W03 / Implementing Inequities – Street-Level Bureaucracy in the Weak Institutions

Topic : Policy implementation, Street-level bureaucrats

Chair : Rik Peeters (CIDE)

Second Chair : Taly Reininger (Universidad de Chile)

Third Chair : Gianinna MuñozArce (Universidad de Chile)

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel seeks to contribute to decolonizing studies on street-level bureaucracy by questioning assumptions about the nature of North and South bureaucracies and the way weak state capacities, patchy service provision, contested state legitimacy, and social inequalities play out in street-level interactions between citizens and the state. Discussions and presentations in this panel are aimed at improving our understanding of the way social inequalities fundamentally affect state-citizen relationships and how the street-level bureaucracies reflect and often reproduce these inequalities. Specific topics of relevance include – but are not limited to – the variety of strategies street-level bureaucrats develop to cope with overdemand and resource shortages, how territorial differences in policy implementation produce inequalities, the informalization of street-level interactions with citizens, the consequences of street-level bureaucrats' embeddedness and the brokerage function of street-level bureaucrats in the communities they serve.

We welcome papers of all kinds of methods and approaches (public administration, ethnography, political science, etc.) in this panel. Although we aim primarily for scholars studying the Global South, we explicitly do not exclude papers presenting relevant research from other parts of the world. Paper submissions may be theoretical, methodological, or empirical. Relevant topics for this panel include:

- Street-level bureaucracy and social inequality
- Comparative studies of street-level bureaucracy
- Street-level bureaucracy in the Global South
- Contested citizen-bureaucrat interactions
- Political influences on street-level bureaucracy
- State and administrative capacity / institutional weakness and street-level bureaucracy
- Decolonial approaches to street-level bureaucracy

ABSTRACT

What laws formally guarantee, politicians promise, and public policies aim to achieve needs to be materialized in our daily interactions with public organizations. There, we often encounter street-level bureaucrats, low-ranking public servants, or frontline workers who process our applications for a social benefit, provide access to public services such as health care or education, and enforce traffic and safety regulations. What happens in street-level bureaucracies, however, when basic resources are not provided or are simply non-existing? Or when adverse working conditions limit the extent to which job expectations and client demands can be met? This panel is about those street-level bureaucrats and seeks to contribute to understanding how structurally adverse working conditions affect bureaucrats´ decisions and behavior and how these impact policy implementation and citizen-state interactions.

We build upon studies that draw attention to contexts where street-level bureaucrats commonly face adverse social and working conditions, such as precarity, instability, and endemic violence or corruption – common for the Global South or other weak institutional contexts. Specifically, the aim of this panel is contributing to decolonizing studies on street-level bureaucracy by questioning assumptions about the nature of North and South bureaucracies and the way weak state capacities, patchy service provision, contested state legitimacy, and social inequalities play out in street-level interactions between citizens and the state. Discussions and presentations in this panel are aimed at improving our understanding of the way social inequalities fundamentally affect state-citizen relationships and how the street-level bureaucracies reflect and often reproduce these inequalities.

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Session 1

Wednesday, June 26th 10:15 to 12:00 (AULA 4)

Serving citizens or serving the political machine? The implementation of a new social policy during elections in Mexico

Sergio A. Campos (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica (CIDE))

Frontline work is inherently uncertain. However, this uncertainty may be amplified in countries with weak institutions for multiple reasons. One of these reasons is the volatility of public policies. This means that the actions and programs carried out by governments can respond primarily to clientelistic and patronage rationalities rather than to the relevance of solving public problems. In this context, street-level bureaucrats are subject to implementing volatile actions that can change overnight, generating more significant uncertainty and workloads than they are typically accustomed to. This uncertainty can have harmful effects on the way frontline workers act, from uncertainty in their job to discontent with decision makers, especially if public programs are used for political-electoral purposes and frontline workers are forced to implement new clientelistic programs. Based on qualitative data from a case of public policy change in a local government in Mexico, this research explores the responses of street-level officials to the public policy volatility they face.

The differentiated take-up of state benefits by minority groups: a view from the literature of take-up and bureaucracy at the street level.

Adriana Ramirez Ruiz (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Economicas)

The take-up of benefits from the target population of public policies is a key element in achieving the policy's objectives. For this reason, the take-up literature has been dedicated to delving into the elements that lead an individual to decide to take-up a benefit. However, this perspective does not examine the external factors that affect individual costs and tends to homogenize findings for the entire population.

This causes two problems, the first is that the impact of the elements of the State, such as the treatment of the bureaucrat to the user, on the take-up of benefits is ignored. The second is that because minority populations have higher costs in contrast to those of the average population, their mechanism of taking up benefits has great risks of being different from that of the general population, if this happens it may increase the inequalities of these populations.

Within the literature on street-level bureaucracy, it has been found that street-level bureaucrats impact state-imposed administrative burdens (elements like take-up costs) by increasing or decreasing them. This action of bureaucrats can occur consciously or unconsciously, based on ideas of deserving and social labels. However, it has not been explored how the treatment of the bureaucrat from the user's perspective modifies administrative burdens and affects the take-up of the benefit.

The objective of this article is to know the differentiation in the take-up of minority groups by interacting the user's perception of the treatment of the bureaucrat at the street level with the traditional costs associated with take-up. This is intended to have a broader understanding of the take-up of state benefits and how this is carried out in minority groups by combining elements of the literature on street-level bureaucracy and take-up. In addition, the selected case will give a glimpse of the bureaucrat's behavior toward minority groups in a context characterized by work overload, weak institutions, and strong informal institutions, little-studied areas of the mainstream of the literature.

To this end, the information provided by ENSANUT will be taken, which is a survey that includes questions

related to the process of obtaining a health service in Mexico. A PCA was applied to all those questions related to the evaluation of the bureaucrat's treatment at the street level, and several additional questions were selected to represent the traditional costs of take-up. The information was analyzed through regressions by minority social groups with interactions between costs and the treatment of the street bureaucrat and fixed effects. Preliminary results indicate that the treatment of the bureaucrat does influence the costs of take-up and that take-up is differentiated for minority groups. Specifically, results show that minority groups have a worse perception of the treatment of the bureaucrat which increases their take-up cost. Many reasons can be given to these results but most of them relate to the specific condition of the Mexican bureaucracy that made them act in a discriminatory form.

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Session 2

Wednesday, June 26th 14:00 to 17:15 (AULA 4)

Sostenibilidad de la vida e implementación de políticas sociales: propuestas en clave feminista.

Mitzi Duboy (Universidad Alberto Hurtado)

Las políticas sociales en América Latina han estado construidas en lógicas desde un ethos que fortalece condiciones laborales de precarización, que brindan escasos recursos para la ejecución de los programas y que están atravesadas por problemas de corrupción. Dichos problemas también han sido experimentados por quienes implementan las políticas sociales en Chile. Así, se han detectando muchas de estas lógicas de precarización en los ejercicios profesionales de quienes implementan programas sociales, en las consecuencias que el Estado tiene en la vida de las personas, en la forma en cómo el Estado se despliega en el territorio para la aplicación de estas políticas y en el mecanismo a través del cual se despliega esa relación. Sumado a lo anterior, reciente literatura a puesto en la palestra los efectos generizados para quienes implementan las políticas sociales, es decir, que hay una forma de ejercer la discreción profesional que se distingue por género. En esta línea, se ha mostrado como la implementación de las políticas sociales sostiene una posición desfavorable para las mujeres, tanto laboral como relacionalmente y, a su vez, han afirmado la idea de que la discreción profesional también tiene manifestaciones generizadas.

Aunque estos enfoques han ampliado la forma de entender la implementación de políticas, no se han preocupado especialmente por enlazar la relación entre políticas sociales y la sostenibilidad de la vida.

Por lo mismo, en esta ponencia desarrollaré un abordaje que entrelaza el enfoque de la sostenibilidad de la vida y la implementación de políticas sociales, con la intención de generar algunas propuestas que emanan de la práctica de ejercicios de discreción profesional y de las resistencias profesionales, de quienes implementan programas sociales en Chile. Estas reflexiones emergen de resultados de investigación de dos proyectos Fondecyt Regulares en los que he participado. Aunque ninguno de estos partió problematizando las relaciones de género ni los feminismos, los relatos de quienes han participado de la investigación no han tardado en mostrar una infinidad de imbricaciones posibles, lo cual me/nos ha invitado a pensar estos cruces que han visto la luz en dos artículos académicos dedicados específicamente a mostrar resultados de investigación leídos desde este marco (Duboy-Luengo & Muñoz-Arce, 2022; Muñoz-Arce & Duboy-Luengo, 2023). Sin embargo, lo que hoy (me) propongo, es ampliar la mirada para proponer insumos que, desde el enfoque de sostenibilidad de la vida, contribuyan en tres direcciones: hacia quienes implementan políticas sociales; hacia quienes diseñan políticas sociales, y; hacia quienes enseñan estas materias en los diferentes espacios educativos.

Analysis of primary school teachers' attention to cases of family violence, through the theoretical model of street-level bureaucracies

Cynthia Lucía Carpio Valencia (El Colegio de Sonora)

In Mexico, emergency calls due to family violence represented, during 2023 (January-November), 3.8% of total actual calls. In turn, the State of Sonora occupied (in the same period) the first place nationally in reports for this reason with a record of 44,787 calls (SSP,2023). The main victims of family violence are women, girls and boys. In all cases, girls and boys are victims of psychological violence due to being exposed to and witnessing the acts of violence that occur against women, and where they can also be directly attacked (UNICEF, 2019). For their part, schools are obliged to report all cases of violence against children and adolescents (NNA), which arise in the school, family and community space (DOF, 2019). For

this, action protocols have been generated. In this sense, this article argues why it is relevant to use the theoretical model of street-level bureaucracies for the analysis of the process of attention to cases of family violence from the participation of teachers.

The theoretical model of street-level bureaucracies proposed by Lipsky (1980) redefined the perspective with which the implementation of public policies was traditionally analyzed, to emphasize the actions of the people who apply certain policies - especially the bureaucrats who are at the end of the hierarchical chain, who serve the recipients and beneficiaries of a certain service or government program.

The relevance of this model is based on the fact that it is a theoretical proposal for the analysis of the process of implementing a public policy, which recognizes in the foundational work the figure of teachers as street-level bureaucrats. The characterization of Maynard and Portillo (2014) constitutes a guide to analyze the practices of teachers regarding one of their functions - compliance with action protocols in cases of violence-. Likewise, the notion of coping strategies (copin) explains the different ways in which public servants cope with the demands of the job. This notion constitutes an incorporation of psychology into this conceptual framework. Furthermore, the theory of street-level bureaucracy recognizes the importance of the contextual elements where people operate, which is particularly useful for the analysis of this research where schools are located in areas of high marginality.

With all this, we seek to argue that this theoretical model allows us to analyze a research problem from a perspective that has been little studied in Mexico and provides theoretical-methodological elements that allow us to delve deeper into the behavior of teachers in the face of this new demand.

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Session 3

Thursday, June 27th 09:00 to 12:15 (AULA 4)

The reproduction of structural inequalities in Chile's Conditional Cash Transfer Program

Taly Reininger (Universidad de Chile)

Conditional cash transfer programs have been and continue to be the dominant model for addressing extreme poverty in Latin America since the late 90s. While these program types vary by country, Chile's model has been heralded as innovative due to its psychosocial accompaniment component. Under this program model, frontline professionals accompany beneficiary families for 24 months through home visits, seeking to 'activate' families by completing the objectives of the family intervention plan. Frontline professionals are thus responsible for providing families with information regarding available public services and programs while motivating them to undertake actions in order to improve their well-being.

The temporality of the relationship, the intimacy produced by conducting sessions in families' homes, and the personal and often intimate content addressed in the home visits often produce emotional bonds between female program beneficiaries and frontline professionals. Presenting preliminary findings from a 3-year longitudinal qualitative study of Chile's conditional cash transfer program, this paper argues that the emotional bonds formed between frontline professionals and female beneficiaries are mobilized in order to minimize the structural inequalities the program fails to address. This includes issues related to the lack and quality of public services, as well as the precarious employment conditions frontline professionals confront on a daily basis, thus reproducing inequalities.

Can public policies aggravate or (re)produce inequalities? Theoretical and methodological aspects

Cosmo Junior (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul)

When we talk about public policies, especially social policies, we immediately think that they are formulated and implemented with the aim of mitigating or remedying some kind of social inequality. It turns out that in some concrete cases this is not the reality. On the contrary, some public policies, when implemented, end up aggravating existing inequalities or reproducing new types of inequality. With this in mind, this study sought to synthesize theoretical and methodological aspects that enable empirical analysis of concrete cases. This analysis can be applied both to top-down studies - checking the processes, i.e. the arrangements and instruments for implementing the public policy, and to bottom-up studies - looking specifically at the interaction between the actors involved in implementing the policy and the target subject. To this end, the study has a qualitative approach and as a technical procedure used a literature review for convenience. As a result, the literature presents two unwanted social effects: material - linked to access to and coverage of public policy; and symbolic - referring to the reproduction of stereotypes and, therefore, the relationship of subordination.

(Virtual) Allocating inequality: analyzing state violence against adolescents deprived of liberty in Brazil

Eduarda De Almeida (Fundação João Pinheiro)

Inspired by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and with the aim of regulating art. 227 of the Federal

Constitution (CF/1988), the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA) was published in Brazil in 1990. The ECA delimited the practice of the delinquent act as conduct described as a crime or misdemeanor. This means that upon committing an infraction, adolescents and young people will have their acts investigated within the scope of the Juvenile Justice. If convicted, social and educational measures will be applied as a strategy of accountability, social integration, and conduct disapproval. In practice, however, since the implementation of these measures is usually carried on inside deteriorated and violent detention centers, both adolescent's integrity and their conditions to resocialize are severely threatened, weakening the effectiveness of the policy. Literature highlights the recurring problems in guaranteeing the rights of adolescents deprived of liberty (AGANBEN, 2002; ALMEIDA et al, 2023) and denounces state violence directed against the black, youth and poor adolescents inside the detention centers (FERNANDES, 2021). Despite being a widespread phenomenon (JESUS, 2009; GOMES, 2014; GODOI, 2018), due to lack of access to relevant data, state violence analysis has not yet incorporated the implementation actors (a.k.a. security officers) perspectives. Because of that, analysis have failed to grasp state violence in its full complexity, as a situated event that takes place within socio-education centers organizational routine. Considering that, this research aims to understand how state violence works against adolescents deprived of liberty, observing security officers' decisions. The officers are seen as street level bureaucrats entitled with discretionary powers whose decisions are subjected to serious moral and resource allocation dilemmas (LIPSKY, 2019; LOTTA, 2012; LOTTA et al., 2020; NOVATO, NAJBERG e LOTTA, 2020). The analysis will consider the officer's account of the facts, obtained in 1941 security reports of youth detention centers of the Minas Gerais' State/Brazil. The reports represent unprecedented data in Brazil's in both juvenile justice and policy studies. The records analyzed frame interns as delinquent, uncontrolled and violent, justifying the use of progressive physical violence as a necessary measure to control the adolescent during a security crisis. Recurrently that violence generates critical injuries. Some files also report controversial acts of self-violence committed by the interns, some tragically resulting in self-extermination. The results run against a great amount of evidence that points to the presence of torture as a diffuse phenomenon inside deprived liberty governmental facilities (FERNANDES, 2021; FERRAZ E SANTOS-CHIES, 2022). The findings raise relevant questions about the causes of state violence against young interns of socio-educational system in Brazil. On the one hand, there is an attempt to maintain state violence as an invisible, unspeakable, unindictable, and unpunishable crime (MAIA, 2006). On the other hand, elastic concepts of torture might have been contributing to let the kinds of justifications provided by the security officers' narrative to stand out.

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Session 4

Thursday, June 27th 14:00 to 17:15 (AULA 4)

Discussions

Rik Peeters (CIDE)

Discussions

How to resist a “scientifically” validated program? Street Level Bureaucracy in the relationship of science, technology and society network based on a mental health program in Chile.

Cristóbal Villalobos (Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile)

Incipiently, research on street-level bureaucracy in Latin America has investigated how implementers questioning, resist, and transform the political-institutional frameworks from which social interventions are built. In the region, these processes of resistance and agency occur mainly around relatively new programs, with little evidence of their impact and organized mainly under the logic of New Public Management (NPM). In this context, in this presentation we ask ourselves, how are the processes of professional resistance articulated and developed in the face of a “scientifically” validated program? Starting from the conceptual articulation between the theories of professional resistance, the analyzes of street-level bureaucracy and the of actor-network theory, we study the motivations, implications and processes of resistance that occur in the Skills for Life Program (Habilidades Para la Vida, HpV in Spanish), the largest mental health program for children and adolescents in Chilean schools. Based on an analysis of 23 semi-structured and group interviews, as well as the analysis of the available documentation of the program, the preliminary results show that the empirical evidence of the program acts as a blanket of validation of the national strategies and guidelines, limiting the possibility of resistance at the local level. Likewise, we find that resistance is articulated by seeking to promote new evidence - rather than questioning the criteria with which it is constructed - showing the interweaving between professional resistance, implementation of policies and validation and scientific production in social programs in Latin America.