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Abstract

This article examines how civil servants react to the obligation to report suspicions of benefit fraud among the clients with whom they work. Benefit fraud has gained increasing attention in (welfare) states across the world, and reporting suspicions of benefit fraud has become an obligation for many civil servants. This new task contrasts with the traditional role of many civil servants and this study examines how the new task is perceived. The theoretical concept of policy alienation is used to analyse the results of a questionnaire sent to civil servants in a Danish municipality. A remarkable outcome of the study is a very high level of non-response. The unwillingness to participate in the study indicates significant policy alienation. The analysis further shows that the policy makes sense to civil servants on a societal level but not on an individual level. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the department in which the civil servants are employed is highly influential in terms of how the civil servants view the task. This implies that the management and heads of departments can affect the level of policy alienation within their own departments and they consequently have a high impact on how civil servants implement new legislation.

Introduction

This article examines how civil servants perceive and react to the obligation to check and report the legality of public social benefits received by the clients with whom they work. Prevention and disclosure of benefit fraud has gained increasing attention in welfare states across the world (Madsen, Jacobsen, & Jensen, 2011) and reporting suspicions of benefit fraud has become an obligation for many civil servants (KMD, 2011; Prenzler, 2010). But how do civil servants respond to an obligation to report suspected benefit fraud by the clients with whom they work closely?

In order to be cognisant of benefit fraud, civil servants need to know about their clients' needs and the benefits they receive. Those civil servants who potentially have knowledge about clients' benefit fraud are the ones who work closely with the clients. In 1980, Lipsky introduced the term street-level bureaucrats, which characterizes civil servants who interact directly with clients on a daily basis (Lipsky, 2010). Other terms such as front-line workers (Durose, 2011) or public professionals (Tummers, 2012) are also used to denote the members of staff in a public administration who work directly with clients. In this article, the theory of street-level bureaucrats will constitute the basic understanding of the civil servants' roles and duties and the term civil servants will be used throughout.

Civil servants are important in the manifestation of public policy, as the welfare state is predominantly revealed to clients through civil servants at the street-level (Kallio & Kouvo 2015). Street-level civil servants implement policies by translating the meaning of a policy to clients and one important role of

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civil servants is thus to mediate between individuals and society (Poulsen, 2007). An important aspect of the theory of street-level bureaucracy is that civil servants need to have room for discretion to interpret and adjust the policies being implemented, so that they fit the needs of the clients. There is agreement in the literature on public administration that the room for discretion is both desirable and inevitable (Evans, 2011; Høybye-Mortensen, 2015; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). At the same time, it is evident that street-level civil servants face cross-pressure because of conflicting policy goals, organizational goals, professional standards and demands from the clients with whom they work (Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; Møller, 2016). The conflicting demands are especially problematic, if they involve policies that appear meaningless to the civil servants (Tummers, 2012) or put pressure on their professional identity (Noordegraaf, 2016; Schott, van Kleef, & Noordegraaf, 2016). The task to report or “rat” on clients suspected of claiming unauthorised benefits exemplifies this cross-pressure as the demand to report on clients contrasts with the traditional objective of assisting clients in need of public services. The obligation to report suspected benefit fraud is consequently potentially met with alienation by street-level bureaucrats, because it challenges their understanding of meaningful public policies and their professional identity as making a positive difference to the lives of the clients (Poulsen, 2007; Tummers, 2012).

There is a vast amount of literature on civil servants as street-level bureaucrats, their use of discretion and the implementation of public policies by street-level bureaucrats (Alden, 2015; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). Internationally, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, literature is also available on benefit fraud (Connor, 2007; Groves, 2002; McKeever, 1999). However, studies have not analysed how the work to prevent benefit fraud interacts with the roles performed by civil servants. The current study uses well-known theoretical perspectives on civil servants’ approaches to new policies and examines the civil servants’ response to their role in the system of checking for benefit fraud in a Danish municipality. The obligation to check on clients and if necessary report them places some civil servants in ethical and/or professional dilemmas because they do not perceive their job description as matching the role of being an informer about the clients they are supposed to help. The outcome can be alienation and non-compliance with the policy instructions they receive. The study entails a quantitative questionnaire distributed within a Danish municipality and focuses on the civil servants’ response to the obligation to report suspicions of benefit fraud. The main research question addressed is; How do civil servants react to and perceive the obligation to report suspected benefit fraud?

The article contains six sections. Section two presents theoretical perspectives on policy alienation and the roles of civil servants. The issue of benefit fraud and the conception of it in Danish politics and administrations is briefly sketched in section three. A presentation of the article’s case and the methodology applied is available in section four, followed by an analysis of the data in section five. The results of the analysis are discussed and conclusions are drawn in the final section six.

Policy alienation and roles of civil servants

With civil servants being the manifestation of government and the primary agents of implementation of public policy (Kallio & Kouvo, 2015), it is important to look at how civil servants act when implementing new policies. The role of a civil servant is to assist, help and provide services to clients who are entitled to public services (Lipsky, 2010). The civil servants thus act on behalf of the political system and society as a whole when implementing a policy (Poulsen, 2007). Despite of the existence of rules and procedures for implementing public policies, each civil servant must interpret a policy and determine what to do in the specific situation (March & Olsen, 1995). The existence of professional discretion consequently affect the decision-making and the implementation is consequently based on the civil servant's interpretation combined with a professional analysis of the needs of the client in question.

Lipsky argues that street-level work is alienating work because the individual civil servant is unable to control the pace of the work and only works with a segment of a product (Lipsky, 2010). Policy alienation can be defined as a "*psychological disconnection from the policy program being implemented by a public professional who interacts directly with clients on a regular basis*" (Tummers, 2012). Two reasons for policy alienations are distinguished in the literature: policy powerlessness and policy meaninglessness.

Policy powerlessness relates to the influence (or lack of influence) a civil servant has over the outcomes of a policy he or she is implementing (Seeman, 1959; Tummers, 2012). Policy powerlessness can occur at a strategic, tactical or operational level. The levels refer to the influence a civil servant can have on a policy when it is drafted, when it is received in the department, and when the policy is being applied in connection to a client (Tummers, 2012). The understanding of powerlessness is particularly relevant to street-level civil servants at the operational level where their room for discretion affects their understanding of powerlessness.

Policy meaninglessness refers to the inability of a civil servant to understand how a policy contributes to a larger purpose (Sarros, Tanewski, Winter, Santora, & Densten, 2002). Policy meaninglessness can occur at a societal and an individual level. At the societal level, meaninglessness refers to a civil servant's inability to acknowledge the added value of a policy to the overall goals of society (Tummers, 2012). Applying the opposite terminology, a meaningful policy is one, which fulfils societal goals that the civil servants understand and/or agree with. On an individual level, meaninglessness refers to the understanding by civil servants that a particular policy does not give value to the clients with whom they work (L. Tummers, 2012). Civil servants who feel that they are helping their clients by implementation of a policy will find the policy meaningful while civil servants who find the policy contradictory to the goal of helping clients will find it meaningless. A certain degree of discretion can increase civil servants' perception of meaningfulness (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014) because they can influence how much or how little a policy affects the clients.

When looking at meaninglessness at both a societal and an individual level, it is relevant to include perspectives on the deservingness of clients (Kallio & Kouvo, 2015). Studies have shown that the attitudes of civil servants about who deserves public benefits affect the implementation and provision of benefits to individual clients (Kallio & Kouvo, 2015; Keiser, 1999). Civil servants who see their clients as deserving public benefits are more likely to consider a policy meaningful if it gives the clients the benefits they need or deserve. The opposite situation in which a policy denies clients certain benefits that they are entitled to according to the civil servants, can lead to an understanding of the policy as meaningless.

An issue not discussed in the literature is that the two levels of meaninglessness can collide and create a dilemma. A policy can be perceived as meaningful at a societal level but meaningless at an individual level. Being careful with public spending is meaningful on a societal level but may be less meaningful when dealing with specific clients who have concrete and relevant needs. If a discrepancy occurs between the two perspectives of meaninglessness, discretion that allows civil servants a certain power over the implementation of public policies can make the policy make sense after all. An additional perspective of this discrepancy is public service motivation, which refers to a pro-social motivation “*to serve the public good and shape the well-being of society*” (Andersen, Pallesen, & Salomonsen, 2013). Civil servants’ motivation may thus be to serve the public good but defining the public good is problematic when the interests at an individual level and the societal level are not synonymous. The theories of policy alienation and deservingness of public benefits are especially relevant when studying civil servants’ response to a policy to report benefit fraud among their clients.

The issue of benefit fraud

The issue of benefit fraud is closely linked to the welfare state. In a welfare state, taxes are high and public service is expected to have a high level as well (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The advantage of paying high taxes is that clients are entitled to public benefits and services when they are in need of these. The services provided to each individual client is based on the legislation and a large public sector with many civil servants provide the services or distribute the benefits that each client is entitled to according to the existing legislation (Brandal, Bratberg, & Thorsen, 2013; Kvist, Fritzell, Hvinden, & Kangas, 2012).

The incentives for paying taxes is thus the reciprocity between the taxes paid and the services received. The system is based on a high level of trust (Tinggaard Svendsen, 2014) between citizens in general and between clients and the public sector – embodied by the civil servants. Dishonesty and illegal claims of benefits combined with fiscal constraints challenge the welfare system, which has produced a necessity to control whether the recipients of public benefits are legally entitled to these benefits. Discussions of benefit fraud and various political incentives to prevent fraud have consequently been in place as early as the 1970s

(St Louis, Burgess, & Kingston, 1978) although the majority of policies dealing with benefit fraud were initiated during the 1990s (Prenzler, 2010; Varma & Ward, 2014).

Benefit fraud takes many forms and goes under several names. In some countries, the term used is social security fraud or welfare fraud (Marriott, 2017; McKeever, 1999, 2012; Sabatini, Menzies, & Evers, 1992). In this article, the term benefit fraud is used throughout. The main definition is that benefit fraud is the illegitimate claim of allowance or benefit from the public sector (Groves, 2002; Madsen et al., 2011). Benefit fraud occurs for example when a client claims unemployment benefits while working, claims unsubstantiated housing support or when couples claim benefits as single parents while living together. Fraud also occurs if changes in circumstances are not reported.

Academically, benefit fraud is primarily studied as a crime or from a sociological behavioural perspective. International literature on benefit fraud is consequently organized around legal aspects of benefit fraud (Gustafson, 2011; Prenzler, 2010; Walsh & Bull, 2011), the reasons and types of clients who cheat the public system (Chunn & Gavigan, 2004; Regev-Messalem, 2014) or general attitudes towards benefit fraud (Kallio & Kouvo, 2015; KMD, 2011; Varma & Ward, 2014). No studies look directly at how the responsibility to report about benefit fraud affects the civil servants who work under the rules and regulations related to fraud control.

Benefit fraud in a Danish municipality

Historically, there has been no systematic registration of benefit fraud in Denmark (Madsen et al., 2011). However, in recent years public attention towards benefit fraud has increased and studies have been made regarding the amount of fraud taking place and why benefit fraud and errors in payments take place in Denmark (Høyby-Mortensen, Kleif, & Ejby-Ernst, 2013; Madsen et al., 2011). Studies estimate that benefit fraud annually amounts to between five and 12 billion Danish kroner (approx. between 600 million and 1.6 billion euro) (KMD, 2011). One Danish study looks at erroneous payments and benefit fraud and concludes that lack of knowledge about the rules, misleading information given by clients (on purpose or by accident) and lack of coordination between public agencies contribute to the current level of benefit fraud. Benefit fraud is more often committed by young people, men and clients with short education (Høyby-Mortensen et al., 2013).

In 2010, the Danish government in coalition with two opposition parties adopted 29 initiatives to combat benefit fraud. The initiatives included establishment of municipal control teams, increased coordination and cross-analysis of public registries and coordinated efforts across public sectors and departments (Ministry of Employment, 2010). Following the adoption of these 29 initiatives, several Danish municipalities have adopted rules and procedures related to how their civil servants respond to benefit fraud. The national adoption of these initiatives was passed without public debate. The only response to the public hearing

about the initiatives was related to the legal rights of the citizens who were to be subjected to increased surveillance (Folketinget, 2011).

The municipality in the current study has rules about their civil servants' responsibility to report about clients suspected of receiving unjustified services. According to these rules, to prevent and stop benefit fraud is a common responsibility of all employees in the municipality. In 2010, the mayor of the municipality issued a letter¹ to all civil servants urging them to prevent benefit fraud. The letter stressed that benefit fraud should be prevented with reference to the common good of all citizens as each citizen should get the benefits he or she is entitled to and nothing more. The argument used is that combatting benefit fraud makes sense at a societal level and it is consequently a common responsibility to combat benefit fraud. The letter included examples of benefit fraud and explained how it is the duty of all civil servants to report suspicions of benefit fraud to the relevant departments. Combating benefit fraud is consequently a politically and economically important policy, which the civil servants are obliged to implement.

The municipality is a typical medium-size municipality² organized into six departments of Daycare and education, Children and families, Employment, City planning and culture, Disability and psychiatry and Health and care. In addition to these six departments, there are various staff functions and offices related to the municipal organization, one of these being Citizen Service. Within Citizen Service, a Control Team works to prevent benefit fraud. The Control Team consists of two civil servants, one from the department of Employment and one from Citizen Service. The tasks of the Control Team are to prevent and discover social benefit fraud both by themselves and by assisting individual departments. The team was established in 2014 with two civil servants working part time in the Control Team. Since 2016, the two civil servants have been working full time on the prevention of benefit fraud, which according to the municipality has led to an increase in the municipal savings on benefit fraud from approx. 200.000 euro in 2014 to close to one million euro in 2016.

Methodology

The study is a case study (Yin, 2014) undertaken in one Danish municipality. A case study can be performed using qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. This study was undertaken as a quantitative study with the aim of including a large variety of civil servants from the various departments in the municipality. The study consists of a questionnaire, which includes both quantitative and qualitative response categories. The strength of this approach is that it can provide empirical data from a larger number of respondents on specifically formulated questions while at the same time allowing for individual qualitatively formulated responses when the respondents have further information on the subject. Tummers has developed a scale for measuring civil servants' willingness to implement policy (L. Tummers, 2011). However, as this study is to analyse how civil servants react to the implementation of the particular policy to report benefit fraud

and not on implementation of policies in general, this scale was abandoned and an original questionnaire was developed.

The questionnaire was sent to all relevant civil servants in the municipality studied. The questionnaire contains eight quantitative questions and three qualitative questions. The questionnaire was distributed by email to the work emails of the civil servants selected, and two reminders were sent respectively one and two weeks after the questionnaire was first distributed.

As the study focuses on street-level civil servants' response to the reporting of benefit fraud, the respondents relevant to the study are municipally employed civil servants who work directly with clients receiving social and welfare benefits. The respondents were selected based on their contact with clients. The respondents are civil servants who are involved in the discretionary decisions about what kind of benefits clients are entitled to or who handle the payment of the benefits. This means that the civil servants included are social workers, employment consultants, child welfare caseworkers and administrative assistants who meet clients regularly. Schoolteachers, social educators, home-helpers or home nurses and similar types of civil servants were excluded from the study. Although these civil servants are in direct contact with for instance children, families and elderly people, they are not in a position to have knowledge about the kinds and amounts of benefits, the clients receive.

The number of civil servants included in the study varied significantly between the departments with only nine civil servants included from the department of Health and care and as many as 119 included from Children and family. The high number of respondents included from the department of Children and family illustrate that civil servants in this department are in direct contact with clients who receive several public benefits. No civil servants in the department of City Planning and culture were included. In total, the questionnaire was distributed to 258 respondents in five departments of the municipality and Citizen Service.

The analysis of the collected data does not include advanced statistical methodology or tests of significance due to the relative low response-rate and a disproportionate distribution of the data, which will be discussed below. The analysis is consequently based on a theoretically based analysis of the data.

Data analysis

Benefit fraud and the responsibility to report suspected fraud does not appear to have a high priority to civil servants. A clear indication of the lack of priority is a low response rate to the survey. Fifty-eight percent chose to answer the questionnaire and out of the 148 answers received, several respondents chose only to answer selected questions.

Non-response to the survey as a sign of policy alienation

Table 1 below shows the number of questionnaires distributed and returned from the five departments and Citizen Service. Overall response rate is 58 %. Howev-

er, as can be seen in the table, the response rate varies significantly between the departments. In the figure, the second column shows the number of questionnaires distributed within each department. The third column shows the number of questionnaires returned. Fourth column shows the response rate in relation to the number of questionnaires distributed and the fifth column shows the percentage of answers in relation to the total number of questionnaires returned.

Table 1: Response rates by departments

Department	Number of questionnaires distributed	Responses	Response rate within department	Percentage of all responses
Employment	80	73	91,3	49,3
Daycare and teaching	18	15	83,3	10,1
Disability and psychiatry	13	10	76,9	6,8
Health and care	9	5	55,6	3,4
Citizen service	19	19	100,0	12,8
Children and family	119	26	21,8	17,6
Total	258	148	57,4	100,0

In the four departments, Employment, Daycare and teaching, Disability and psychiatry and the Citizen Service, the response rate is between 77 % and 100 %. These response rates are highly satisfactory. In Health and care, the response rate is 56 %. This response rate is relatively low, but also uncertain because only nine respondents received the questionnaire in the first place.

One department stands out. In the department of Children and family, the response rate is only 22%. This is a very low response rate, which is especially noteworthy since Children and family is the department in which the largest number of questionnaires were distributed. One hundred and nineteen questionnaires were distributed to employees in the department of Children and family. This is 44% of all questionnaires distributed.

Non-response to a questionnaire is associated with bias because if one particular group of respondents does not reply to the questionnaire, the conclusions of the study cannot be generalized to a larger population (Schouten, Cobben, Lundquist, & Wagner, 2016). As this is a single case study, the aim is not to make predictions or indisputable generalizations. Understanding the reason behind the non-response is consequently of higher value than trying to estimate the value of the respondents who did not participate.

The lack of responses is however difficult to analyse. Some statistical researchers argue that there is only one main factor behind the willingness to answer a questionnaire, which involves a simple cost-benefit analysis; what is in it for me? (Tourangeau & Plewes, 2013). Other studies indicate that a more de-

tailed analysis of reasons for responding to a survey is necessary. Daly et al (2011) present nine reasons for lack of response to a survey. Seven of these arguments are relevant to nonresponses related to inability or refusal to answer. The arguments include length of survey and the quality of instructions on how to answer, insufficient incentives/payment, lack of interest in the topic and competition with other emails/other job tasks (Daly, Jones, Gereau, & Levy, 2011). Of these varying arguments, length of the questionnaire does not appear relevant in this case, as 11 questions is not a long survey. Insufficient incentives might be relevant in several ways. For one thing, there was no payment or possibility of winning a prize when answering the questionnaire. Second, if the issue of benefit fraud does not appear relevant to the civil servant, the incentive to answer is low. Finally, during a normal working day many civil servants are faced with a large workload including a large number of emails and obligations. A questionnaire on benefit fraud is consequently in harsh competition with other emails. These explanations for non-response are all plausible. However, the reasons behind the large level of non-response may be explained in further detail by including the theoretical concept of policy alienation.

Applying a cost-benefit perspective to the policy alienation theory implies that the civil servants do not find it worthwhile to answer the questionnaire. The civil servants may feel a sense of both powerlessness and meaninglessness. Powerlessness occurs because the rule to report all suspicions of benefit fraud removes their individual professional discretion. A sense of meaninglessness occurs on the individual level because the policy makes it difficult to make the positive difference to the lives of their clients, which civil servants wish to make.

In his letter, the mayor of the municipality pointed out that the policy makes sense on a societal level because preventing illegitimate spending on benefits will save society (taxpayers') money. However, to the civil servants dealing with individual clients who are in need of benefits and support, the policy can appear meaningless on an individual level. A conundrum between the societal and the individual level thus appear to exist. The conclusion is consequently, that if a civil servant views the policy on a societal level, it makes sense, while viewing it on an individual client level can make it meaningless and leads to policy alienation. If this conclusion is correct, can this argumentation explain the difference between the various departments?

Let us focus on the two largest departments in the study, the departments of Employment and Children and family. Meaninglessness on an individual level by Children and families, and meaningfulness on the level of society by Employment may be explained by political mechanisms outside of the individual departments. Denmark (and other Nordic countries) have experienced a shift in social politics from welfare to workfare (Kananen, 2012; Torfing, 1999). The change from welfare to workfare indicates a shift from seeing clients as deserving benefits (simply) because they are unemployed to requiring something in return for the benefits awarded. An aspect of deservingness consequently influences the politics and the social work performed in employment politics (Kallio & Kouvo, 2015). In the workfare politics implemented by Danish employment

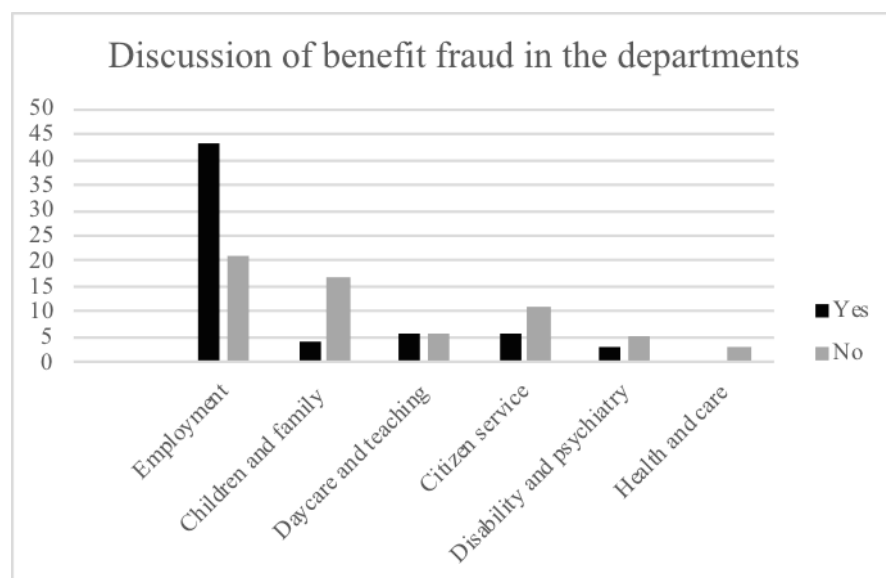
departments throughout the last few decades the societal value of employment politics has gained increasing importance (Kananen, 2012; Torfing, 1999). This means that the meaning or value of employment politics focuses on a societal level.

Contrary to this, the politics related to vulnerable children and families being undertaken in the department of Children and families is focused on an individual level of helping the individual clients (children and their families) who are in need of public services (Cousins, 2013). The deservingness of clients is thus affected by national politics, and it manifests itself in this study as non-response through policy alienation against the policy to report suspicions of benefit fraud. The varying political perception of deservingness influence differences in perspectives on benefit fraud in different departments. Through this analysis, the study indicates that the (un)willingness to participate in a study about benefit fraud can be understood as policy alienation based on national politics filtered through the department in which the individual civil servant is employed.

The role of management and agenda setting

Taking a closer look at differences between departments suggests that managerial attitudes and attention to benefit fraud may provide further perspectives on the non-response. Figure 2 below shows whether benefit fraud has been discussed in the individual departments.

Figure 1: Have you discussed the issue of benefit fraud in your department?



n=125.

An immediate overview shows that the civil servants within each department do not agree whether the issue has been discussed or not. Despite of the lack of consensus within each department, another tendency is that there is a clear difference between departments. The department of Employment, in which 68% indicate that the issue has been discussed, has a high response-rate in the overall study. Consequently, a connection appear to exist between the attention given to the issue of benefit fraud on a department level and the willingness to answer the questionnaire. Of the 21 civil servants from the department of Children and family responding to the question, only 19 % (four civil servants in actual numbers) reply that the issue of benefit fraud has been discussed. In the departments of Daycare and teaching, Citizen Service and Disability and psychiatry between 50 and 30 % reply that the issue has been discussed. In the department of Health and care, only three civil servants answered the question and none of them indicates that the issue has been discussed. In total, figure 1 suggests that the issue is approached very differently within the departments. This variation in attention given to the issue on a departmental level supports the analysis of non-response above. As the management of a department has authority to put issues on the agenda within the department, the fact that a majority from Employment and a minority from Children & families state that benefit fraud has been discussed in the department indicates that managerial behaviour affects the willingness to respond to the survey. If the issue of benefit fraud has not been discussed and the management of a department does not engage in a dialogue about the task to report on benefit fraud, it might in itself add to policy alienation and understanding of meaninglessness within the particular department. The incentives for the individual civil servant to answer a questionnaire on benefit fraud is less attractive when the issue that does not have priority in the department.

Acknowledgement of the work against benefit fraud

The questionnaire contained two questions about the establishment of a Control Team focused on combatting benefit fraud. Eighty-five percent of the respondents know that a Control Team exists. This indicates that there is a certain level of general knowledge about the efforts to combat benefit fraud within the municipality. A second question asked if the civil servant considered it a good idea to have a Control Team against benefit fraud. Ninety-six % answered yes to this question.

These findings indicate that the civil servants are aware of the work to prevent benefit fraud and that the majority actually appreciate the efforts to prevent fraud – as long as someone else is doing the job. The almost unanimous declaration that the existence of a Control Team is a good idea indicates that the civil servants participating in this study can see the advantage of preventing and stopping benefit fraud, when they do not have to do the work themselves. Drawing on the concept of policy alienation and the meaning of public policies, these findings suggest that civil servants see the meaning with having a policy against benefit fraud – on a principle or societal level. This accentuates the previous conclusion that policies against benefit fraud are meaningful on a societal level

but appear meaningless when the civil servants have to implement them in relation to their own individual clients.

Reactions to suspicions of benefit fraud

One thing is having knowledge about the municipal system against benefit fraud and a response to how they would react if the suspected clients of benefit fraud. Another thing is actually suspecting specific clients of committing benefit fraud. More than half of the civil servants (58 %) have suspected their clients of benefit fraud. Table 3 shows the distribution of suspicions between departments. The largest number of civil servants who have suspected their clients of benefit fraud work in the Employment department. Employment also has the largest number of respondents on the question (42 % of all answers given). The large differentiation between the figures from each department means that it is not possible to conclude if there is a significant difference between the numbers of suspicions of benefit fraud between the departments.

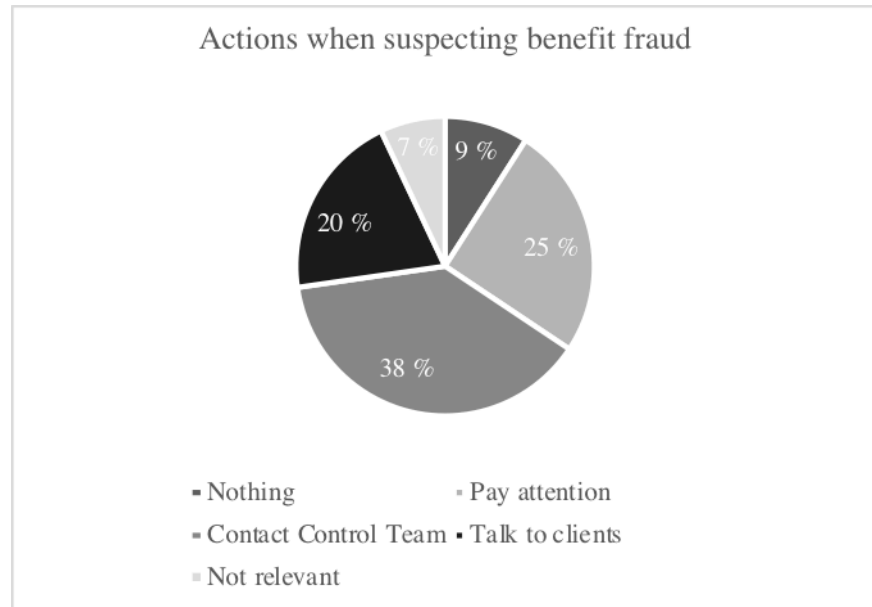
Table 3. Have you suspected clients of benefit fraud?

	Have suspected	Have not suspected	Total
Employment	34 %	18 %	52 %
Children and daycare	7 %	10 %	17 %
Daycare and teaching	4 %	6 %	10 %
Citizen service	9 %	5 %	14 %
Disability and psychiatry	3 %	3 %	6 %
Health and care	1 %	1 %	2 %
Total	58 %	43 %	100 %

n=125

Figure 2 shows what the civil servants do if they suspect benefit fraud. One hundred twenty-two out of the 148 respondents answered the question. Seven percent responded that the question was not relevant to them and another nine percent responded that they did nothing. This answer is in direct opposition to the municipal policy and the directions given by the mayor to all civil servants. This is consequently a clear indication of direct policy alienation.

Figure 2: What do you do if you suspect benefit fraud?

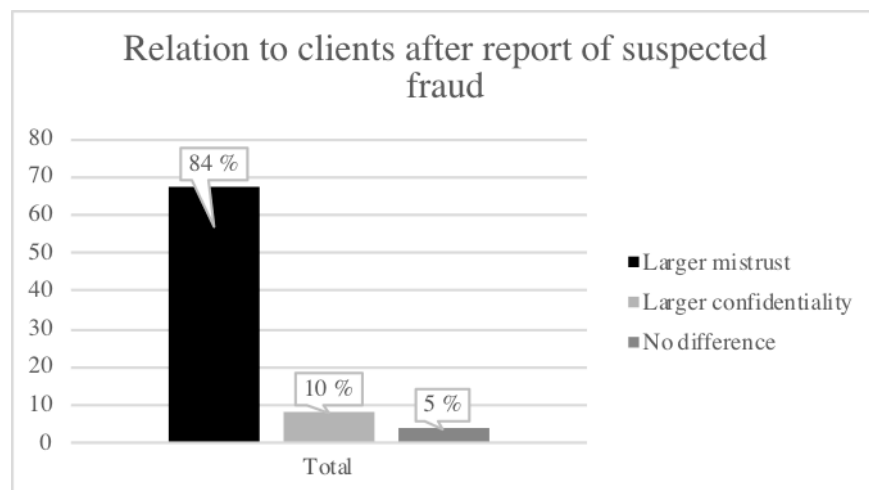


Eighty percent of the respondents however do indicate that they take action when they suspect benefit fraud. The majority of these civil servants (25%) indicate that they contact the Control Team (or the department responsible for the payments to the client). Thirty-eight percent indicate that they pay more attention to the clients upon signs of benefit fraud and 20% take action by talking directly to the clients they suspect of committing benefit fraud. There is no clear patterns of response to benefit fraud within the departments.

Relationship between civil servant and client

The final question was related to the relationship between civil servant and clients after the civil servant reported a suspicion of benefit fraud to the Control Team or other relevant department. As the objection to reporting clients can be explained by alienation to a policy that does not make sense to the civil servant, one of the arguments may be that reporting on clients may alter and damage the relationship between civil servant and client. Figure 3 suggests that this objection to reporting benefit fraud may be justified. Of the 79 civil servants who have reported on clients, 67 civil servants (84%) state that the action has resulted in larger mistrust between the client and them as civil servants.

Figure 3: Relation to clients after reporting them for suspicion of benefit fraud



n=79

Eight civil servants (10%) state that they have larger confidentiality with their clients after reporting the suspicion and four civil servants (5%) claim that the relationship is no different from before the report was made. The 12 civil servants who have not experienced a negative change in their relationship with the client are all from the Employment department. This result can be explained by the arguments presented earlier that there are differences between the national politics on different issues. The emphasis on workfare and the deservingness of clients appear to be accepted by both clients and civil servants within the department of Employment.

Conclusion

Benefit fraud is a hot political topic in many welfare states because fraud strains the public budgets. As benefit fraud affects society at large, it is no surprise that politicians place the responsibility to control and prevent benefit fraud with all citizens and especially all civil servants. This positions many civil servants in a new role where they not only are responsible for helping clients but also for controlling and if necessary reporting on their clients. The new task has been met with policy alienation by several civil servants. Some civil servants accept the task because it makes sense to them on a societal level. Others are alienated and object to the task because it does not make sense on an individual client level.

The two most remarkable outcomes of this study are the unwillingness to participate in the study and the noteworthy variation in participation between the municipal departments. Non-response is difficult to analyse but by using the concept of policy alienation, the article has presented an analysis of the non-response as a result of policy alienation and meaninglessness on an individual

level. The implementation of a policy against benefit fraud is meaningless on an individual level, when civil servants work with individual clients and aim to make a positive difference in the clients' lives through implementation of a policy (L. Tummers, 2012). This conclusion is accentuated by the fact that the majority of civil servants state that their relationship with a client has deteriorated after reporting a client of benefit fraud. Consequently, the policy appears problematic and meaningless to many civil servants on an individual level. However, on a societal level the policy makes sense, which is evident by an almost unanimous support for the existence and work of a Control Team against benefit fraud. Civil servants do not oppose the idea of combatting benefit fraud, but they prefer that someone else has the responsibility for doing the actual work. The empirical findings of this study accentuates the distinction between policy meaninglessness on an individual and a societal level. These findings are in line with a related theoretical perspective of public service motivation. In a study published in *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration* 2013, the link between public service motivation and behaviour is explored. The study concludes that there are different kinds of 'public goods' and that different types of public service motivation can have behavioural consequences (Andersen et al., 2013). When analysing benefit fraud, combining factors of public service motivation with perspectives of policy alienation can provide useful insights into a topic with increasing public attention. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can furthermore shed light on how conflicting motivational factors and meanings affect the performance of civil servants. On a theoretical level, the study indicates that further theoretical and empirical studies on this discrepancy between policy meaninglessness on different levels can inform the literature.

In 2014-15, an investigative committee studied the roles of civil servants in Denmark (the Bo Smith Udvalg). The committee was initiated due to public debate about the role of civil servants. The study focused on ministries and national departments and the main emphasis was on the cooperation between elected public servants (meaning politicians) and civil servants at the top level of administration, especially spin-doctors and other high profile civil servants (Smith Jørgensen & Christensen, 2016; Udvalget, 2015). In the concluding report and the following academic and public debate, the role of municipal civil servants was briefly included (Ibsen & Opstrup, 2016). A recommendation for both state and municipal levels of government was establishing codes of conduct related to obedience to the instructions given by the elected politicians of the municipality (Udvalget, 2015). This suggestion indicates that a lack to report on benefit fraud is unacceptable regardless of the argument. We may be able to explain the lack of compliance with the concept of policy alienation but a more important question may be; How can policy alienation among civil servants be reduced? The analysis presented in this article indicates, that national politics influence the attitudes and performance of civil servants but also that the attitudes and performance vary in different departments. The differences between the departments in this study can partly be explained by differences in the attitudes about deservingness of various groups of clients. Clients receiving benefits

from the department of Employment are viewed as less deserving than clients in the department of Children and family. These attitudes are influenced by policies made on a national level. However, there is also a noteworthy difference between the attention given to the issue of benefit fraud in each department. This suggests that the role of management has important influence on the attitudes towards a policy and consequently on the implementation of the policy. Although street-level civil servants by definition have a certain level of discretion, these findings support other studies that conclude that the managers of civil servants have the potential to influence the civil servants attitudes and implementation of public policies (May & Winter, 2009). It can be difficult to implement a new policy and place civil servants in a new role if the civil servants are alienated by the policy, but the study suggests that management is important and that dedicated managers can influence the adoption and implementation of public policies.

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Notes

¹ Letter available on request. Contact author.

² The average number of clients in the 98 Danish municipalities is approximately 55.000 inhabitants (Statistics Denmark, 2017).