATING PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS

To organise the empirical results, I divided the dynamic interactions the research participants described having with job counsellors into three parts: the cost modifications caused by the ascribed job counsellors' behaviours, the welfare recipients' responses, and the negotiated outcomes.

Cost modifications ascribed to job counsellors' perceived behaviours

In this subsection, I analyse the interviewed welfare recipients' alleviated, increased or added psychological

costs, which can be attributed to three types of job counsellors' ascribed behaviours: supportive, disregarding, or confrontational.

Cost alleviation through ascribed supportive behaviour

Job counsellors whose behaviours the research participants described as friendly and supportive adapted to their personal circumstances by bending the rules or spending additional resources. These counsellors were generally perceived to alleviate welfare recipients' psychological costs, such as stress or loss of autonomy. Hans had nothing but praise for the job counsellor he had worked with for a long time.

There is no pressure; they are humane at the Jobcenter. Well, I at least did [have good experiences there]. [...] Support is given there; I talk to Mrs. [the job counsellor's last name] about this and that [...] Communication is sensible. [...] But when something comes up, it's discussed beforehand, if I'm agreeing to it, I say yes. I'm generally always agreeing.

Hans commended his job counsellor for supporting him during his job application and training efforts, particularly for offering him choices and including him in decisions. By doing so, she prevented the potential loss of autonomy that often comes with the mandatory work requirement. Hans also described his counsellor as sensitive to his circumstances. Since she was aware that Hans lived in an economically underdeveloped area, she softened the requirements, such as the number of

applications he had to submit per month, which reduced his stress in this regard. An explanation Hans gave for his job counsellor's behaviour was her humanity. By underlining that *his* experiences with the Jobcenter had been positive, Hans also showed that he knew of other welfare recipients who were less fortunate in this regard. However, Hans also mentioned his general willingness to cooperate, which could have affected his job counsellors' behaviour towards him.

Amir also described his job counsellor as supportive, but his counsellor went even further in his efforts. When Amir, his wife and their children had to seek new housing after their landlord terminated the tenant agreement, Amir's counsellor paused his 'activation' status and freed him from all of his job search obligations to enable him to address his family's pressing housing issues. Amir recalled their interaction as follows,

Our landlord made [...] personal need; we had to leave. [...] Back then, I also lost my job. [...] I told [the counsellor], "I continue to look for work." [...] He said, "Mr. [Amir's last name], from now on, you don't need work; now you're there for [your] family." [...] Then, I said, "But I can't without work." He says, "Yes, we see that: What have you worked? Everywhere you've been? We see, you've worked the whole time. Now you have to secure your family." And then I said, "Okay." [...] And then he said, "I leave you in peace now until you find a flat."

The job counsellor's behaviour, as described by Amir, was clearly oriented towards his personal circumstances. Amir appreciated the help provided by his counsellor, who also referred him to an organisation that supported his search for housing. Amir's counsellor's discretion helped mitigate the stress of being required to search for housing while working at the same time. By repeatedly stating his willingness to work and hesitation to agree with his exemption, Amir presented himself as deserving to be excepted from the rules. This is also how Amir interpreted the job counsellor's behaviour, believing that he was freed from his obligations because his prior hard work had proven him deserving.

Karl, a young man in his 30s who listed both physical and mental illnesses, including a social phobia, as reasons that he was unfit to work, was referred to a third party by one of his job counsellors, which alleviated several psychological costs, such as stress and anxiety. His '*social lady*', a social worker at the psychosocial service of a non-profit association, taught him stress relief and anger management measures. Although Karl could not

remember anything else about the job counsellor who had referred him to the social worker, she had provided him with a person outside the Jobcenter, who could address his personal issues.

Being severely dyslexic, Otto found regularly applying for extensions of his benefits—only approved for 12 months at a time—an onerous task, especially after his brother, who had previously helped him with paperwork, passed away. When I asked Otto whether someone in the Jobcenter could help him instead, Otto replied,

(laughing) Jobcenter. Yes, you ask, "No, we're not allowed to." [...] Well, I once had one there, who was my case manager. She actually did ... That happened, that she would help me.

The job counsellor took extra time to accommodate Otto's needs, something other counsellors had refused to do, claiming it was against the rules. This apparent rule bending or breaking led to immense relief for Otto, who feared existential consequences if he could not accomplish this task on his own, as he explained,

Well, that you don't lose your flat. [...] Well, you're always afraid in the back of your mind. When you forget ... or can't fill in the form. I always have to ask, "Who will help me?"

By actually helping him complete his form during an appointment, one of Otto's job counsellors mitigated his stress and anxiety regarding the possibility that he might fail to satisfy the requirement, at least temporarily.

Jelena recounted being pigeonholed as an undeserving troublemaker because she often questioned regulations or training programmes and thus had negative experiences with every job counsellor until she was assigned to one who seemed to disregard her colleagues' negative comments about Jelena. Jelena recalled that her new counsellor informed her of the bad reputation she had acquired at the Jobcenter.

My current [job counsellor], [...] said: "I know you. I have heard many, many complaints." [...] Well, because before, I had only – what's the word – enemies [at the Jobcenter].

This remark suggests not only that Jelena had been stigmatised by previous counsellors but also that this categorisation was passed on to successors and was subsequently repeated. However, from Jelena's perspective, her new job counsellor ignored her colleagues' assessments of Jelena and treated her without judgement. In doing so, this counsellor mitigated the stress and

frustration that Jelena had previously experienced due to conflicts with counsellors during her Jobcenter appointments.

Cost increase through ascribed disregarding behaviour

When research participants perceived job counsellors as indifferent because they ignored their personal needs and overlooked their requests, their psychological costs increased, contributing to their frustration and stigma-related shame. One persistent theme highlighted by many research participants was a sense of being miscategorised as lazy or unwilling to work and thus viewed as ‘undeserving’ of special consideration by job counsellors. Kristin, a single mother who had struggled to find a permanent job despite having completed vocational training as well as further education, perceived her diligence as being ignored by many of her job counsellors, and she, at times, felt unsupported in her efforts, as she described,

Yes, because sometimes you felt a little let down. [...] By the Jobcenter I often felt abandoned [...]. You were then always placed on the same level as others, which is where I have always said, “You have to consider ... or look at my file, I’m doing everything, what is offered to me, to not just sit at home.” And then they would always tell you, “Well, you have to take self-initiative!” And I ... what else should I do, except write 35 applications per month?

Feeling neglected by her job counsellors due to unattainable deservingness criteria, Kristin became frustrated and felt increased shame that she already associated with her unemployment.

Owing to his job counsellor’s discretion, Otto was required to interview for jobs for which he felt unqualified. This situation exacerbated the stigma from which he already suffered due to being unemployed and barely literate, as he described:

Well, sometimes I think, you’re in the bottom drawer, people who live on the [Jobcenter]. [...] Well, you want to work. But when [employers] ask, “What have you learned?” And when you then also say that you have trouble with reading and writing, then you already know [...] We are partly branded. At some point, you should be fair and honest

and say, “Well, you can’t do that. So, let it be and so.”

This quotation highlights Otto’s frustration and discouragement, as he was forced to interview for jobs without any prospect of success. By insisting that he applied and interviewed for jobs that were unavailable or unattainable, Otto’s counsellor added humiliation and disappointment to the psychological costs he already endured.

Karl described a similar standardised behaviour by one of his job counsellors. Although she was friendly, Karl’s counsellor disregarded his psychosocial impairments, as he recalled.

She [was] nice and friendly [...] I can’t hold that against her, but she was one of these, let’s call her a lady of the old school. You could tell that she really wanted, that people went into work. With people’s problems or things that you told her, she didn’t really want to deal with.

Karl explained his counsellors’ adherence to requirements with her older age and long-term service in the agency. As a ‘*lady of the old school*’, he claimed that she perceived her role solely as job placement without allowing welfare recipients’ personal circumstances to affect her decisions.

Cost increase and added psychological costs through ascribed confrontational behaviour

Job counsellors, whom the research participants perceived as displaying rude or even hostile behaviour, refusing service, raising requirements, and levelling accusations, intensified the psychological costs the welfare recipients experienced and created additional costs. Werner, who was forced to quit his old job due to his poor health, recalled being screamed at and repeatedly called a fraudster by his job counsellor over an honest mistake that he had made regarding documentation.

Well, [...] that was really a low blow, no? [...] Well, that is really inhumane. Maybe there are people who cheat, maybe, but, I mean, you really have to distinguish who’s sitting in front of you.

Werner’s insight highlights that while he understood that fraud occurred, he felt that this did not justify his counsellor subjecting him to general suspicion and

hostile behaviour, which increased his stress and added new feelings of degradation and shame.

Similarly, Susanne, a single mother, remembered how she was affected when her job counsellor verbally lashed out at her for questioning the suitability of a job proposal.

Well, [...] she was really, really nasty. She was unfriendly; she dissed me when I didn't want to apply to some posting. When I told her, "You know what, I can't work 40 hours [...]" Honestly, I had real stomach pains. I didn't want to go to her. [...] Well, she alone would have managed that you don't keep appointments anymore, [and] that you then get [benefit] cuts or something like that [...] or that you voluntarily find yourself a job really fast, so you don't have to go there anymore.

Susanne interpreted her job counsellor's rude behaviour as a reaction to her disagreement and thus noncompliance with her counsellor's discretion towards the suitability of a full-time job. Susanne explained that she understood why people risked sanctions or rushed into employment to avoid further appointments with disrespectful counsellors, as she herself had experienced both physical and mental discomfort.

Hermann, who already had a strained relationship with public administration, particularly with respect to female bureaucrats because of a year-long paternity suit at a youth welfare office, also saw himself faced with challenging job proposals by his female job counsellor, as he explained,

It's not that I have anything against women, but this one was really rough. [...] She sent me some job proposal things that were [...]; she sends me [so far] because of some warehouse job for four hours. Well, tell me, are you crazy? This means a longer commute than working hours.

Hermann found no explanation for this job counsellor's behaviour, which frustrated him. However, he pointed out her gender and his history with female bureaucrats, thus suggesting that he had reservations about his counsellor, which might have also affected his own behaviour towards her.

While Werner, Susanne, and Hermann saw no warranted trigger in their own behaviours for their unfair treatment, Jelena conceded to contributing to her tumultuous interactions with job counsellors. Jelena described that one of her counsellors asked her to leave after she

had made irreverent remarks during an appointment. The counsellor subsequently sent Jelena short notice invitations to Jobcenter appointments, as she recounted.

And a couple of times she sent me away, because I was so cheeky and depressed. [...] And then I received invitations. [...] And for example, today is Monday, and I open the mailbox. I already have an appointment on Friday. [...] Normally, the Jobcenter doesn't do something like that. You're given a week.

Jelena interpreted this practice as punishment for her nonconforming behaviour and suffered more stress regarding her punctual attendance at appointments as a consequence.

Welfare recipients' responses to job counsellors' behaviours

Most of the research participants described accounts of reacting both passively and actively towards their job counsellors' perceived disregarding or confrontational behaviour and how it modified the psychological costs they experienced and attributed to them. I identified four responses by welfare recipients: 'quietly complying', which is passive, and 'resisting compliance', 'complaining' and 'initiating cooperation', all of which are active.

Quietly complying

Welfare recipients behaved passively and quietly complied with raised or seemingly unfair requirements and hostile behaviours by job counsellors when they thought they could not change their behaviours and wanted to avoid repercussions such as financial sanctions. Consequently, both Otto and Susanne continued to apply and interview for jobs they knew were unsuitable for them. However, in Susanne's case, this experience also boosted her motivation to find work so that she could end her exposure to her rude counsellor, as she remembered.

I didn't want to go to her anymore. I was so happy that I then found this [job] and got out of unemployment.

Resisting compliance

Actively rejecting job proposals and resisting other compliance demands made by job counsellors was an effort

by welfare recipients to influence their counsellors' discretion and regain some dignity and autonomy while knowingly risking financial sanctions. For Otto, his job counsellor crossed a line when she proposed a job at a temporary employment agency. Otto stopped quietly complying by accepting every previous proposal without objection and finally declined out of fear that he would not be able to cope with changing work addresses and shifts owing to his low level of literacy.

I always did everything, except once, when I refused. Temp agencies, temp work [...] Then, I said, "No, won't do." [...] Because, I have, like I said, problems with reading and writing. And then you always have to go somewhere and so ...

Other research participants used administrative capital to inform themselves and support their argument. Hermann argued that a job proposal made by his counsellor was '*unreasonable*' because of the long commute it required. Unlike Otto and Hermann, Karl saw himself unfit for any job and resisted this requirement with the assistance of his social worker, official documentation and a personal appeal, as he recalled,

[With] my social lady, I applied for the disability degree that I luckily also received. [...] I have 50 percent on my anxiety disorder. [...] I put it in the [counsellors'] hand, looked her in the eyes and said, "It's an anxiety disorder." I explained to her what that means, what it does.

Complaining

As a way to cope with perceived unfair or rude treatment by job counsellors, welfare recipients resorted to complaining to their counsellors or their superiors, hoping to change the counsellor's behaviour, preserve their dignity, and reduce the stress, stigma, and anxiety they experienced. Werner complained to his job counsellor about her false accusations and hostile tone in an attempt to receive an apology and prevent future degradation. With a similar objective, Kristin confronted one of her counsellors about his lack of support and condescending behaviour towards her:

That's what I said at some point, "If I wouldn't sit here, you wouldn't sit there." Things would be exactly the other way around, and that's what they forget

somehow. [...] I have said that a few times and put my foot in my mouth a few times as well, but in my opinion, you don't have to put up with everything. Not even from them, because they are not above us. We are also just humans.

Hermann even went a step further and reported his job counsellor's behaviour to her supervisor, asking her to assign him to another counsellor, preferably a male, as he recalled:

And yes, at some point, I talked to the department manager personally and said: "You know what, I now want to have somebody else here."

As he did not expect a change in his job counsellor's behaviour, Hermann instead hoped for better treatment from a different person.

Initiating cooperation

Taking the initiative and proposing a training option or job placement was the research participants' rare response to standardised treatment or neglect with the aim of receiving extra time or resources from job counsellors. After feeling abandoned by her job counsellors for a long time and learning that yet again, a new counsellor had been assigned to her, Kristin proposed a training course in which she wanted to participate but needed financing.

I had not heard from the Jobcenter in a year, which seems random to me, and then I saw online now, that I suddenly [...] had a new job counsellor, and then I thought, now I call her and inquire, if she could recommend something to me.

Negotiated psychological costs

When welfare recipients quietly complied, their psychological costs remained unchanged. However, active responses triggered counterreactions from their job counsellors (or their counsellors' superiors), who had the discretionary power to accommodate them, dismiss their requests or complaints, or sanction their noncompliance. This, again, was perceived as supportive, disregarding, or confrontational behaviour by welfare recipients, which in the end alleviated or increased the psychological costs they had previously experienced.

Increased costs

For some research participants, actively responding to the psychological costs they ascribed to job counsellors' behaviours did not pay off, and the costs increased. After Werner's complaint, his job counsellor did not apologise for her accusations, nor did she change her tone towards him. Consequently, he became even angrier and more frustrated and eventually came to a similar realisation as Susanne, in which he had to find any form of employment quickly to escape his counsellor's treatment. *'Before I have to go back there, I'd rather clean toilets'*, he concluded.

Karl was equally unsuccessful in convincing his job counsellor of his impairments and reducing his anxiety due to job search obligations, as she persisted in pursuing her strict activation goals. Seeing no other option, Karl eventually applied for limited incapacity benefits rather than welfare benefits.

Hermann's situation worsened after he rejected a job proposal, and his job counsellor chose to reduce his benefits. Consequently, his anger and frustration increased while he additionally had to address the material costs of the financial sanction.

Cost concessions

Other research participants made concessions. While they were able to alleviate some costs, such as loss of autonomy, or prevent additional costs, such as degradation, they accepted an increase in others. Like Hermann, Otto was sanctioned by his job counsellor when he declined a job offer. However, the reduction in benefits that he faced seemed to be a worthwhile cost to avoid losing his dignity by failing at a temp job, as he recalled.

Well, then I got a blockage, but I put up with that. [...] I think it was two or three months. [...] Ten percent [less].

Kristin's job counsellor did not modify his behaviour even after she addressed his perceived condescending and neglectful actions. However, while her complaint drained a great deal of emotional resources from her, Kristin was still able to ease her frustration and loss of autonomy and combat the spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963) that she felt was imposed on her by speaking up for herself.

Alleviated costs

When interacting with other job counsellors, Hermann and Kristin were more successful in alleviating the

psychological costs they faced. Herman's complaint to the Jobcenter manager was fruitful, and he was assigned to a male counsellor, as he recounted,

And [the manager] then was very approachable. [...] She says she will make a note and will try [...]. But she can't promise me anything about how soon this will work. But it worked; I then got a guy.

The relaxed attitude exhibited by Hermann's new job counsellor proved to be much more effective with Hermann and reduced his stress, frustration and anxiety without decreasing his compliance. By asking for a new counsellor and being accommodated by the agency manager, Hermann helped minimise the psychological costs that he attributed to the intensified conditionality imposed by his previous counsellor. Kristin managed to convince her new job counsellor to deter from standardised practices and authorise the financing of the training that she wanted to complete, which reduced her frustration and allowed her to regain her sense of autonomy.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this article was to analyse, from the perspective of 33 (former) welfare recipients, how their interactions with individual welfare bureaucrats impacted the psychological costs they experienced. Research participants attributed their alleviated psychological costs to welfare bureaucrats, whom they perceived as supportive and willing to bend the rules in light of the welfare recipients' personal circumstances. On the other hand, perceived disregarding or confrontational behaviours by bureaucrats who rigidly followed rules or raised obligations were viewed as increasing the psychological costs that the research participants experienced. They then either quietly complied or attempted to actively negotiate the increased frustration or humiliation by resisting compliance, complaining, or initiating cooperation with welfare bureaucrats. Ultimately, SLBs held the discretionary power to determine some of the psychological costs that welfare recipients experienced by accommodating their requests, dismissing them, or sanctioning them. However, some welfare recipients were able to make concessions. Overall, the results point to a strong interconnection between the perceived behaviours of the SLBs and those of the welfare recipients, which can both intentionally and unintentionally influence each other given that neither agent acts in isolation.

The behaviours research participants ascribed to their counsellors lend themselves to categories of SLBs' coping behaviours (Tummers et al., 2015) and patterns, such as

an orientation towards clients as a response to perceived neediness or hard work (Jilke & Tummers, 2018). The findings also suggest that SLBs can be triggered to turn against clients whom they perceive as demanding or rude (Tummers et al., 2015). Thus, citizens might unintentionally and unknowingly contribute to their own psychological costs through their behaviour. Additionally, the results confirm that minorities or individuals facing more vulnerabilities experience additional administrative burdens due to a combination of citizen and state factors. This also offers more opportunities for SLBs and for these individuals themselves to influence their psychological costs.

The research participants' negotiation practices bear some resemblance with the coping behaviours developed by Nielsen et al. (2021), as they reveal differences in citizens' levels of activity and, to a lesser extent, in their preparations. However, communicating their psychological costs did not always evoke the desired response from welfare bureaucrats, which challenges Halling and Petersen's (2024) results. This may be explained by different research designs and perspectives.

SLBs' discretion can be viewed as a double-edged sword for citizens. While it opens the door for their agency, SLBs still have the last say and can decide to either approve or reject the citizens' requests. Attempts to 'work' welfare bureaucrats using social or administrative capital (Masood & Nisar, 2020; Peeters & Campos, 2021) can succeed with one SLB but fail with another. Consequently, citizens find themselves in an arbitrary system, where their wellbeing often depends on the compatibility of individual personalities and ultimately luck.

This article contributes to the growing literature on citizens' experiences of administrative burden by providing concrete examples of welfare recipients' psychological costs during their interactions with different SLBs within the same institution and regarding the same demands. It also expands the literature on citizen agency and reactions to administrative burdens by building on theoretical concepts of coping behaviours in response to stress and psychological costs.

The original research design and empirical data this article is based on have certain limitations. As the interviews were conducted to explore a broader research question, the limited time of the interviews was not always sufficient to reach saturation. Moreover, the analysis is based on research participants' retrospective accounts of their welfare experiences, as many research participants were employed when they were interviewed. Most importantly, as there were no interviews conducted with SLBs, this article presents only patterns of their perceived behaviour and suggests explanations on the basis of

welfare recipients' interpretations without knowing the SLBs' actual intentions.

Future research should focus more closely on the interplay between both agents during welfare interactions and how respective motivations and behaviours influence the experiences of both welfare recipients and bureaucrats, trigger reactions, and negotiate outcomes. Participant observation and subsequent in-depth interviews with both agents offer substantial potential in this context. The inclusion of middle managers' perspectives (Gofen et al., 2024) may be fruitful with respect to SLBs' organisational constraints and freedoms.

The results highlight the determining roles of SLBs in shaping citizens' experiences with public agencies and confirm the need for more citizen-centred services that involve citizens in decision-making and support their agency. This would require several policy changes, including improved working conditions, such as reduced caseloads and the employment of sufficient bureaucrats in administration, as well as adequate financial resources, which could enable frontline workers to use case-sensitive approaches with *all* clients. Additionally, this would entail a shift away from strict workfare and activation measures towards a more holistic approach that looks at the 'whole person' (Negoita et al., 2024, p. 8) to resolve pressing issues that might prevent welfare recipients from taking up work. While the 2023 welfare reform in Germany initially promoted a stronger orientation towards services at eye level, the current political climate raises questions about its implementation. Welfare recipients' perceptions of these developments have yet to be studied.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Markus Promberger, Emily Frank and Mariella Falkenhain for their constructive feedback on earlier drafts of this article, as well as the associate editor and anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to the research participants for sharing their stories and perspectives. The research project this article is based on was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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

ORCID

Miriam Raab  <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2507-4821>

REFERENCES

- Achatz, J., Bauer, F., Bennett, J., Bömmel, N., Coban, M., Dietz, M., Englert, K., Fuchs, P., Gellermann, J. F. C., Globisch, C., Hülle, S., Kasrin, Z., Kupka, P., Nivorozhkin, A., Osiander, C., Pohlan, L., Promberger, M., Raab, M., Ramos Lobato, P., ... Zabel, C. (2024). Evaluation des Teilhabechancengesetzes—Abschlussbericht [Evaluation of the Participation Opportunities Act—Final Report, No. 04/2024]. *IAB-Forschungsbericht*.
- Bækgaard, M., Mikkelsen, K. S., Madsen, J. K., & Christensen, J. (2021). Reducing compliance demands in government benefit programs improves the psychological well-being of target group members. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 31(4), 806–821.
- Bækgaard, M., Moynihan, D. P., & Thomsen, M. K. (2021). Why do policymakers support administrative burdens? The roles of deservingness, political ideology, and personal experience. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 31(1), 184–200.
- Bækgaard, M., & Tankink, T. (2022). Administrative burden: Untangling a bowl of conceptual spaghetti. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 5(1), 16–21.
- Barnes, C., & Henly, J. R. (2018). “They are underpaid and understaffed”: How clients interpret encounters with street-level bureaucrats. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(2), 165–181.
- Bell, E., & Meyer, K. (2024). Does reducing street-level bureaucrats’ workload enhance equity in program access? Evidence from burdensome college financial aid programs. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 34(1), 16–38.
- Bell, E., & Smith, K. (2022). Working within a system of administrative burden: How street-level bureaucrats’ role perceptions shape access to the promise of higher education. *Administration & Society*, 54(2), 167–211.
- Benish, A., Tarshish, N., Holler, R., & Gal, J. (2024). Types of administrative burden reduction strategies: Who, what, and how. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 34(3), 349–358.
- Benoit, M., & Marier, P. (2024). When hidden politics become visible: Administrative burden experiences of older adults and professionals in home care. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 33(4), 832–845.
- Brodin, E. Z., & Majmundar, M. (2010). Administrative exclusion: Organizations and the hidden costs of welfare claiming. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 20(4), 827–848.
- Burden, B. C., Canon, D. T., Mayer, K. R., & Moynihan, D. P. (2012). The effect of administrative burden on bureaucratic perception of policies: Evidence from election administration. *Public Administration Review*, 72(5), 741–751.
- Christensen, J., Aarøe, L., Bækgaard, M., Herd, P., & Moynihan, D. P. (2020). Human capital and administrative burden: The role of cognitive resources in citizen-state interactions. *Public Administration Review*, 80(1), 127–136.
- Chudnovsky, M., & Peeters, R. (2021). The unequal distribution of administrative burden: A framework and an illustrative case study for understanding variation in people’s experience of burdens. *Social Policy & Administration*, 55(4), 527–542.
- Daigneault, P.-M. (2024). Reconceptualizing administrative burden around onerous experiences. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 7(4), 124–136.
- Daigneault, P.-M., & Macé, C. (2020). Program awareness, administrative burden, and non-take-up of Québec’s supplement to the work premium. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 43(6), 527–539.
- De Boer, N. (2021). How do citizens assess street-level bureaucrats’ warmth and competence? A typology and test. *Public Administration Review*, 80(4), 532–542.
- Dubois, V. (2010). *The bureaucrat and the poor: Encounters in French Welfare Offices*. Routledge.
- Dwyer, P., Scullion, L., Jones, K., McNeill, J., & Stewart, A. B. (2020). Work, welfare, and wellbeing: The impacts of welfare conditionality on people with mental health impairments in the UK. *Social Policy & Administration*, 54(2), 311–326.
- Flick, U. (2011). Das episodische interview [The episodic interview]. In G. Oelerich & H.-U. Otto (Eds.), *Empirische Forschung und Soziale Arbeit* (pp. 273–280). Springer VS.
- Gilad, S., & Assouline, M. (2024). Citizens’ choice to voice in response to administrative burdens. *International Public Management Journal*, 27(1), 38–59.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine.
- Gofen, A., Meza, O., & Moreno-Jaimes, C. (2024). Frontline organizations as experimental settings for policy change: Why public management matters even more. *Public Management Review*, 26(7), 1827–1848.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Penguin.
- Halling, A., & Bækgaard, M. (2024). Administrative burden in citizen–state interactions: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 34(2), 180–195.
- Halling, A., & Petersen, N. B. G. (2024). Frontline employees’ responses to citizens’ communication of administrative burdens. *Public Administration Review*, 84(6), 1017–1037.
- Harrits, G. M., & Østergaard Møller, M. (2011). Categories and categorization: Towards a comprehensive sociological framework. *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, 12(2), 229–247.
- Heinrich, C. J. (2016). The bite of administrative Burden: A theoretical and empirical investigation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 26(3), 403–420.
- Herd, D., Mitchell, A., & Lightman, E. (2005). Rituals of degradation: Administration as policy in the Ontario Works Programme. *Social Policy & Administration*, 39(1), 65–79.
- Herd, P., & Moynihan, D. P. (2018). *Administrative burden: Policy-making by other means*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Jilke, S., & Tummers, L. (2018). Which clients are deserving of help? A theoretical model and experimental test. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(2), 226–238.
- Jones, K., Wright, S., & Scullion, L. (2024). The impact of welfare conditionality on experiences of job quality. *Work, Employment and Society*, 38, 1–22.
- Kupka, P., & Osiander, C. (2017). Activation “made in Germany.” Welfare-to-work services under “Social Code II”. In R. van Berckel, D. Caswell, P. Kupka, & F. Larsen (Eds.), *Frontline delivery*

- of welfare-to-work policies in Europe. *Activating the unemployed* (pp. 88–106). Routledge.
- Lavee, E. (2021). Who is in charge? The provision of informal personal resources at the street level. *Administration Research and Theory*, 31(1), 4–20. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muaa025>
- Lipsky, M. (1984). Bureaucratic disentanglement in social welfare programs. *Social Service Review*, 58(1), 3–27.
- Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-level bureaucracy, 30th anniversary edition: Dilemmas of the individual in public service*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lis, C., & Soly, H. (1979). *Poverty and capitalism in pre-industrial Europe*. Humanities Press.
- Lotta, G., & Kirschbaum, C. (2021). How street-level bureaucrats use conceptual systems to categorise clients. *Policy & Politics*, 49(4), 531–551.
- Madsen, J. K. (2024). Frictions on both sides of the counter? A study of red tape among street-level bureaucrats and administrative Burden among their clients. *Administration & Society*, 56(6), 738–762.
- Masood, A., & Nisar, M. A. (2020). Administrative capital and citizens' responses to administrative burden. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 31(1), 56–72.
- Maynard-Moody, S., & Musheno, M. (2012). Social equities and inequities in practice: Street-level workers as agents and pragmatists. *Public Administration Review*, 72(1), 16–23.
- Maynard-Moody, S., & Musheno, M. (2023). *Cops, teachers, counselors: Narratives of street-level judgment*. University of Michigan Press.
- Mikkelsen, K. S., Madsen, J. K., & Bækgaard, M. (2024). Is stress among street-level bureaucrats associated with experiences of administrative burden among clients? A multilevel study of the Danish unemployment sector. *Public Administration Review*, 84(2), 248–260.
- Moynihan, D. P., Herd, P., & Harvey, H. (2015). Administrative burden: Learning, psychological, and compliance costs in citizen-state interactions. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25(1), 43–69.
- Negoita, M., Levin, M., & Paprocki, A. (2023). Can the state take the burden? Implementation of policies to increase elderly enrollment in SNAP. *Administration & Society*, 55(2), 211–238.
- Negoita, M., Levin, M., Paprocki, A., & Goger, A. (2024). Administrative burden in older adults: A look at SNAP. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 33(4), 880–889.
- Nielsen, V. L., Nielsen, H. Ø., & Bisgaard, M. (2021). Citizen reactions to bureaucratic encounters: Different ways of coping with public authorities. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 31(2), 381–398.
- Nisar, M. A. (2018). Children of a lesser god: Administrative burden and social equity in citizen–state interactions. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(1), 104–119.
- Nivorozhkin, A., & Promberger, M. (2022). Verschiedene Gruppen, unterschiedliche Bedarfe: Eine Typologie der Teilnehmer: Innen an den neuen Maßnahmen der geförderten Beschäftigung different groups, different needs: A typology of the participants of the new subsidised employment programmes. *Sozialer Fortschritt*, 71(8), 531–551.
- Peeters, R., & Campos, S. A. (2021). Taking the bite out of administrative burdens: How beneficiaries of a Mexican social program ease administrative burdens in street-level interactions. *Governance*, 34(4), 1001–1018.
- Rosenthal, G. (1995). *Erlebte und erzählte Lebensgeschichte: Gestalt und Struktur biographischer Selbstbeschreibungen* [Experienced life and narrated life story: Gestalt and structure of biographical self-presentations]. Campus Verlag.
- Schütze, F. (1983). Biographieforschung und narratives interview [Biographical research and the narrative interview]. *Neue Praxis*, 13(3), 283–293.
- Senghaas, M. (2021). Street-level judgements about welfare deservingness: How jobcentre advisors decide about the individual mix of 'support' and 'demand' in the delivery of activation policies. *Social Policy and Society*, 20(3), 385–399.
- Soss, J., Fording, R., & Schram, S. F. (2011). The organization of discipline: From performance management to perversity and punishment. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 21(1), 203–232.
- Tummers, L. L., Bekkers, V., Vink, E., & Musheno, M. (2015). Coping during public service delivery: A conceptualization and systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25(4), 1099–1126.
- Witzel, A., & Reiter, H. (2012). *The problem-centred interview. Principles and practice*. Sage.

How to cite this article: Raab, M. (2025). Negotiating psychological costs: How welfare recipients' perceived interactions with welfare bureaucrats impact their experiences of administrative burden. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 34(3), e70017. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.70017>