

Differentiating the Poor

Patterns of Discrimination in Decision-Making on Social Assistance
Eligibility

Klara Hussénius



Differentiating the Poor

Patterns of Discrimination in Decision-Making on Social Assistance Eligibility

Klara Hussénius

Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Friday 3 March 2023 at 10.00 in Hörsal 1, Hus 1, Campus Albano, Albanovägen 28.

Abstract

Access to the Swedish welfare state's last safety net, social assistance, is ultimately determined through discretionary decision-making by social workers. This dissertation examines intersectional patterns and discriminatory bias in social workers' assessments about social assistance eligibility. Focusing on factors related to applicants' gender, family and ethnicity, the project comprises four studies, all of which highlight patterns regarding which applicants assessed as being eligible for support. Altogether, the project contributes to an expanded understanding of discriminatory tendencies in how social assistance policies are given practical meaning by the professionals that bring them into force.

The first study builds on data covering all social assistance eligibility decisions implemented in 25 municipalities during one calendar month in 2012 (n=472). The remaining three studies build on data from a vignette experiment conducted in 2018, in which just over 1,000 social workers from 19 municipalities, including Sweden's three largest cities, participated.

Results from both sources of data confirm the impression left by previous research that social assistance assessments are gendered. They show that the likelihood of granting assistance is determined through different standards for men and women. In the view of current knowledge gaps, an important contribution lies in bringing the issue of ethnicity bias to light. The results from the vignette experiment indicate that applicants with Arabic-sounding names are responded to with more conditionality than applicants with Swedish-sounding names, and that discriminatory biases related ethnicity are highly intertwined with gender biases.

By raising much-needed questions about the assessment of couples, the project also draws attention to the dissonance between the Swedish welfare state's gender equality regime and the conditions for accessing social assistance. The results indicate that moral judgments about applicants' gendered family roles affect social workers' propensity to grant support to couples, and that such judgments take form through ethnicity bias.

In terms of theory, the dissertation draws upon feminist and postcolonial perspectives on social policy as well as a street-level bureaucracy perspective on frontline work. Social assistance is understood as part of the welfare state's wider politics of redistribution, and the quantitative patterns formed by social workers' individual acts are seen in the light of structural inequalities. The dissertation presents a conceptual model for thinking about social assistance eligibility, emphasising uncertainty as an inescapable dimension of means-testing. A central argument is that eligibility issues decided at the street level cannot be separated from ongoing discretionary processes of policy implementation. While the risk of discrimination in social assistance assessments is inevitable, it tends to be concealed by the administrative arrangements through which policy comes to matter.

Keywords: *bias, deservingness, discrimination, ethnicity, gender, social assistance assessments, social policy, social workers, street-level bureaucrats.*

Stockholm 2023

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-213740>

ISBN 978-91-8014-166-6

ISBN 978-91-8014-167-3

ISSN 0281-2851



Stockholm
University

Department of Social Work

Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm

DIFFERENTIATING THE POOR

Klara Hussénius



Differentiating the Poor

Patterns of Discrimination in Decision-Making on Social Assistance
Eligibility

Klara Hussénus

©Klara Hussénus, Stockholm University 2023

ISBN print 978-91-8014-166-6

ISBN PDF 978-91-8014-167-3

ISSN 0281-2851

Printed in Sweden by Universitetservice US-AB, Stockholm 2023

Till Astrid och Hedda

Förord

Utan att på något sätt förminska mödan i processen kan jag konstatera att arbetet med den här avhandlingen till övervägande delar har varit förknippat med arbetsglädje. Den första jag vill tacka för det är min huvudhandledare Hugo Stranz. Om man är road av att till exempel lyfta tunga saker, eller springa uppför berg, vet man att andra människor kan ha stor betydelse för den egna insatsen. Hugos handledarskap kan liknas vid hur den bästa sortens tränare delar med sig av kunskap, erfarenhet och hantverksmässig skicklighet. Även om liknelsen har potential att utvecklas till en fullskalig allegori tror jag att en high five vid målgång säger mer än tusen ord. Inte minst: tack Hugo för ditt ovärderliga stöd som vän när mitt liv utanför akademien präglades av prövningar.

Ett stort tack riktas också till Åke Bergmark, som i egenskap av biträdande handledare kunnigt och klarsynt följt mig genom avhandlingsarbetet. Från början till slut har ni båda ingjutit tilltro till min förmåga, noggrant granskat mina texter och ständigt motiverat mig att höja ribban. Ni har också lärt mig att angripa arbetets prosaiska kärna, vilken kan liknas vid att nöta backintervaller i ur och skur, med en god portion humor och pragmatism. Bättre skolning i socialbidragsforskningens ädla konst kunde jag knappast ha fått.

Utöver mina handledare vill jag tacka ett antal personer som bidragit till avhandlingen genom att läsa och kommentera på textutkast. För värdefulla synpunkter i ett tidigt skede tackas Evy Gunnarsson och Lisa Andersson. Tack också till Eva Samuelsson och Sofia Härd för viktiga bidrag till det som kom att bli avhandlingens andra delstudie. Tack till Peter Dellgran för kloka reflektioner och givande diskussioner på mitt slutseminarium. Tack till alla kollegor jag haft utbyte med genom Genusakademien vid Stockholms universitet, och till Anita Nyberg som handledde min magisteruppsats och då väckte mitt intresse för handläggning av ekonomiskt bistånd för parhushåll.

Ett stort och kollektivt tack riktas vidare till de doktorandkollegor jag haft privilegiet att dela vardag med. Det är omöjligt att omnämna er alla och att göra den värdefulla gemenskapen rättvisa, men ni vet vilka ni är. Särskilt betydelsefullt har det varit att följas åt med Rebecka Strandell, som påbörjade forskarutbildningen samtidigt som jag och som disputerade för några månader sedan. Tack Rebecka för vårt systerskap. Ett mycket varmt tack riktas också till Sofia Härd för bearbetning av tillvarons metodfrågor. Rebecka och Sofia tackas därtill, liksom Sibel Korkmaz, för initierade analyser av reality-tv som berikat mitt sociologiska tänkande. Nora Germundsson har gjort arbetet roligare i

egenskap av både doktorandkompis och samarbetspartner i olika sammanhang. Tack Nora för många koppar automatkaffe på socialkontor runtom i landet. Tack Stina Michelson för upptågen och Mira Sörmark för innerligheten.

Till sammanhang som varit betydelsefulla för min tillvaro på institutionen hör Feministiskt Socialpolitiskt Seminarium (FemSem). Tack Anneli Stranz, Elin Peterson, Francesca Östberg, Helene Brodin, Maria Andersson Vogel, Petra Ulmanen och Sara Erlandsson för att ni så självklart inkluderade mig i FemSem när jag började som doktorand, och för feministisk teori och praktik i olika former genom åren. Bland kollegor på institutionen vill jag slutligen tacka Ingrid Tinglöf, Rickard Högberg och Ulrika Engström för administrativt stöd.

Att sätta punkt för det här projektet är symboliskt på många sätt. Anna-Maria, som jag delade liv med under större delen av forskarutbildningen, och vars tid på jorden blev för kort, kan inte hålla avhandlingen i sin hand. Så till sist – hur tackar man för det som betyder mest?

Avhandlingen tillägnas er vars samlade medmänsklighet gav mig mark under fötterna. Tack mamma och pappa för allt ni burit med mig. Tack Fanny för alla dagar i Håga. Tack Harald för ditt stora hjärta. Tack Marcella för gullrankan som växer och växer. Tack Kristina för ditt sätt att förstå sorg. Tack Linn för att du lärde mig att styrka är performativt. Tack Weronika för tusen sorters omtanke. Tack Hugo och Anneli som fick mig att skratta via Zoom. Tack Hadi för ditt sätt att gå bredvid mig.

Uppsala, januari 2023
Klara Hussénus

List of Studies

- I. Hussénus, K. (2021). Intersectional patterns of social assistance eligibility in Sweden. *Nordic Social Work Research*, 11(1), 19–33.
- II. Hussénus, K. (2022). Gender and ethnicity in social assistance assessments of single applicants with substance abuse problems. *European Journal of Social Work*, 25(2), 210–223.
- III. Hussénus, K. (2022). Social assistance assessments of couple households: A vignette study on applicants' ethnicity and gendered family roles. *International Journal of Social Welfare*. 31(1), 66–76.
- IV. Hussénus, K., Stranz, H. & Bergmark, Å. (Manuscript). Eligibility deliberations at the frontline: Uncertainty and ethnicity bias in decision-making on social assistance.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Förord..... | i |
| List of Studies..... | iii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Aim and Research Questions..... | 4 |
| Delineations | 4 |
| Background and Previous Research | 6 |
| Social Policy Context | 6 |
| Work as a Rationale for Universalism | 7 |
| Who Needs Social Assistance and Why? | 8 |
| The 'Work Line' as a Dividing Line..... | 9 |
| The Ethnification of Poverty | 9 |
| The Family as a Gendered Arena for Work..... | 11 |
| Intersections at the Margins of the Welfare State | 12 |
| Legal, Regulatory and Organisational Prerequisites | 13 |
| A National Legislation Prompting Municipal Autonomy | 13 |
| An Eroding Standard of Living | 14 |
| An Organisation in Different Shapes..... | 16 |
| Social Assistance Eligibility in Practice..... | 17 |
| Central Dimensions in Means-Testing | 18 |
| Deservingness Opinions and Social Worker Attitudes..... | 22 |
| Patterns in Decision-Making..... | 23 |
| Theoretical Framework | 26 |
| Feminist and Postcolonial Perspectives | 26 |
| The Universal and the Marginal | 26 |
| The Power of Differentiation | 28 |
| Intersectionality as an Analytical Lens | 29 |
| Conceptualising Social Assistance Eligibility | 30 |
| Social Workers as Street-Level Bureaucrats..... | 30 |
| Eligibility as a Dichotomy | 31 |
| The Variable Features of Eligibility..... | 32 |
| The Varying Degree of Uncertainty..... | 33 |
| The Risk of Discrimination | 35 |
| Summary of Analytical Approach and Terminology | 36 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Methods and Data | 38 |
| Study Design | 38 |
| Decision-Making Data | 40 |
| Data Collection and Sample | 40 |
| Analyses | 41 |
| Method Discussion | 43 |
| Ethical Considerations | 44 |
| Vignette Data | 45 |
| Data Collection and Sample | 45 |
| The Survey Context | 48 |
| Vignette Construction and Name Attribution | 48 |
| Analyses | 50 |
| Method Discussion | 53 |
| Summary of the Results | 56 |
| Study I | 56 |
| Study II | 58 |
| Study III | 59 |
| Study IV | 61 |
| Discussion | 63 |
| Patterns of Discrimination | 63 |
| Inequality Hidden in the Welfare State's Backyard | 65 |
| Ethnic Discrimination Made Legitimate | 66 |
| No Gender Equality for the Poor | 68 |
| A Perfect Breeding Ground for Discrimination? | 70 |
| Implications for Social Work Practice | 71 |
| Final Remarks | 73 |
| Sammanfattning på svenska | 74 |
| References | 77 |
| Appendixes | 101 |
| Appendix 1. Questionnaire, decision-making data | 102 |
| Appendix 2. Vignette, couple household (four versions with name manipulation) | 110 |
| Appendix 3. Vignette, couple household + questionnaire | 112 |
| Appendix 4. Vignette, single household (four versions with name manipulation) | 114 |
| Appendix 5. Vignette, single household + questionnaire | 116 |
| Appendix 6. The vignette study's respondent questionnaire | 118 |

Introduction

Whose financial scarcity is deemed legitimate need – deserving of remedy by the welfare state – is by no means an arbitrary matter. On the contrary, the ways in which welfare states distinguish between ‘the deserving’ and ‘the undeserving’ poor involve specific assumptions and lead to specific material consequences. Meanwhile, the power of such processes to (re)produce group-level differences is not necessarily obvious (Fraser, 1987).

One way to shed light on social policy arrangements established to target and monitor support for the least well-off is to treat responses to individual claims for means-tested cash benefits as an empirical question. Drawing upon such an approach, this dissertation addresses patterns in the establishment of eligibility for the Swedish welfare state’s last safety net – social assistance.

The social assistance benefit is earmarked for individuals and families who are otherwise unable to support themselves. Eligibility is determined by social workers on a case-by-case basis. The dissertation comprises four studies examining quantitative patterns in social workers’ distinctions between eligible and non-eligible social assistance applicants. The focus is directed towards patterns that can be linked to applicants’ social positions. Three bases for differentiation are focused on: gender, ethnicity and family.

As the welfare state’s last safety net, social assistance is governed by principles that differ significantly from the major principles of inclusion that apply in the rest of the Swedish welfare system. Whereas the social *security* system is governed and administered by national authorities, and intended to provide income protection for the broad majority, social *assistance* is targeted to an economically disadvantaged minority and is a municipal responsibility (Minas et al., 2018). Means-testing takes place on a temporary basis according to which each payment is subject to an individual assessment (Stranz et al., 2017). While access to social assistance is surrounded by a significant degree of conditionality, the benefit levels are low compared to the average living standard of the surrounding society. Especially among long-term recipients of the subsidy, experiences of social exclusion are pervasive (e.g., Bergnehr, 2016; Marttila et al., 2010). The design of the subsidy has also entailed a growing gap between social assistance recipients and low-income earners in Sweden (Bergmark, 2013).

Social assistance administration is organised under the municipal personal social services (the PSS) and constitutes a major field of social work practice in Sweden. The organisational setting is intended to enable social workers to pay attention to interactions between individuals' economic difficulties and other forms of psychosocial problems (related to e.g., substance abuse, domestic violence and mental illness). In addition to social assistance, the PSS' responsibilities include child welfare and adult social work (Stranz et al., 2017). The social workers responsible for making eligibility decisions have far-reaching individual discretion. While regulated through both national and local policy directives, social assistance eligibility depends on the discretionary assessments of these professionals (Stranz, 2007; cf. Lipsky, 2010).

In addition to strict requirements for applicants to have exhausted all other possible sources of income, assessments often emphasise applicants' presentation of work willingness (Nybom, 2012; Thorén, 2008). Against this background, scholars have raised concerns about the Swedish social assistance system as embedding obvious risks of legal uncertainty and being characterised by a poor-law logic (e.g., Bergmark, 2013; Panican & Ulmestig 2016; Stranz, 2007; Thorén, 2008). The high degree of local and professional discretion implies that the propensity of a household to be granted support may depend both on their municipality of residence and which social worker assesses their case (Hydén et al., 1995; Stranz, 2007).

In socioeconomic terms, the target population for social assistance can be said to emphasise subgroups with marginal positions in the welfare state (e.g., García & Kazepov, 2002; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Tussing, 1974). In addition to the obvious class dimension of this statement, categorisations related to gender, ethnicity and family emerge as central if we are to describe positions associated with higher poverty risks and overrepresentation in social assistance reciprocity (NBHW, 2022). At a general level, the foreign born are significantly overrepresented among social assistance recipients in Sweden. The same applies to single mothers, single men without children and young adults. The accentuation of economic difficulties is especially marked in subgroups facing multiple structural disadvantages, which is the case, for instance, for foreign-born single mothers (Bergnehr, 2016; Stranz & Wiklund, 2012).

Here, labels like 'foreign-born' and 'single mothers' are used to highlight positions overrepresented in economic scarcity. These categorisations also represent grounds for stereotypical beliefs, the individual implications and experiences of which are context-bound and shaped by several social hierarchies (e.g., Harrits, 2019; Harrits & Østergaard Møller, 2011; McCall, 2005). The concept of intersectionality offers a conceptual structure for thinking about how experiences of privilege and subordination tend to take shape via the interaction of several social hierarchies. In this way of thinking, an intersectional position is defined by several grounds for social categorisation (McCall, 2005).

In decision-making about social assistance, social workers are required to make use of categorisations in order to perform their tasks. In doing so, they run the risk of implementing policy in different ways for different groups of applicants, thereby granting social assistance according to discriminating logics (e.g., Hasenfeld, 2010; Lipsky, 2010). Discriminatory bias may operate through multiple logics of stereotypical beliefs, with specific implications depending on how one basis of categorisation intersects with one or several others (cf. Ridgeway & Kircheli-Katz, 2013).

Increasing scholarly interest has been directed towards the impact of gender and gendered family roles in encounters between social workers and clients (e.g., Bauer & Wiezorek, 2016; Nygren et al., 2021). A number of studies indicate that professionals act according to different standards in their meetings with male and female clients (e.g., Callegari et al., 2022; Kullberg, 2005). In social assistance assessments, social workers seem prone to reproduce traditional family roles by stressing men's breadwinning responsibilities more than women's (Kullberg, 2004; 2005; Kullberg & Fäldt, 2008; Nybom, 2011; Stranz et al., 2017).

Internationally, research has documented ethnic discrimination in the propensity of policy implementors to sanction welfare clients (e.g., Schram et al., 2009; Soss et al., 2011). The literature on public welfare opinions demonstrates that immigrants tend to be seen as less deserving than members of majority populations in their countries (e.g., Kootstra, 2016; Reeskens & van der Meer, 2019). In Sweden, a growing body of research has drawn attention to ethnic discrimination in a wide range of areas (e.g., Ahmed & Hammarstedt, 2020; Agerström & Rooth, 2009; Bursell, 2014; Khosravi, 2012; Wolgast et al., 2018).

However, research examining the occurrence of ethnicity bias in social assistance assessments has hitherto been lacking. Further, the work that has been carried out so far on gender bias is limited to studies of single mothers and single fathers. The conditions for accessing social assistance in couple households remain to a large extent unknown.

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of patterns in decision-making about social assistance eligibility for different groups of applicants. It comprises four studies that all highlight patterns in which kinds of households are assessed as eligible for social assistance. Focusing on factors related to the gender, family and ethnicity of applicants, the analyses seek to capture general tendencies as well as intersectional nuances pertaining to this question. The analyses are guided by an intercategory approach to intersectionality (McCall, 2005). This means that established social categorisations are adopted and used pragmatically in order to empirically study the existence of diversity (Spierings, 2012).

The first study builds on data covering implemented decisions about social assistance eligibility, and maps factors that predict granting for different groups of applicants. The remaining three studies address patterns in

assessments by social workers of short hypothetical cases, so-called vignettes. The vignette method facilitates the analysis of discriminatory bias: that is, whether equivalent cases are assessed differently based solely on the social attributes of the applicants.

Aim and Research Questions

The overarching aim of the dissertation is to examine intersectional patterns and discriminatory bias in social assistance assessments. More specifically, the intent is to analyse the occurrence of difference between various categories of applicants as regards their likelihood of being granted social assistance. The analytical focus is centred on three grounds for social categorisation: gender, ethnicity and family. By adopting an intercategory intersectional approach to these categories, the project is designed to be sensitive to heterogeneity. The overarching objective is addressed through four separate studies, each corresponding to one of the following research questions:

1. To what extent, and how, do decisions about social assistance eligibility form intersectional and/or subgroup-specific patterns related to applicants' gender, country of birth and family type? (Study I)
2. To what extent, if any, do social workers assess eligibility for social assistance differently depending on a single applicant's gender and ethnicity? (Study II)
3. How do social workers assess social assistance eligibility for heterosexual couples with a baby, and do applicants' ethnicity and gendered family roles affect such assessments? (Study III)
4. Can patterns in the propensity of social workers to indicate uncertainty in social assistance assessments be related to ethnicity bias in eligibility outcomes, and if so, how? (Study IV)

Delineations

Any research project design is specific and involves numerous decisions about what the study will not address. On this note, a few clarifications as to the scope of the present project may be in order. First, while acknowledging that local variation represents a major dimension of how social assistance policies come to matter in practice, municipal differences are not subject to analysis in this project. Instead, the aim here is to study patterns that can be observed *across* municipalities, and which can be attributed to factors at the applicant level.

Further, the present project focuses on a clearly defined outcome of social assistance assessments, namely eligibility. This being said, there are many other dimensions of social assistance assessments: for instance, professional perceptions of applicants' need and deservingness (Kullberg, 2005); implemented sanctions (Keiser et al., 2004); activation measures (Nybom, 2012); and size of granted benefits (Stranz, 2007). In this project, such measures have been excluded from consideration in order for all four studies to spotlight the question of eligibility, while simultaneously highlighting gender, ethnicity and family from a variety of angles.

Further, it is worth noting that in order for social assistance assessments to take place in practice, the applicant household must have first applied for social assistance and passed through the gate-keeping functions of the PSS (Minas, 2005). This dissertation does not attempt to study issues of take-up and non-take-up of social assistance, such as (for instance) the extent to which targeted individuals actually apply for a subsidy (cf. Tervola et al., 2022). Likewise, the linkage between intake functions – that is, procedures for determining which individuals are accepted as clients of the PSS – and eligibility outcomes is not addressed (cf. Minas, 2005).

Background and Previous Research

This chapter provides a contextual understanding of the empirical studies that make up the dissertation. It begins by outlining the overarching design of the social protection system of the Swedish welfare state. A central point is that the first-tier safety nets have a manifest inside/outside-mechanism related to labour market participation. Against this background, group-level differences in social assistance reciprocity are then discussed. An overview follows of the regulatory and organisational arrangements surrounding social work with social assistance. The chapter ends by outlining central eligibility criteria and overviewing current knowledge about deservingness opinions and assessment differences in decision-making about cash benefits.

Social Policy Context

Welfare state policies for poverty alleviation are usually conceptualised by reference to the relative proportion of targeted means-tested benefits and more inclusive social insurance programmes (e.g., Korpi & Palme, 1998; Nelson, 2004). Whereas targeted minimum income benefits most obviously reallocate material resources to households in financial need, the existence and design of more encompassing social insurance programmes, with coverage of and usage by the non-poor, are of crucial importance for the overall reduction of poverty (Korpi & Palme, 1998; Frazer & Marlier, 2016; Nelson, 2004; Kuivalainen & Nelson, 2011; Marx et al., 2016). Social insurance provisions that benefit the broad majority are also associated with greater public legitimacy than targeted benefits. Conversely, tax-transfer systems entailing a high degree of redistribution are dependent on broad support from the public (Brady & Bostic, 2015; Rothstein, 1998; Svallfors, 2016).

A dividing line can be drawn between policy regimes that rely mainly on targeted, means-tested benefits to the least well-off, and those emphasising non-means-tested social security solutions covering the broad majority (Blomqvist & Palme, 2020; Nelson 2004). The concept of universalism refers to the latter type of redistributive model, and aligns with the general characteristics of the Swedish welfare state. The contemporary history of the Swedish welfare state exhibits a relatively unique continuity as regards commitment to universal social policy solutions. Since the 1930s, a national consensus in favour of a strong welfare state has shaped Swedish

governments, and been embraced by parties on both the left and the right sides of the political spectrum (Rothstein, 1986). In the Nordic countries, universalism is not only a principle for redistribution, but also an influential ideology linked to the ambition of promoting class and gender equality (Anttonen, 2002). The core idea of universalism consists in a rationale of providing welfare benefits and services to all citizens on the same conditions (Blomqvist & Palme, 2020). That said, the notion of universal social policy solutions as arrangements covering ‘all’ is not unproblematic. In the strictest sense of the word, the concept of universalism fails to recognise people who are *not* provided with welfare services on the same conditions as those representing the norm for ‘all’ (e.g., Martinsson et al., 2016; McEachrane, 2018).

Work as a Rationale for Universalism

The Swedish model for redistribution implies that poverty in the first place is prevented by means of progressive taxes and social insurance programmes covering the broad majority (Korpi & Palme, 1998). The function of social assistance is complementary: this subsidy is intended to secure a minimum standard of living for the least well-off. Hence, it is individuals who are insufficiently covered by the Swedish welfare state’s universal social security system who are referred to social assistance. In order to understand group-level differences in the need for social assistance, we must look at the principles of entitlement to the first-tier benefit programmes.

The overarching design of the social security system relies on an individual-based entitlement link between labour market participation and social security schemes (Sainsbury, 2019). National authorities administer these programmes, which include, for instance, sick leave, unemployment insurance, parental leave and pension schemes. The programmes include minimum flat-rate compensation levels for those who lack previous incomes on which to base the benefits, but most importantly they build upon a loss-of-income-logic. Working-age individuals are expected to be employed full-time, while enjoying protection in the event of temporary interruptions (Sainsbury, 2019). This reflects a key logic that pervades the Swedish welfare state and is often referred to as ‘workfare’ or the ‘work line’ (*arbetslinjen*) (e.g., Junestav, 2004). In the field of social security, the ‘work line’ can be most simply described as the attempt to promote high labour market participation by rewarding workers with social protection (Junestav, 2004; Lundqvist, 2011; Nord, 2018). Conversely, the ‘work line’ is thought to help anchor the social contract between citizens and the welfare state, leveraging support for redistributive tax-transfer mechanisms (Trägårdh, 2020).

The ‘work line’ is also reflected in the Swedish welfare state’s model for addressing and establishing support for gender equality, which has been a key theme in social policy since the 1970s (Lundqvist, 2011; 2017; Nyberg, 2012;

Tollin, 2011). Access to income from the labour market and the welfare state is crucial to enabling women's financial autonomy, independent from their family relations (Gunnarsson, 2002; O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993). From the international perspective, this recognition has been especially extensive in Sweden, and addressed not least of all through reforms to the first-tier security system (Hobson, 2004; Lundqvist, 2017; Stanfors, 2019). In essence, the welfare state has sought to enable women's independence from men by encouraging female employment. A central idea has been to provide social protection on the basis of the individual, not the household, as an economic unit (Nyberg, 2012; Sainsbury, 2019). The individual income taxation reform of 1971 represents a milestone for this policy approach, decoupling as it did the linking of tax payments and social rights from marital status (Gunnarsson, 2016). Individual salaries determine the amounts of social security payments, albeit with integrated maximum ceilings. This both serves the overarching principle of rewarding workers – regardless of gender – with social protection and aims to encourage a dual earner/dual carer model (Lundqvist, 2011). Important fields for gender equality reforms, all intended to promote female employment, also include the extensive development of childcare infrastructure, measures taken to create new jobs for women in the public sector, and flexible parental leave policies (Duvander & Ferrarini, 2013; Hobson, 2004; Nyberg, 2012; Lundqvist, 2011).

The past few decades have seen a shift that challenges the historical position held by the Swedish welfare state. In the wake of the major economic crisis of the 1990s, neoliberal ideas gained increased influence in the field of social policy and have brought profound institutional and political changes (Nord, 2018; Blomqvist & Palme, 2020; Svallfors, 2016). Since the 1990s, both sickness and unemployment insurance have been subjected to cutbacks in benefit levels (Blomqvist & Palme, 2020; Ferrarini et al., 2012; Lindlee & Berglund, 2022).

This development has disproportionately affected already marginalised groups: immigrants, single mothers and young adults (Fritzell et al., 2007; Morissens & Sainsbury, 2005; Sainsbury & Morissens, 2010; Zagal et al., 2022).

Who Needs Social Assistance and Why?

The labour market, the family and the welfare state's first-tier system (consisting of earnings-related social insurance programmes) can be seen as three interlinked arenas for supply that precede social assistance (Gunnarsson, 2002). Individuals' ability to provide for themselves by accessing income from these arenas has direct bearing on their risk of finding themselves in a situation where they need to apply for social assistance. The ways in which individuals combine such incomes during different periods also affect their risk of suffering from economic vulnerability later in life (Gunnarsson, 2002).

The following review takes its starting point in the labour market, the family and the welfare state in order to shed light on group-level patterns in social assistance reciprocity. As will be shown, these arenas are intimately intertwined, at both an individual and an aggregate level. While an overview is given of general mechanisms of differentiation embedded in the social policy system, the goal here is not to describe wider dimensions of social exclusion and psychosocial problems among social assistance recipients.

The 'Work Line' as a Dividing Line

The labour market is intended to be the primary source of income for both men and women. Working full-time under stable employment conditions provides the most advantageous prerequisites for accessing adequate levels of social security benefits in connection with, for instance, sickness, unemployment and parental leave (Sainsbury, 2019). For individuals, therefore, their prospects of establishing themselves on the labour market are critical not only for their present supply situation but also for their future ability to gain protection from the welfare state's first-tier safety nets.

Among social assistance recipients, unemployment is the most commonly documented cause of financial need, prevalent among approximately half of recipients (NBHW 2021a). Within this group, some are awaiting unemployment benefit transfers, while others are receiving such payments but at levels that do not cover their expenditures. Most common, however, is for members of this group to lack access to unemployment benefit transfers (NBHW 2021a). The basic rule for entitlement to earnings-related unemployment insurance is that the individual is member of a profession-specific unemployment benefit fund and has worked at least six months within the past 12 months (Lindlee & Berglund, 2022). Thus, long-term absence from the labour market increases the risk of falling through the first-tier system and being referred to social assistance.

As regards social assistance recipients whose economic difficulties are primarily related to structural constraints on the labour market, two overarching groups can be distinguished: the foreign born and young adults. These categories should not be seen as representing mutually exclusive groups but rather as risk factors that may interact (e.g., Forslund & Liljeberg, 2021). Since this dissertation examines ethnicity-related patterns, the case of migration background as a risk factor for unemployment (and by extension social assistance reciprocity) will receive particular attention.

The Ethnification of Poverty

The Swedish labour market exhibits many forms of inequality related to ethnicity (e.g., Grönlund & Fairbrother, 2022). In general terms, being born outside of Sweden, having parents that are born outside of Sweden and being

stereotyped as belonging to an ethnic minority group all correlate negatively with labour market prospects (e.g., Erlandsson, 2022; Friedrich et al., 2021; Gustafsson et al., 2019; Rooth & Ekberg, 2003; Wolgast et al., 2018). Compared to natives, the foreign born face greater difficulties in gaining a stable position on the labour market. They also tend to remain in unemployment for longer periods than natives while being overrepresented in precarious employment (Friedrich et al., 2021). Factors such as country/region of birth and time since migration represent variables of importance for the degree of dis/advantage across subgroups (e.g., Obućina, 2014). Repeatedly highlighted in the literature is a pattern whereby migrants born in Africa and the Middle East are especially disadvantaged by labour market inequalities, while the degree of vulnerability typically decreases with longer duration of stay in Sweden (Aldén & Hammarstedt, 2015; Carlsson, 2010; Friedrich et al., 2021; Gustafsson, 2013; Gustafsson & Zheng, 2006; Hammarstedt & Shukur, 2006; Obućina, 2014; Wolgast et al., 2018). Educational levels differ with regard to migration background, but are insufficient to explain all of the observed disparities (e.g., Aldén & Hammarstedt, 2014).

As a reflection of these conditions, the risk of being located in the lowest part of the income distribution curve is clearly related to ethnicity. Whereas the total proportion of people living below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold is generally a little lower in Sweden than the EU average, migration-related patterns in poverty risks are more tangible in Sweden (Eurostat, 2021; OECD/EU, 2018). Among native Swedes, the share of adults below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold was approximately 10% in 2020. The corresponding figure for non-European immigrants was as high as 34% (Statistics Sweden, 2020). This gap is wider in Sweden than in most other EU countries and has increased during the past decade (Eurostat, 2021; cf. Statistics Sweden, 2016; 2022).¹

When looking at figures for social assistance recipiency, migration background (born in/outside Sweden) is the only available indicator of ethnicity-related differences. The overarching pattern this indicator enables us to see is striking. Approximately 20% of the Swedish population as a whole was born in a country other than Sweden. Among social assistance recipients, the proportion of foreign born is over 60% (NBHW, 2022). This illustrates a significant overrepresentation of migrants in the welfare state's last safety net, and raises concerns about a tendency toward segmentation in the welfare state's social protection system. Rather than functioning as a complement to 'universal' first-tier benefits, social assistance runs the risk of serving as a necessary resort for a significant share of the foreign-born population with

¹ From an international perspective, this can partly be explained by a relatively high share of humanitarian immigration and low educational levels among refugees (Statistics Sweden, 2016). Until 2016, Swedish asylum laws were among the most generous in the European Union. However, the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 was followed by a major reorientation of Swedish policy on asylum (e.g., Nordling & Persdotter, 2021).

constrained access to work and thereby to the first-tier system's earnings-related benefits (cf. Sainsbury, 2019; Stranz & Wiklund, 2012).

The Family as a Gendered Arena for Work

As regards the family as an arena for supply, the burden and sharing of expenditures and unpaid care responsibilities are critical to the ability of individuals to support themselves without social assistance (e.g., Grönlund & Fairbrother, 2022; Nyberg, 2014). Whereas couples can support each other financially and lower their living costs by sharing households, single households are generally more economically vulnerable. This vulnerability applies to long-term constraints on access to full-time employment as well as to critical life events and unforeseen expenditures (e.g., Gunnarsson, 2002; Stranz & Wiklund, 2012; Obućina, 2014).

For parents, the additional expenditure that comes with dependent minors places higher requirements on income (Stranz & Wiklund, 2012). Here, it can also be noted that having more children correlates with a higher economic burden, which is more tangible in the foreign-born part of the population (Obućina, 2014). Further, doing unpaid work within the family – most obviously, duties related to parenthood – may make it more difficult to fulfil the welfare state's ideal of full-time employment (Grönlund & Fairbrother, 2022). In order to address this, an overarching idea within Swedish gender equality policy is to encourage men and women to share unpaid work within the family (Sainsbury, 2019). In addition to mechanisms embedded in the social insurance system, the welfare state provides a relatively extended system of public services (such as childcare facilities) intended to reduce the overall burden of unpaid family work. This is reflected in the fact that Sweden has a high number of dual-earner households compared with many other European countries (Sainsbury & Morissens, 2010). Seen from an international perspective, a large proportion of the female population in Sweden is employed. Meanwhile, women are overrepresented in part-time employment and jobs with low wages while still accounting for the bulk of unpaid work (Boye, 2008; Sainsbury and Morissens, 2010).

But policy-making for gender equality has mainly addressed two-adult families, such that single parents still face difficulties in combining parenthood with full-time employment (cf. Lundqvist, 2011). Due to gender inequalities in both income and sharing of unpaid work, the economic consequences of parenthood are most tangible for single mothers (Stranz & Wiklund, 2012). Although the relative accentuation of poverty risks among single mothers is lower in Sweden than in many other welfare states, single mothers are a subgroup that faces significant economic vulnerability (e.g., Fritzell et al., 2007; Stranz & Wiklund, 2012; Zagel et al., 2022). This vulnerability is also reflected in social assistance reciprocity. Over the past five decades, single mothers have consistently been the most overrepresented

household type in social assistance reciprocity (Fritzell et al., 2007; NBHW, 2018b; Stranz & Wiklund, 2012). The rate of single mothers receiving social assistance in 2017 was approximately 17%, compared with just over 5% in the population as a whole (NBHW, 2018b).

Another overrepresented group in social assistance reciprocity, seen in terms of gender and household type, is single men without children. This household group is the most common in absolute terms among social assistance recipients, whereas single mothers are the most overrepresented group (NBHW, 2022). In the former group, the incidence of problems traditionally considered to require social workers' competencies, not least of all substance abuse problems, has been shown to be higher than in other recipient groups (cf. Skogens, 2012).

Intersections at the Margins of the Welfare State

Whereas the Swedish welfare state has demonstrated effectiveness in avoiding a 'feminisation of poverty' (e.g., Kim & Choi, 2013; Sainsbury & Morissens, 2010; cf. Brady & Burroway, 2012), the composition of women in the lowest income groups testifies to gender and ethnicity as important – and interacting – variables for the distribution of class disadvantages. These patterns are intimately intertwined with both the work dimension and the family dimension. Poor prospects for employment are especially pronounced among foreign-born women, and the gender gap in labour market prospects is particularly strong among immigrants from low-income countries (Grönlund & Fairbrother, 2022). At the intersection of relative poverty, gender, family and ethnicity, foreign-born single mothers are particularly overrepresented in social assistance reciprocity (Stranz & Wiklund, 2012).

The accentuation of economic vulnerability that comes with multiple disadvantages is also clear when looking at periods of social assistance reciprocity (e.g., Bergnehr, 2016; Stranz & Wiklund, 2012; cf. Obućina, 2014). Long-term social assistance reciprocity (defined as 10 months or more during a year) is especially pronounced among single mothers, on the one hand, and the foreign born, on the other (NBHW, 2022; Stranz & Wiklund, 2012). Approximately 40% of the households that receive social assistance are long-term recipients. Of those, 60% are households with one or more foreign-born adult (NBHW, 2022). Among single mothers, those born outside Sweden receive social assistance for even longer periods than native-born single mothers (Stranz & Wiklund, 2012).

Public statistics on the causes of financial need among recipients also illustrate how dynamics between the family arena and the welfare state's first-tier system are entangled with gendered care responsibilities. Among those who applied for social assistance due to constraints related to parental leave in 2020, 92% were women and only 8% men (NBHW, 2021a).

Further, whereas couple households are generally underrepresented in social assistance reciprocity, the overall disadvantaged position of the foreign born is clear when looking at *which* couple households receive social assistance in spite of the statistical advantage of being two adults. In 2020, couple households receiving social assistance transfers were, in nine of ten cases, composed of at least one foreign-born adult (NBHW, 2021a).

Pertaining to the small proportion of couple households among social assistance recipients, it should be noted that social assistance eligibility is based on the household (not the individual) as a financial entity. This means that applicants in couple households can be denied support based on the income of a spouse or partner (cf. NBHW 2021b). Although it runs counter to the recognition of the family as an institution that has historically reproduced patriarchal power relations, granted subsidies are indirectly assumed to benefit the household as a whole. This risks strengthening (gendered) relationships of dependency in couples with narrow economic margins (e.g., Bennett, 2013; Hobson 1990; Orloff 1993; Ulmestig & Eriksson, 2017).

Legal, Regulatory and Organisational Prerequisites

The following review is structured to highlight central traits of institutional arrangements that together form the prerequisites for decision-making about social assistance eligibility. A central theme is that municipalities enjoy a significant degree of autonomy in the way they organise PSS. This means that social work with social assistance takes place within frameworks defined by differing local and organisational contexts. The discretionary agency of individual frontline professionals is simultaneously enabled and enclosed by the frameworks imposed by policies and organisational arrangements.

A National Legislation Prompting Municipal Autonomy

The Swedish Social Services Act states that Swedish municipalities, by means of social assistance, shall guarantee their residents ‘a reasonable standard of living’. Sweden consists of 290 municipalities that run the gamut from sparsely populated rural areas to densely populated cities. Governed by elected assemblies, the municipalities are charged by the national parliament and government with providing essential parts of the welfare state’s public services. Among their compulsory responsibilities are the provision and operation of public schools, of childcare and of social services (Bengtsson & Melke, 2014). The social services category includes care for elderly and disabled people and services that are organised within the PSS (Stranz et al., 2017).

The municipalities exhibit broad disparities in terms of (for instance) number of inhabitants, demographic composition, occurrence and character of social problems, unemployment rates and labour market conditions. This means that the demand for various types of social work is differentiated at the local level (Bergmark et al., 2017). In addition, larger cities require different organisational solutions for social services, compared to small municipalities in rural areas. In response, the Social Services Act is written in a way that enables municipalities to organise PSS activities in ways that are tailored to their local conditions – an important feature of the act (Stranz, 2007).

In preparatory works to the legislation, the Social Services Act is described as a goal-oriented framework law (Prop. 1979/80:1). While no clear-cut definition of ‘framework law’ exists, the basic idea is that the legislative text sets out overarching directions without specifying in detail how such goals should be achieved (Esping, 1994; Kjellbom, 2014). The construction is anchored in both the idea that local politicians and public officials are best suited to assess how social work should be organised in their local areas, and a trust in the ability of professionals to exercise their expertise with discretion (Bergmark & Lundström, 2007). This notion is critical to understanding how objectives of flexibility are inscribed in social assistance policy at multiple levels (Stranz, 2007).

The Social Services Act comprises directives regarding, on the one hand, municipalities’ obligations to provide services, and, on the other hand, individuals’ rights to access services (Kjellbom, 2014). In its overarching article, it declares that the municipalities’ social welfare boards (*socialnämnder*) are obliged to ‘on the grounds of democracy and solidarity [...] enhance people’s economic and social security, equality in living conditions and active participation in societal life’ (Socialtjänstlag, SFS 2001:453).

The social welfare boards are made up of local politicians and make decisions about local policies governing PSS activities (Bengtsson & Melke, 2014). The lack of detailed regulation at the legislative level means that the Social Services Act cannot be implemented without putting in place additional local policies and organisational arrangements (Esping, 1994; Kjellbom, 2014). A less intended result is that local politicians, in some respects, are able to influence policies governing social services based on their political agendas (Panican & Ulmestig, 2016; Stranz, 2007).

An Eroding Standard of Living

When it comes to compensation levels for social assistance, national policies set out a combination of fixed and variable components. As further illustrated below, under the heading *Central Dimensions in Means-Testing* (p. 18), these components form a critical part of decision-making about social assistance eligibility.

Social assistance is divided into two parts: basic assistance (*försörjningsstöd*) and additional assistance (*livsföring i övrigt*) (NBHW, 2022; Socialtjänstlag, SFS 2001:453). Basic assistance is intended to cover recurring household expenses,² the compensation levels of which are regulated by the national benefit standard (*riksnormen*) (NBHW, 2021b). The construction of this standard is described in more detail below. Basic assistance further covers a set of cost items that are not determined at the national level, which many municipalities regulate based on local norms. These cost items include expenditures that vary locally and across occupations.³ Additional assistance, in turn, is intended to cover non-regulatory expenses including, for instance, healthcare, spectacles and medicine. As regards additional assistance, the municipalities enjoy a greater degree of freedom in determining the implications of ‘reasonable’ compensation levels (Bergmark, 2013). The legislative preparatory works state that additional assistance should correspond to what a ‘local low-income earner can afford’ (prop.1996/97:124, p. 169).

Basic assistance represents 95% of the municipalities’ social assistance transfers and covers the costs that are typically applied for (NBHW, 2021a). The national benefit standard can thus be seen as the single most important national policy tool affecting the monetary meaning of ‘a reasonable standard of living’ (cf. Bergmark, 2013). The standard consists of a fixed set of cost items, the compensation amounts for which are adjusted on a yearly basis by the Swedish Consumer Agency. The adjustments account for the effects of inflation, but not for wage developments (cf. NBHW, 2021b). This has resulted in a growing gap in income levels between social assistance recipients and low-income earners (Bergmark, 2013). It is also worth stressing that the Social Services Act determines *which* cost items are included in the norm, constraining the standard’s flexibility over time. For instance, costs for internet access – which are typically recurring and can be considered necessary to participate in Swedish society – are not included in basic assistance. This means that such expenditures must be applied for as part of additional assistance (cf. NBHW, 2021b).

In parallel with a steady growth in prosperity in the general population, over time, social assistance reciprocity has come to be associated with an increasingly manifest degree of relative poverty since the imposition of the national benefit standard in 1998 (Bergmark, 2013; 2016). In tandem with this development, average periods of social assistance reciprocity have increased, particularly in groups that tend to fall short of the welfare state’s first-tier system, including single mothers, the foreign born and young adults (Fritzell et al., 2007).

² This includes seven standardised cost items: food, clothes and shoes, leisure and play, everyday consumer goods, healthcare and hygiene products, the newspaper and the telephone (NBHW, 2021b).

³ This includes five standardised cost items: housing, household electricity, work commutes, fees for trade union membership and fees for unemployment insurance (NBHW, 2021b).

An Organisation in Different Shapes

The municipalities' organisational orchestration of social assistance administration is an illustrative example of how the boundaries between different social work areas, as well as the conditions for the professional's exercise of discretion, are affected by decisions at the local political level (cf. Dellgran & Höjer, 2005). The work of the PSS with social assistance is both ideologically and politically charged, involving assumptions both about how problems with economic vulnerability can be explained and how they should be solved (cf. Bergmark, 2000; Germundsson, 2022).

Across municipalities, social work carried out within the PSS is built around three areas: social assistance, child welfare and adult social work. Whereas the latter has primarily been centred around substance abuse treatment, organisational borders between the PSS' working areas are subject to both variation and change (Stranz et al., 2016). In recent years, social work addressing intimate partner violence has come to constitute a considerable working area included in many municipalities' PSS (Lundberg & Stranz, 2019).

The high degree of municipal autonomy is reflected in the fact that the PSS come in many different organisational shapes across the country. In terms of integration and specialisation, two ideal types for organising the PSS' main fields of activity can be identified (Stranz et al., 2016). In most municipalities, social assistance, substance abuse care for adults and child welfare are organisationally separated into different units. This represents the specialised organisation model. It can be contrasted with the integrated model, in which all three areas of the PSS are administered in one unit, a model which is more common in smaller municipalities (Bergmark and Lundström, 2007; Grell et al., 2013). This being said, combined organisations featuring elements of both specialisation and integration also occur (e.g., Perlinski et al., 2013).

The degree and character of further specialisation as regards the PSS' work with social assistance also demonstrates local differences (Bergmark et al., 2017). Given that social assistance is administered separately from the other PSS areas, the work within the social assistance unit may be more or less specialised internally. One common form of specialisation is the occurrence of working groups designated to assess certain types of social assistance cases. Similarly, person-based specialisation may mean that applicants who, for instance, are victims of violence are referred to a specific individual professional specialised within this domain (Stranz & Minas, 2019).

Further, one crucial aspect of PSS organisation that both displays municipal variation and exhibits varying degrees of specialisation pertains to intake arrangements. It is typically not possible to visit a PSS office and undergo means-testing without having gone through some kind of initial contact (Minas, 2005). Intake refers to the handling of new potential social assistance

applicants and is normally arranged to take place over the telephone.⁴ The extent to which intake work is separated from other tasks is normally related to municipality size. Larger municipalities often have specific units working only with intake; such solutions are less common in small municipalities (Bergmark et al., 2017). Intake instances have important service functions in terms of providing citizens with adequate information. They may also serve the function of conducting a preliminary investigation, which streamlines the PSS' continued handling of the case if it leads to an application (Minas, 2005). It is also worth noting that the arrangements that regulate contact between new potential applicants and the PSS have a gate-keeping dimension. The PSS operate with limited public funds, and it lies in the organisation's interest to minimise 'unnecessary' work. Intake functions serve to prevent individuals that are obviously ineligible for social assistance from applying, thereby limiting the case load (Minas, 2005).

Social Assistance Eligibility in Practice

So far, the Social Services Act and the national benefit standard have been highlighted as national policy frameworks that both *make space for* and *require* additional detailed regulation and organisational arrangements in order to be put into practice at the local level. As has been shown, objectives of flexibility are inscribed in policy at several levels, a fact which comes with intended as well as unintended implications. The local directives that are to guide social assistance administration differ between municipalities, something which also applies to PSS organisational structures (e.g., Bergmark et al., 2013; Byberg, 2002; Johansson & Panican, 2016; Minas, 2005; Minas et al., 2018; Stranz, 2007). Hence, albeit ultimately governed by national legislation, policies and practices surrounding social assistance cannot easily be described in uniform, nationwide terms. As a whole, the administration of the benefit is characterised by a high degree of local discretion (Kuivalainen & Nelson, 2011; Johansson & Panican, 2016).

In addition to formal policy documents, *informal* norms and unspoken agreements about how certain aspects of their work should be carried out are likely to be established among colleagues within the same organisation. This represents additional room for local differences that are not necessarily anchored in policy documents (Stranz, 2007; Svensson, 2011). Further, and not least, the Social Services Act places significant trust in the discretion of the individual professional: that is, social workers' competencies and abilities to use their professional knowledge, skills and experiences in order to make informed decisions. Leeway for professional discretion is a key objective of

⁴Along with the welfare technology trend, some of aspects of intake functions are likely to be increasingly relocated to digital platforms (cf. Germundsson, 2022).

the Social Services Act, one that is emphasised in preparatory works as well as in the legislative text and complementary guidelines (Stranz, 2007).

While stressing that social assistance policies ultimately come to matter on the frontline, the centrality of discretion in decision-making does not necessarily imply that social workers enjoy a high degree of autonomy or perceive that they are able to make use of their professional skills during decision-making (cf. Van Parys, 2019). The relationship between policy, implementation and outcomes is in many ways unforeseeable (e.g., Bergmark & Stranz, 2022; De Wilde, 2018; Stranz, 2007). A higher degree of detailed regulation at the local level might, for instance – and contrary to policy-makers’ intentions – tend to breed differences in the ways professionals implement policies in practice. And while the aggregate of policy directives might offer a multiplicity of possible ways of interpreting rules in relation to specific cases, professionals may also perceive them as constraining their options for making assessments based on discretionary judgment (cf. Stranz, 2007).

It is also worth noting the tension between the pursuit of increased professionalisation in social work and recurring trends in the opposite direction in the field of social assistance (e.g., Blomberg et al., 2013). Whereas the majority of the professionals employed in social assistance administration are trained social workers holding a bachelor’s degree in social work (Bergmark & Lundström, 2007), the working field is characterised by a relatively low degree of professionalisation in terms of, for instance, supervision and further professional training (Dellgran & Höjer, 2005). The high degree of municipal autonomy means that the local social welfare board’s way of looking at their client group may affect which competencies and skills they value among their employees, and the conditions under which these professionals work (cf. Stranz, 2007). At the national level – as well as internationally – the ‘activation turn’ in the field of social policy (e.g., Hvinden & Johansson, 2007; Lødemel & Moreira, 2014) has meant that social assistance eligibility has become more strictly conditioned upon requirements related to applicant participation in labour market programmes (e.g., Thorén, 2008). In addition to the formal impact of such policy changes, this development may also affect how social workers perceive applicant need and deservingness (cf. Blomberg et al., 2013; 2018).

Central Dimensions in Means-Testing

This forthcoming section looks at central principles that guide decision-making about social assistance eligibility across municipalities. The objective is to articulate stable principles that figure in the day-to-day work of social work professionals as they make decisions about social assistance eligibility. Five critical aspects of means-testing are identified and discussed: household composition, the deficit test, the last resort test, the asset test and the work

willingness test. The discussion highlights the discretionary space associated with each aspect.

First, *household composition* – and the ways in which the household as a unit is defined and identified – is a basic premise that affects all other parts of the means-testing process (NBHW, 2021b). At the most basic level, household composition refers to the number of adults and children living together.⁵ The age of minor children has bearing on the calculation of household expenditure according to the national benefit standard (NBHW, 2021b; SFS 2001:453). Youth are treated as adults from the age of 21 if they attend school, otherwise from age 18. Although the Social Services Act states that children’s perspectives are to be considered in the PSS’ work with social assistance, policy directives to guide the implementation of this decree are limited. In practice, social work with social assistance tends to be adult-centred (e.g., Kjellbom, 2017; Pålsson & Wiklund, 2021).

For adults, the rule of thumb is that couples who are married, registered partners, cohabiting or living under ‘marriage-like forms’ count as members of the same household. Thus, the notion of the household is anchored in a nuclear family model which interlinks personal budget with romantic love and kinship (cf. Henriksson Wahlström & Goedecke, 2021). Also embedded within this model is the assumption that material resources are shared equally within the family (cf. Nyberg, 2014).

Exceptions from this rule of thumb can be made for couples where intimate partner violence is known to be present (NBHW, 2021b: 153f). In such cases, individuals can be treated as separate households in means-testing. Local routines and organisational arrangements addressing intimate partner violence – as well as individual professionals’ abilities and efforts to detect violence – may thus affect the determination of the household unit (cf. Lundberg & Bergmark, 2021). This illustrates how the degree of specialisation within the PSS may, by extension, have bearing on patterns that emerge in means-testing. If the home is shared by other adult constellations than a traditional couple (e.g., friends, adult siblings, tenants), the rule of thumb is that individual adults are to be treated as separate households (NBHW, 2021b: 153f).

In practice, uncertainty around household composition may mean that the social services will make home visits to investigate housing arrangements and the nature of applicants’ close relations. The social worker’s scope for discretion is especially likely to come into play for applicants that do not fit the coupledness norm. This may apply, for instance, to unmarried couples with separate homes but partly shared finances. Likewise, heteronormativity attached to the nuclear family model may affect how closely the relationship between adults that share the same address is investigated. In this context, it is conceivable that same-sex couples are more likely to be construed as friends, whereas cross-gender

⁵ Adolescents who reside outside the home (e.g., to undertake secondary school studies in another municipality) may also be included as household members (NBHW, 2021b: 119).

friendships might tend to give rise to assumptions about coupledness (cf. Henriksson Wahlström & Goedecke, 2021).

The next dimension of means-testing, the *deficit test*, links household composition to the national benefit standard. More specifically, the national benefit standard, complemented with local norms, comprises a framework by which the household's financial balance is calculated. The framework is based on pre-defined tariffs covering standardised costs for specified consumption items. The composition of the household determines the size of amount of standardised costs (NBHW, 2021b).

The deficit test means that eligibility is conditioned upon the household's level of financial need in relation to this standardised framework. If the household's disposable income is lower than the calculation determines their expenditure to be, the deficit test suggests that social assistance can be granted to cover the difference (given that other criteria are met) (NBHW, 2021b). The calculation is usually assisted by digital tools and might therefore be perceived as a task of a purely technical nature (cf. Germundsson, 2022). That said, discretionary dimensions may be entangled with the performance of the calculation. This can apply, for instance, to how rigorously the household's economy has been investigated and how the numerical information at hand is treated.

For example, the professional's discretion can guide his or her decision to request proof of a given cost or how to treat the cost if the applicant fails to provide a receipt. In these cases, formal or informal norms – established in the specific municipal or organisational context – may decide the level of strictness (cf. Stranz, 2007). It is also possible that the professional's personal acquaintance with the applicant could make a difference, and that aspects inscribed in software code may affect the outcome of the calculation.

The *last resort test* implies that social assistance is to be granted only on the condition that the applicant has exhausted all other possible sources of supply (NBHW, 2021b; SFS 2001:453). This dimension is intertwined with the other dimensions. It means that a household deficit must exist even when the incomes of all members within the household unit are considered.⁶ This includes the possible existence of surplus or assets (discussed in terms of the *asset test*) and income from the labour market (which is further discussed in terms of *work willingness*).

Not least of all, the last resort test underlines the role of social assistance as the last safety net in the welfare state. Before claiming social assistance, applicants must have exhausted any other benefits they might be entitled to from the first-tier social security schemes. This includes, for instance, sick leave, unemployment benefits and housing allowances. At the household level, it also includes transfers attached to dependent children, such as maintenance allowances and study grants (NBHW, 2021b: 118f). If it is found that the household is entitled to – but has not claimed – transfers from the first-

⁶ Labour market earnings of dependent adolescents are excepted, up to a maximum amount (NBHW, 2021b: 119).

tier safety net, the last resort criterion is not met. Depending on how the professional handles this principle in relation to the individual case, the last resort test may fall out differently. Unclaimed benefits can be treated as actual income when calculating the household deficit. Applicants who fail to fulfil the last resort test may also be denied social assistance, or be granted support in a smaller amount (cf. NBHW, 2021b).

The *asset test* means that applicants who own property such as a car or a real estate may be required to sell their property in order to achieve social assistance eligibility. Compared to minimum income schemes in many other European countries, the Swedish arrangement is relatively harsh (Marchal et al., 2021). The asset test also includes saved money and applies even to small amounts of surplus. It is thus incompatible with long-term social assistance reciprocity to seek to build up any form of economic buffer. Whereas this is intended to increase the incentive to work, it runs the risk of reproducing social exclusion (e.g., Bergnehr, 2016; Panican & Ulmestig, 2016; Ulmestig & Eriksson, 2017). The strictness with which the asset test is applied may be related to the work willingness test (below). For instance, the professional may determine that owning a car increases an unemployed applicant's labour market prospects, and therefore approve the applicant keeping the car (Bergnehr, 2016; Marchal et al., 2021). As regards real estate, the level of strictness of the asset test may be pragmatically adjusted to the local housing market. If it would be impossible or more expensive to rent an apartment, an applicant who owns real estate may be allowed to keep it.

Lastly, the *work willingness test* means that the social services have far-reaching abilities to condition social assistance upon applicants' efforts to become self-sufficient (Panican & Ulmestig, 2019). Most obviously, this takes the form of conditions and sanctions attached to job searching as administered by the public employment office, and participation in municipal activation policies (e.g., Nybom, 2012; Thorén, 2008). The work willingness test is founded on the same basic premise as the other tests: social assistance is intended as a temporary measure and individuals should, in the first instance, attempt to earn their living by other means. Income from labour market participation is the most desirable type of income, and even applicants with very poor labour market prospects may be required to participate in municipal job training programmes to obtain eligibility for social assistance (e.g., Thorén, 2008). In practice, the concrete implications of this may diverge widely. In addition to the fact that local activation arrangements vary significantly, the degree of conditionality in policy implementation may depend on the individual professional as well as his/her subjective view of the individual applicant. If the applicant's work barriers are associated with substance abuse problems, the work willingness criteria may be used to condition eligibility upon participation in treatment (cf. Nybom, 2012; Skogens, 2012).

Deservingness Opinions and Social Worker Attitudes

Commonly held ideas about welfare deservingness – that is, ‘who should get what and why’ (van Oorschot, 2000) – are crucial for the legitimacy of social policy arrangements (e.g., Laenen, 2020; Meuleman et al., 2020). Social constructions of different target groups for welfare benefits are for instance likely to impact whose access to support is curtailed in connection with retrenchments (e.g., Kreitzer et al., 2022; Larsen, 2008a; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). At a discursive level, popular opinion about deservingness can thus be said to play a certain role, albeit a somewhat elusive one, in determining the institutional conditions within which social assistance administration takes place.

Recent decades have seen a dynamic growth of contributions to the understanding of popular deservingness opinions and attitudes to welfare (e.g., Larsen, 2008b; Blomberg & Kroll, 1999; Petersen et al., 2011; Kallio & Kouvo, 2015; Koostira, 2016; Knotz et al., 2022; Meuleman et al., 2020; Reeskens & van der Meer, 2019; Svallfors, 1999; van Oorschot, 2000; 2006; van Oorschot et al., 2017). A central framework within this body of literature is that of the so-called CARIN principles (Meuleman et al., 2020; van Oorschot et al., 2017). Elaborated through empirical studies conducted primarily in European countries, the framework comprises five central criteria to which people across national contexts have been shown to adhere to when forming perceptions about the welfare deservingness of different target groups. The five criteria are: control, attitude, reciprocity, identity and need (hence CARIN) (Meuleman et al., 2020; van Oorschot, 2000; van Oorschot et al., 2017). In short, it is suggested that in order for citizens to view welfare recipients as deserving, the recipients must be perceived as needing support while also lacking the control to change their situation. Moreover, deservingness perceptions are conditioned upon expectations that recipients should be grateful (attitude) while also demonstrating a willingness to contribute to society (reciprocity). Furthermore, people whom the majority society treat as ‘others’ – notably, immigrants – are perceived as less deserving of support by virtue of their identity (van Oorschot, 2000; Koostira, 2017; Meuleman et al., 2020; Reeskens & van der Meer, 2019).

The literature described above has mainly elaborated on the relationship between the general public’s deservingness perceptions and support for welfare state arrangements. Social worker attitudes to the welfare state seem to differ somewhat from those of the general public. Such attitude differences seem to be explained partly, but not entirely, by background characteristics of social workers (De Wilde et al., 2018; Weiss & Gal, 2007). Social workers are generally less prone than other citizens to blame social assistance recipients for being lazy (e.g., Blomberg et al., 2013; 2018; Kallio & Kouvo, 2015). However, professionals who administer social assistance in their day-to-day work seem more inclined than their colleagues in other areas of social work

to adhere to individual blame explanations for poverty (Blomberg et al., 2013). More education, higher age and longer work experience have shown to correlate with more positive perceptions of social assistance recipients among social workers (Blomberg et al., 2013; 2018; Kallio & Kouvo, 2015).

Patterns in Decision-Making

Decision-making about social assistance eligibility requires the application of human judgment (cf. Lipsky, 2010). This is reflected in the fact that a given applicant's likelihood of being granted support may both vary across municipalities and depend on which specific professional assesses their case. A number of studies substantiate this picture, although a relatively large share of the variation that has been observed in social assistance assessments remains unexplained (e.g., Bergmark & Stranz, 2022; De Wilde, 2018; Hydén et al., 1995; Stranz, 2007).

At the organisational level, several studies suggest that assessment differences can be linked to degree of specialisation. However, the results are somewhat contradictory and give no clear picture of the relationship between organisational models and social workers' propensity to grant support (Byberg, 2002; De Wilde, 2018; Stranz, 2007; cf. Minas, 2005). The same can be said of factors linked to the individual characteristics of social workers. Here, variables such as gender, migration background and age of the professional have been linked to variation in assessments. *How* these factors come to matter seems, however, to some degree to vary (Bergmark & Stranz, 2022; Fäldt & Kullberg 2012; Stranz, 2007; Stranz et al., 2017; cf. Blomberg et al., 2013). Higher age of the professional has, for instance, been linked a higher propensity to grant social assistance in some cases, and a higher propensity to deny in other cases (Bergmark & Stranz, 2022). It has also been suggested that the combination of the professional's gender and the applicant's gender might affect social assistance assessments (Fäldt & Kullberg, 2012). Professional factors such as education and work experience have been linked not only to differences in professionals' attitudes towards social assistance clients, but also to patterns in their assessments (e.g., Bergmark & Stranz, 2022; Hydén et al., 1995; Stranz, 2007).

As regards factors at the applicant level – the focus of this dissertation – discretion poses obvious risks of bias (e.g., De Wilde, 2018; Kullberg, 2005). In the Swedish context, several studies have noted that the responses of social work professionals to clients with financial difficulties tend to be gendered (e.g., Callegari et al., 2022; Kullberg, 2005; Parsland & Ulmestig, 2021). A general trend is that social workers pay greater attention to the ability of male social assistance applicants to prove work willingness. This may mean that men's efforts are assessed more strictly than women's, and that professionals are more prone to condition support upon men's participation in activation

programmes and job searching (Fäldt & Kullberg, 2012; Kullberg, 2004; 2005; Nybom, 2011; Stranz et al., 2017). Researchers have also pointed out gendered logics embedded in activation policies, meaning that measures addressed at the unemployed tend to be constructed on the basis of a male norm. This may mean that women are ‘offered’ activation measures to a lesser extent (Nybom, 2012; Knize, 2021; Lens, 2008; Parsland & Ulmestig, 2021).

In the Swedish context, ethnicity-related patterns have been studied in implemented eligibility decisions. The findings show that among social assistance applicants, a larger share of foreign-born applicants is granted support, compared with Swedish-born applicants (Stranz et al., 2017). Whether this pattern reflects assessment bias or differences in financial deficits – or a combination of these factors – is not known. Research focusing on social assistance transfers to single mothers indicates the latter. In this group, foreign-born applicants do on average receive larger social assistance transfers – which, however, still compensate for household deficit to a lesser extent than for Swedish-born single mothers (Stranz & Wiklund, 2012).

Much of the literature on ethnicity-related patterns in other national contexts focuses on the propensity of professionals to withdraw cash benefits for clients who fail to prove work willingness within activation programmes (e.g., De Wilde, 2019; Keiser et al., 2004; Knize, 2021; Schram et al., 2009; Terum et al., 2018). In the U.S. context, a recurring finding is that street-level bureaucrats are more prone to implement such sanctions for Black and Latinx clients than for White clients (e.g., Monnat, 2010; Schram et al., 2009; Soss et al., 2008). The empirical evidence from studies conducted in the European context is not uniform. Several studies point in the same direction as the U.S. studies, suggesting that street-level bureaucrats tend to discriminate against ethnic minority welfare clients (Pedersen et al., 2018; Thomann & Rapp, 2018). Other findings suggest that ethnic minority/migration cues may be associated with a decreased degree of conditionality in decision-making. This may be related to professionals’ consciousness of structural difficulties faced by newly arrived refugees, for instance, in obtaining other sources of income than minimum cash benefits (cf. Ratzmann, 2021).

In one vignette experiment focusing on sanctions in an activation programme in Norway, results did not indicate discrimination against clients with ethnic minority names. If anything, the patterns suggested a tendency toward ‘reverse discrimination’ to the disadvantage of males with Norwegian names (Terum et al., 2018). Similarly, Gschwin et al. (2022) found that immigrants in the German social assistance system were less likely to be sanctioned than native-born clients. In particular, recently arrived immigrants faced a low sanction risk, suggesting that street-level bureaucrats adjusted their assessments to cues about clients’ access to other sources of income (Gschwin et al., 2022). Previous research also indicates that the occurrence and nature of bias may differ significantly for various minority groups (e.g., Gschwin, 2022; Soss et al., 2011).

Whereas higher work load does not seem to correlate with negative views of unemployed clients among social workers (Blomberg et al., 2015), studies of other professional fields suggest that street-level bureaucrats with high workloads are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards immigrants (Andersen & Guul, 2019; Schütze & Johansson, 2019). Meanwhile, professionals who perceive themselves as having more discretion in their jobs seem to be less likely to find encounters with migrants burdensome (Schütze & Johansson, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This chapter sets out a conceptual structure that guides the dissertation's framing of the empirical studies. The first section uses feminist and postcolonial perspectives to shed light on processes of differentiation embedded in the Swedish welfare state. The following section formulates an analytical understanding of social assistance eligibility that emphasises the fundamental role of discretion in street-level acts of distinguishing eligible from non-eligible applicants. Building on this discussion, an explication of the risk of discrimination in social assistance assessments follows, and the chapter ends by describing certain key terms, such as intersectional patterns and discriminatory bias, and how they are analytically employed in the dissertation.

Feminist and Postcolonial Perspectives

A central insight put forward by feminist and postcolonial scholars is that 'truths' that are presented as neutral, disinterested and universal tend to conceal specific and ideological assumptions (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Haraway, 1988; Keskinen et al., 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2011). The very notion that something is self-evidently thought to apply to all has historically said a lot about structural power relationships according to which certain people have systematically been made invisible and/or constructed as deviant. The Swedish welfare state's notion of universalism, both historical and contemporary, can be seen in this light (e.g., de los Reyes, 1998; Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2005; Leinonen & Toivanen, 2014; Keskinen et al., 2009; Sainsbury & Morissens, 2010). The fact, for instance, that ethnic minority single mothers face particular difficulties in qualifying for social security via paid work tells us something not only about 'the marginal' but also about assumptions embedded in the construction of 'the universal'.

The Universal and the Marginal

In welfare state systems, social policy solutions may – intentionally or unintentionally – entail that specific groups of people, based on such factors as their gender, ethnicity and family type, are referred to less favourable forms of social protection than the majority population (e.g., Fraser & Gordon, 1994;

Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The wider implications of such differentiating processes go beyond the distribution of welfare state transfers, since they tend to unveil ideological values underlying the principles for inclusion. Welfare states thus have the power to establish unspoken agreements regarding the necessary conditions for citizens to be perceived as deserving. For instance, the key logic of the work ethic not only marks most social security systems but is also embedded in the public understanding of what constitutes legitimate grounds for claiming welfare state support (e.g., Laenen, 2020). In a broader sense, the concentration of individuals with certain social characteristics among recipients of targeted welfare tends to (re)produce stereotypical linkages between certain social characteristics and deviant welfare state positions (e.g., Foster, 2008; Gilens, 1999; Martinsson et al., 2016; Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

In the early 20th century in Sweden, the Social Democratic Workers' Party popularised support for publicly funded social security programmes by promoting a vision of a society in which everyone was taken care of, irrespective of class. The endeavour of class solidarity was embedded in a larger ideological project launched under the name of 'the People's Home' (*Folkhemmet*) (Götz, 2004; Hort, 2014; Junestav, 2004). Within this project, discursive constructions of 'the people' inscribed both tacit and manifest notions of discrimination. Individuals who were not constructed as ethnic 'Swedes', based on racial and ethnic traits, were not included in the solidarity project (Schall, 2012; 2016; cf. McEachrane, 2018). Progressive in promoting increased standards of living for large parts of the population, 'the People's Home' prompted a social security model that claimed to include all, but nevertheless linked deservingness of welfare state support to certain social traits. The establishment of comprehensive social policy structures in the first half of the 20th century thus both incorporated and concealed discriminating ideas according to which ethnic minorities were constructed as deviant and referred to charity (e.g., Idevall Hagren, 2022; Schall, 2016).

From a feminist perspective, unproblematised ideas of universalism have long been criticised for building upon an idea of the citizen as someone who works for a wage and takes part in the public sphere by virtue of their employment status. The feminist critique stresses that influential understandings of social citizenship have tended to construct the (male) position of a *worker* as the neutral subject of social rights, while failing to acknowledge the (female) position of a *carer* (e.g., Anttonen, 2002; Lewis, 1992; O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993). Arguably, this gendered valuation of un/paid labour is also reflected in the principles for inclusion in the Swedish welfare state, since, in practice, entitlement to, and benefit levels of, the 'universal' insurances are closely linked to labour market participation. Given that women's access to social rights has been addressed by facilitating female employment, it can be argued that earnings-related entitlement to social citizenship has become a less male-specific form of universalism.

The Power of Differentiation

As has been shown, the need for social assistance is not equally distributed across the population. The foreign born are substantially overrepresented among social assistance recipients, as are single mothers, young adults and single men without children. The subsidy is also linked to stigmatisation, low compensation levels and social exclusion (e.g., Dahlberg et al., 2009; Girardi et al., 2019). The general ethnification of poverty is complexly intertwined with labour market inequalities and the conditions for accessing the welfare state's first-tier system. Gendered family roles – and intersecting power asymmetries involving class and ethnicity – entail that certain groups of women face particular obstacles in fulfilling the ideal of full-time work. If the labour market is treated as a neutral arena for the realisation of social rights, these notions risk remaining unrecognised, and their consequences being perceived as natural.

Poverty, simply by definition, is attached to undesirable experiences and societal challenges. The linking of certain race/ethnicity-related and gendered attributes to lower-class positions tend therefore, in themselves, to be stigmatising (e.g., Lister, 2015). In the U.S. context, such processes have been exemplified in the stereotype of 'the welfare queen', a trope that demonises poor mothers of colour relying on targeted minimum income benefits (e.g., Foster, 2008; Rich, 2016). Based on a specific socioeconomic group's overrepresentation in targeted welfare, the stereotype associates certain embodied racial and gendered features with laziness and a lack of moral character. This type of symbolic mechanism is simultaneously fuelled by the concentration of poverty in a specific intersection and the referring of individuals positioned in that intersection to a marginal form of welfare state support (Rich, 2016; cf. Schadauer, 2022). While key components in such processes involve pre-existing systems of classism, sexism and racism, discursive understandings of concepts like need, deservingness and work ethic are contaminated with specific ideas about gender, class and ethnicity (e.g., Foster, 2008; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Gilens, 1999; Rich, 2016).

The function of social assistance as the last safety net means that this subsidy targets individuals that fall through the welfare state's more favourable safety nets. Given that the prerequisites for full-time employment are unequally distributed in the population, the Swedish social security system's universalism embodies an equation that has different implications for different groups. Meanwhile, a basic premise for the very existence of social work practice is that certain individuals and their living conditions are identified as deviant or undesirable, and thus call for intervention from the welfare state (Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2005).

The welfare state's division between universal social security and means-tested social assistance tends to construct recipients of the latter as deviant. As much as this statement involves symbolic dimensions, it also relates to matters

of social rights, since the municipal social assistance system operates according to fundamentally different principles than the national social insurance system (e.g., Panican & Ulmestig, 2016). Here, it is worth mentioning the recent wave of activation policy is associated with a segmentation between national and municipal measures addressing unemployment. This trend has meant that those who face the highest thresholds and poorest prospects for employment increasingly tend to be referred to social assistance and municipal activation programmes, rather than to first-tier unemployment insurance and the national public employment office (e.g., Andersson, 2022; Nord, 2018; Parsland & Ulmestig, 2019). Compared to measures offered at the national level, the efficacy of municipal labour market policies is thought to be more limited. However, the latter remain to a large extent unevaluated, as they comprise a multiplicity of differing local projects (Panican & Ulmestig, 2019). Overall, its municipal governance means that social assistance administration is associated with a low degree of transparency. In relation to the Swedish welfare state's main safety net, social assistance runs the risk of functioning as a legally uncertain second-class social citizenship for disadvantaged groups in society (cf. Panican & Ulmestig, 2016).

Intersectionality as an Analytical Lens

The call for an intersectional understanding of power can be traced back to the Black feminist movement in the U.S., which drew attention to the failure of White feminists to recognise Black women's exposure to patriarchal oppression (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Hooks, 1981). Since then, intersectionality has been widely adopted by, and intensely discussed and elaborated among, postcolonial and feminist academics.

The basic idea is that categories such as class, ethnicity/race, gender, age and sexuality always interact in people's lives and thus have consequences that are impossible to understand separately. Many scholars also stress the importance of drawing attention to intersections marked by multiple disadvantages, since such positions tend to be subject to particular vulnerability while remaining invisible in dominant critical discourses. For instance, experiences of oppression suffered by lower-class ethnic minority women have tended to be lower on the agenda in feminist movements than those experienced by middle-class ethnic majority women (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). Further, the focus on interaction between multiple social categories facilitates sensitivity to the specific conditions of individuals whose intersectional positions simultaneously include privilege and disadvantage (Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz, 2013).

This dissertation is inspired by an intersectional way of thinking about the coexistence of multiple power relationships. Assuming that group-level differences in social assistance eligibility may simultaneously be related to

several social categories, the intersectional lens is evident in the analytical ambition to highlight patterns related to intersecting applicant positions. In contrast to the more common ways of conceptualising intersectionality – by addressing *experiences* of multiply disadvantaged individuals, or *deconstructing* the very processes through which social categorisations become meaningful – this involves using existing categories as central units of analysis that may highlight inequalities. However, the adoption of social classifications should not be confused with an essentialist view of the categories at issue as static (cf. McCall, 2005; Spierings, 2012).

Conceptualising Social Assistance Eligibility

The following section outlines an analytical way of thinking about social assistance eligibility as a dichotomous status that is enacted in relation to a continuum. This reasoning aligns with Lipsky's (2010) conceptual framework of street-level bureaucracy and emphasises the role of policy implementor discretion in determining social assistance eligibility. The main point is that social assistance assessments are discretionary practices, which means that eligibility is something that professionals *do* rather than *unveil*. Formulated the other way around, what social assistance eligibility 'is' relies ultimately on interpretations by professionals of national and local policies in relation to individual cases (cf. Ellis, 2007; Stranz, 2007). This insight is used as a point of departure to elaborate on the distinctive account of eligibility around which this dissertation's analytical design is structured. While acknowledging that patterns formed by street-level bureaucrats' doings by no means arise arbitrarily, the conceptualisation does stress variability and uncertainty as intrinsic properties of social assistance eligibility.

Social Workers as Street-Level Bureaucrats

The PSS can be described as a human service organisation that inhabits all the key features of a street-level bureaucracy (Hasenfeld, 2010; Lipsky, 2010). Briefly, the function of street-level bureaucracies is to deliver concretisations of public policy at the frontline, and thus the employees of such organisations can be said to operate as intermediaries between the state and its citizens. The nature of street-level bureaucrats' work means that they have direct contact with citizens and that their actions affect in tangible ways the individuals with whom they interact (Lipsky, 2010). Their professions thus require them to pay attention to unique circumstances while dealing with highly complex and human dimensions of policy. What all public services delivered by street-level bureaucracies have in common is that they cannot be reduced to matters to which public authorities can respond programmatically; rather, they require human judgment (Lipsky, 2010).

In contrast to top-down perspectives on administration (e.g., Merton, 1940; Weber, 1978), the literature on street-level bureaucracy stresses that the ‘human factor’ in bureaucratic action cannot be reduced to a necessary evil that impairs the organisation’s functioning and efficiency (e.g., Raaphorst, 2017). While professional discretion implies limited control over outcomes from a managerial perspective, it also provides a degree of flexibility that is necessary for human service organisations to work (e.g., Hasenfeld, 2010; Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Prottas, 1979). This flexibility may also serve a crucial function of enhancing professionals’ abilities to cope with organisational pressure and conflicting demands (e.g., Brodtkin, 2013; Lipsky, 2010).

Core tasks of social workers in the PSS include interpreting national and municipal regulations and guidelines of various characters in specific situations. In assessing whether or not an applicant household is eligible for social assistance, professionals have to account for both material and moral aspects of the applicants’ living conditions (cf. Hasenfeld, 2010). In addition to calculating income and expenditures, this may for instance involve judging applicants’ job-seeking efforts or participation in substance abuse treatment programmes. Since the nature of applicants’ financial problems vary, and may involve complex psychosocial problems, social assistance assessments cannot be entirely guided by directives that are programmatic and unambiguous in all cases (e.g., Stranz, 2007). Social workers’ implementation of social assistance policies will inevitably involve moral dimensions and uncertainty (cf. Hasenfeld, 2010; Raaphorst, 2017).

Eligibility as a Dichotomy

The centrality of discretion in social assistance assessments means that eligibility issues cannot simply be described in terms of a fixed set of criteria (cf. Lipsky, 2010: 60f). Meanwhile, dictionary definitions are indicative of the straightforwardly dichotomous way in which we tend to understand any notion of eligibility once it has been implemented: either you do fulfil the requirements, or you do not. Eligibility may, for instance, be defined as ‘the fact of having the necessary qualities or satisfying the necessary conditions’ or ‘the quality or state of being eligible’.

Considering the yet-to-be-determined nature of any eligibility issue *before* means-testing, discretionary decision-making can be thought of as an act that transforms uncertainty inscribed in policy into organisationally manageable outcomes (cf. Hasenfeld, 2010; Raaphorst, 2017; Stranz et al., 2017). By enforcing a certain interpretation, the street-level bureaucrat simultaneously determines whether the applicant fulfils the requirements, and produces a ‘fact’ about whether or not that is the case.

Before returning to professional acts of decision-making, however, some caveats about the dichotomous notion of eligibility should be mentioned. In

addition to the fact that social assistance assessments involve dimensions that go beyond any fixed criteria, they also produce outcomes with more nuances than ‘eligible’ or ‘not eligible’. For instance, professionals may grant social assistance under certain conditions, such as requiring an applicant to show up for daily activities at a job centre. Likewise, they may grant compensation for certain expenses, such as rent, while denying compensation for other expenditure items.

In short, the reality of what it means to be assessed as eligible for social assistance may be informed by a higher degree of complexity than any either-or definition would suggest. In terms of discrimination, patterns may arise not only in distinctions between eligible and non-eligible applicants, but also in the amount of granted benefits, or in tendencies to deny support for certain expenses within a certain applicant group.

Further, although any scholarly attempt to study, for instance, applicants’ experiences of means-testing, or the detailed circumstances that surround individual assessments, would be ill advised to focus strictly on the dichotomous account of eligibility, nonetheless, given that eligibility is a state that is either enacted or not, the outcomes of social assistance assessments can reasonably be described and envisaged as dichotomous. That is, when an individual is granted social assistance – regardless of the size of the benefit and the conditions under which it is paid – s/he receives a transfer and holds the status of being eligible for social assistance. Investigating tendencies among policy implementors to grant social assistance to some households and deny support to others is, in itself, an essential empirical inquiry (Van Parys, 2019).

As an operationalisation, the concept of eligibility offers a useful analytical lens for studying processes of differentiation. This dissertation adopts this distinctive feature of eligibility and make use of its potential as a quantifiable measure of a critical social policy issue.

The Variable Features of Eligibility

The essential question that guides this work is the occurrence of group-level patterns and bias regarding which applicants emerge from the means-testing process as eligible. Thus, the account of the dichotomous nature of the eligibility concept is crucial to the four studies as well as to the type of overarching insights they aim to generate. At the same time, by stressing that social assistance eligibility is inseparable from ongoing discretionary processes of policy implementation, eligibility is understood as neither static nor ontologically anchored in a fact. Instead, the basic premise that underlies the studies is that an inherent structure of variability is embedded in the very core of what social assistance eligibility ‘is’.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, the unfixed elements embedded in the concept of social assistance eligibility are intended by the policies and organisational arrangements that set out the frameworks for means testing.

Rather than simply referring to existing rules and regulations, social workers have the task of producing the practical meaning of policies through their discretionary interpretations thereof (e.g., Hasenfeld, 2010; Stranz, 2007; Thorén, 2008). As implementors of social assistance policies, the task of social workers is more properly described in terms of interpreting and enacting regulations and guidelines in relation to specific cases, than in terms of simply ‘finding out’ whether or not a household is eligible for support.

The adequacy of this approach is supported by a substantial body of studies comprising analyses of local social assistance policies as well as empirical studies of payment levels and assessment variation (e.g., Bergmark, 2013; Byberg, 2002; Johansson, 2001; Minas, 2005; Minas, et al., 2014; Panican & Ulmestig, 2016; Stranz, 2007; Stranz & Wiklund, 2012; Thorén, 2008). Overall, social work research focusing on social assistance administration commonly emphasises the scope of discretion that characterises the work.

Meanwhile, it is worth stressing that social policy produces outcomes that are definite and material in nature, while having the power to present such matters as objective truths rather than products of interpretation (cf. Fraser, 1987; Lipsky, 2010: 60f). For applicants, means testing results in transfers of money – or the lack thereof – which are very concrete facts at both the individual and the aggregate level.

The Varying Degree of Uncertainty

This dissertation’s adoption of the eligibility concept would not be served by lapsing into a fully relativistic understanding of who ‘can’ be eligible for social assistance. In order for the concept of eligibility to be meaningful, it must account for the fact that professionals base their assessments on actual and concrete social policy directives as well as on measurable and non-measurable aspects of the applicants’ living situations. It would, for instance, seem unlikely that a well-paid full-time working individual with access to saved money and earnings-related benefits would be assessed as eligible for social assistance. In such a hypothetical case, policy documents would offer a more or less unambiguous directive to deny social assistance. It is thus not the case that the discretionary room for interpretation of social assistance policies is always equal, no matter the circumstances that surround the applicant household at issue. Figure 1 presents a way to seek to acknowledge this while illustrating the non-static characteristics of social assistance eligibility.

Figure 1. The Eligibility Continuum



The figure suggests that any assessment of social assistance eligibility can be visualised in relation to a continuum, where ‘definitely non-eligible’ and ‘definitely eligible’ represent two opposite ends of a scale. Theoretically, any social assistance assessment conducted by any professional can be located somewhere along the scale. Here, the outer end points serve as conceptual anchors rather than as empirical constants. The essence of the continuum lies in the range between the two extremes, which covers a continuous scale. Logic suggests that the distance between any given case to the two ends of the scale depends on how clearly (or not) the professional perceives the household to comply with (or depart from) the relevant eligibility criteria. The figure thus illustrates that issues of social assistance eligibility are associated with two interrelated dimensions of variability: 1) a varying degree of the household’s suitability for eligibility (according to the professional’s assessment) and 2) a varying degree of uncertainty on the part of the professional in assessing the household’s suitability for eligibility. The principle that underlies the continuum implies that assessments positioned in the middle of the scale are associated with the highest degree of uncertainty.

The core question of this dissertation is whether assessments of social assistance eligibility can be described in terms of intersectional patterns and discriminatory bias, and if so, how. The dissertation’s analytical design departs from the notion that irrespective of where any assessment is (theoretically) placed along the proposed continuum, it aims to conclude in a decision that can be classified in terms of eligibility. Put differently, social assistance assessments produce outcomes that can be described in terms of granting and denial.

The function of the continuum is to recognise and illustrate that street-level bureaucrats make decisions about social assistance eligibility on a case-by-case basis, and that the degree of uncertainty involved in these discretionary acts varies subjectively between cases. Interpretations of how well applicants fulfil eligibility criteria are always in reference to benchmarks that may be perceived as explicit, material and documentable as well as implicit, moral and non-documentable. Whether they are found in policy documents, in information about the household’s rental costs, or in cues about applicants’ consumption habits, benchmarks constitute matters of interpretation. The point of the figure is, instead of fixating on the exact content of such benchmarks, to emphasise the dynamic features of the discretionary practices through which they become meaningful in eligibility decisions.

The Risk of Discrimination

Institutional arrangements that formally offer equal conditions for all may disproportionately disadvantage certain groups due to group-level differences in their prerequisites. This type of differentiating process was discussed above, under the heading *Feminist and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Although it is not the goal of this dissertation to study such processes directly, an important point of departure is that decision-making about social assistance eligibility is a practice embedded in a wider welfare state context. Hence, social assistance assessments cannot be isolated from the dynamics of differentiation that shape the preconditions for such work (e.g., Eliassi, 2015; Harrits, 2019; Lotta & Pires, 2019; Raaphorst, 2018; Soss et al., 2011).

The socioeconomic composition of social assistance applicants means that group-level differences with entangled notions of class, gender, ethnicity and family are highly present in social assistance administration. This involves differences in applicants' labour market opportunities, access to more favourable social security benefits, and exposure to economic vulnerability due to family situation, among other things.

Furthermore, classifying practices are embedded in the infrastructure of the PSS (Hasenfeld, 2010; Stranz et al., 2016). Whereas the legislation calls upon social workers to attend to clients' individual circumstances, the PSS as an organisation must accommodate the processing of an unending flow of individuals through the bureaucratic system (Hasenfeld, 2010). The term 'technologies' is often used to denote the work that is done within organisations to transform input – 'raw material' – into outputs. In human service organisations like the PSS, the raw material consists of clients (Hasenfeld, 2010). Classifications based on different types of client problems, for instance, rationalise the redirection of clients through organisational slots and guide social workers in allocating support measures (Stranz et al., 2016; Hasenfeld, 2010; Lipsky, 2010).

In this context, categorisations not only function as essential tools for increasing organisational efficacy but also help frontline workers cope with everyday dilemmas (Andersen & Guul, 2019; Lipsky, 2010). Street-level bureaucrats, who deal with a persistent lack of resources while often facing uncertainty, can use social categorisations and stereotypical 'cues' to make assumptions about unobservable client characteristics (Raaphorst & Van De Valle, 2018; Thomann & Rapp, 2018). Operating in an organisational context where group-level differences are pronounced, social workers are likely to both consciously and unconsciously make use of assumptions related to applicants' social positions (e.g., Harrits, 2019). The moral dimensions of their work, meanwhile, tend to be masked by organisational rationales that present classifications as bureaucratic tools that primarily serve administrative functions (Hasenfeld, 2010).

Altogether, the discretionary room in decision-making about social assistance eligibility poses an obvious risk of discrimination. I use the term *discriminatory bias* to refer to systematic differences in outcomes of decision-making when the applicants' conditions are set to be equal.

The eligibility continuum acknowledges that the position of any individual case along the horizontal line between 'definitely non-eligible' and 'definitely eligible' is variable. It is possible to imagine that discriminatory bias operates through both of the continuum's intertwined dimensions. That is, social cues – such as gender and ethnicity – that guide the categorisation of an applicant might affect (1) how suitable for eligibility the professional assesses the applicant to be and (2) how uncertain the professional perceives the assessment to be.

Summary of Analytical Approach and Terminology

The dissertation builds upon the recognition that nobody 'is' eligible for social assistance *prior to* means testing. Since eligibility is enacted through discretionary practices that take place at the street level, applicants do not carry a pre-existing eligibility status, but rather can be granted social assistance as a consequence of means testing. Although social assistance assessments involve processes of discretionary interpretation that are complex and multifaceted, the outcomes of such procedures can be described and measured in terms of granting and denial. This dichotomous notion of eligibility is at the heart of the dissertation's four studies, all of which address differences in the likelihood of being granted social assistance.

Further, the project starts from the recognition that social categorisations related to gender, ethnicity and family represent essential concepts for understanding processes of differentiation in the welfare state. Factors related to these categories may both represent differences in access to other sources of incomes, and form grounds for stereotypical beliefs and assessment bias. In order to pragmatically provide insight into the occurrence of group-level differences in the likelihood of achieving eligibility for social assistance, the analytical strategy that guides the dissertation can be described in terms of an intercategory intersectional approach (Mc Call, 2005). This means that pre-existing categorisations are used as analytical tools in order to explore to what degree differences can be observed empirically.

The intercategory approach has the potential to highlight conditions that tend to remain invisible because they concern people who are either in subordinate positions in relation to several different bases of categorisation, or placed in a position implying a combination of privilege and subordination (McCall, 2005; Ridgeway & Kircheli-Kratz, 2013). It also provides useful tools for emphasising specificity and heterogeneity rather than generality (Spierings, 2012). The inclusion of several social categories in the analyses

might both refine and deepen the insights of previous findings and contribute new knowledge about the conditions of means testing for particular subgroups.

The term *intersectional patterns* refer to observable linkages between, on the one hand, intersections between two or more categories and, on the other hand, the likelihood of being granted social assistance. The term *discriminatory bias* refers to assessment patterns which entail that the prospects for eligibility differ between categories of applicants, although their conditions are set to be equal.

It is worth stressing that intersectional patterns and discriminatory bias are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily overlapping terms. Intersectional patterns may refer to differences that are or are not explained by discriminatory bias. Discriminatory bias may refer to bias that is either related to an intersectional position (and thus also an intersectional pattern), or to a position defined by only one social category.

Finally, the conceptual structure for capturing patterns that link applicants' social positions to their likelihood of gaining social assistance eligibility is supplemented by the term *subgroup-specific patterns*. This relates to explanatory factors that interact statistically with the applicant's social position by having different impacts for different subgroups.

Methods and Data

This dissertation comprises four papers based on two sets of empirical material. This chapter outlines the overarching study design, describes how the sources of data were collected and analysed, and discusses methodological and ethical considerations related to the research process.

Study Design

The study design is based on the analytical approach outlined in the previous chapter. The dichotomous notion of eligibility represents the outcome variable around which all four studies are centred. The concepts of gender, ethnicity and family are operationalised pragmatically to enable analyses of potential correlations between applicant positions and likelihood of granting eligibility. In addition, the dimension of family also structures the overarching study design by defining the focus of Studies II and III, both of which concern the assessment of specific household compositions.

Empirically, the dissertation takes advantage of two techniques that have proven useful for studying social assistance assessments quantitatively (cf. Stranz, 2019). Study I analyses data concerning actual decisions (e.g., Stranz et al., 2017). This data set – henceforth referred to as *decision-making data* – covers information about all households (n=472) that applied for social assistance during one calendar month in 2012 in a selection of 25 municipalities. As such, it enables insight into pathways between applications and decisions that have arisen out of actually conducted assessments of social assistance eligibility. Studies II–IV analyse data drawn from vignette assessments (e.g., De Wilde & Marchal, 2019; Kullberg, 2005; Stranz 2007). This data set is based on a study in which professionals (n=1005) in 19 municipalities assessed eligibility for fictive applicant households described in vignettes. Henceforth referred to as *vignette data*, this data set enables analyses of discriminatory bias. Both sources of data were collected through surveys directed to professionals involved with decision-making on social assistance eligibility.

Table 1 overviews the data used, the applicant categories in focus and the types of patterns addressed in the respective studies. The table also presents additional subjects examined in the studies but not directly addressed in the research questions of the dissertation.

Table 1. Overview of the studies

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Study I | <p>Research question: To what extent, and how, do decisions on social assistance eligibility form intersectional and/or subgroup-specific patterns related to applicants' gender, country of birth and family type?</p> <p>Data: Decision-making data</p> <p>Applicant categories and operationalisations: Gender (men/women); ethnicity (born in/outside Sweden); family (couple/single households; households with/without children)</p> <p>Intersections: gender/ethnicity; gender/family; ethnicity/family</p> <p>Analytical focus: Intersectional patterns and subgroup-specific patterns</p> |
| Study II | <p>Research question: To what extent, if any, do social workers assess eligibility for social assistance differently depending on a single applicant's gender and ethnicity?</p> <p>Data: Vignette data</p> <p>Case delineation: Family (single applicant without child custody)</p> <p>Applicant categories and operationalisations: ; Gender (female/male names); ethnicity (Arabic-/Swedish-sounding names)</p> <p>Intersections: gender/ethnicity</p> <p>Analytical focus: Intersectional discriminatory bias</p> <p>Additional focus: Relationship between professionals' gender and migration background and discriminatory bias</p> |
| Study III | <p>Research question: How do social workers assess social assistance eligibility for heterosexual couples with a baby, and do applicants' ethnicity and gendered family roles affect such assessments?</p> <p>Data: Vignette data</p> <p>Case delineation: Family (heterosexual couple with a baby)</p> <p>Applicant categories and operationalisations: Ethnicity (Arabic-/Swedish-sounding names); gendered family roles (allocation of parental leave within the couple)</p> <p>Intersections: ethnicity/gendered family roles</p> <p>Analytical focus: Discriminatory bias</p> |
| Study VI | <p>Research question: Can patterns in the propensity of social workers to indicate uncertainty in social assistance assessments be related to ethnicity bias in eligibility outcomes, and if so, how? (Study IV)</p> <p>Data: Vignette data</p> <p>Case delineation: Family (single applicants without child custody + heterosexual couple with a baby)</p> <p>Applicant categories and operationalisations: Ethnicity (Arabic-/Swedish-sounding names)</p> <p>Analytical focus: Uncertainty patterns and discriminatory bias</p> <p>Additional focus: Rationales of uncertainty</p> |

Decision-Making Data

In order to answer the first research question, Study I was designed to map patterns formed by actual decisions about social assistance eligibility across a selection of municipalities.

The empirical data was collected in 2012 as part of the research project *People-Processing in the Personal Social Services*.⁷ The project aimed at examining investigation processes and decision-making in the PSS and addressed, in addition to social assistance administration, the fields of child welfare and substance abuse treatment. Study I analyses the part of the data set that is related to social assistance, which is also the focus of the following review. The data collection was planned and orchestrated by researchers at the Department of Social Work at Stockholm University prior to the work with this dissertation. While I was not involved in the data collection, I worked as an assistant in the project with the task of coding collected data.

Data Collection and Sample

The sample comprised data about all households that were subject to decision-making about social assistance eligibility in a selection of municipalities during a period of one month (April) in 2012. Twenty-five municipalities were randomly selected from a sampling frame consisting of all middle-sized⁸ Swedish municipalities (N=138). This yielded a variety of municipalities located both in rural areas and close to the major cities. The data set included 472 cases concerning social assistance clients.⁹

In the initial stage of data collection, key persons at the PSS units provided lists of all clients subject to decision-making on social assistance during the given period of time. This information was used to prepare and distribute questionnaires, one for each applicant household, to the professionals (n=138) in charge of the respective case. For couple households, the questionnaire related to the head of the application.

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was designed to capture several dimensions of the client's characteristics and the PSS' processing of their case. This included background characteristics of the applicant – education, employment status and income and previous experiences with the PSS. It also included conditions that had emerged in the investigation, including the professional's assessment of psychosocial problems. Finally, the questionnaire asked about key aspects of how the application had been processed, including decisions taken in the case. In addition, each professional

⁷ The project was funded by FAS (now FORTE, Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare; Grant 2009-0790).

⁸ Municipalities with 13,000–64,999 inhabitants.

⁹ In addition, the research project collected data covering 699 cases related to child welfare and substance abuse treatment, which were not included in the analyses presented here.

filled in a short questionnaire that asked for background information about themselves (e.g., age, gender, country of birth and professional background).

The design of the data collection entailed that key persons at the PSS units received and returned paper questionnaires via mail. The response rate was approximately 84 %.¹⁰ After accounting for item nonresponses, the sample analysed in Study I comprised 423 cases. In those, the distribution between female and male applicants was 41,1% / 58,9%. The distribution of applicants as regards migration background and family type is presented separately for each gender in Table 2.

Table 2. Applicants' country of birth and family type. Percentages presented by gender.

| | Female applicants (n=175) | Male applicants (n=248) | Total |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Born in Sweden | 72,0% | 66,1% | 68,6% |
| Born outside Sweden | 28,0% | 33,9% | 31,4% |
| Single w/o children | 41,1% | 68,1% | 57,0% |
| Single with children | 40,0% | 7,3% | 20,8% |
| Couple w/o children | 12,6% | 14,5% | 13,7% |
| Couple with children | 6,3% | 10,1% | 8,5% |

Analyses

Analytically, the ambition in Study I was to provide a nuanced view of pathways between applications and decisions through a lens that facilitated sensitivity to heterogeneity and diversity (cf. Spierings, 2012). The analyses addressed *intersectional patterns* and *subgroup-specific patterns* in the likelihood of granting social assistance. Intersectional patterns are correlations between eligibility decisions and applicant positions defined by *two or more* social categories. Subgroup-specific patterns refers to correlation between factors *other* than the applicant's social position, observed in a specific subgroup defined by *one* social category (i.e., either gender, migration background or family type).

The analyses were performed in Stata, version 14. The principal part of the analysis consisted of seven regression models. In order to handle the municipal clustering of the data, modified Poisson regression analysis was utilised (e.g., Zou, 2004; Yelland et al., 2011). The standard errors were clustered at the municipality level (cf. Yelland et al., 2011) and relative risks according to granting of social assistance were estimated using GLM (Generalized Linear Models).

¹⁰ The figure relates to the social assistance cases.

The seven modified Poisson regression models all shared the same essential structure:

- *The dependent variable* was dichotomous, reflecting the eligibility decision (granting/denial).
- *The first set of independent variables* indicated the applicant's social position based on operationalisations of the dissertation's central concepts.¹¹ The first set of independents was varied between the models.
- *The second set of independent variables* comprised factors that could be subject to subgroup-specific patterns. This included four dummy variables referring to the professional's assessment of the occurrence of psychosocial problems¹² and one dummy variable indicating whether the applicant was registered at the public employment services and/or at the social insurance agency. This set of variables was identical in all models.
- *The third set of independent variables* comprised control variables.¹³ This set of variables was also identical in all models.

The models were composed so as to, altogether, capture as many manifestations of intersectional and subgroup-specific patterns as possible within the frames allowed by the dataset (cf. Spierings, 2012).

One model included the whole sample (n=423). Here, the first set of independents included interaction terms based on the applicant's gender and migration background. Further, the two family indicators (single/couple households and households with/out children) were included as separate independents. The model enabled estimates of differences between applicants at various intersections of gender/migration background when controlling for family. In addition, it provided general estimates of the family indicators and the second set of independents in relation to the dependent variable.

Further, two gender-specific models were conducted, one for men (n=248) and one for women (n=175). The coefficients for applicant position thus indicated – *within* the subgroups of men and women respectively – the separate effects of migration background (native/foreign-born), children in the

¹¹ These included gender (male/female); country of birth (born in/outside Sweden) and family type (single/couple households on the one hand, and households with/without children on the other).

¹² The variables represented assessments of the following problem areas: (a) alcohol/illicit drugs; (b) mental health impairments; (c) somatic health impairments; and (d) financial debts.

¹³ These included the applicant's age and whether they were previously known by the PSS; indicators related to the professional (age, gender and engagement in social assistance administration) and the use of standardised assessment tools.

household (yes/no) and single/couple household. When the results from these two models were placed side-by-side, the first set of independents provided the basis for the interpretation of intersectional patterns (gender/ethnicity and gender/family), whereas the second set of variables addressed sub-group specific patterns. Following the same principle, two separate models were conducted for foreign-born (n=133) and native-born (n=290) applicants, respectively. Finally, two separate models were conducted for applicants with (n=299) and without (n=124) children in the household. In the latter two models, the first set of independents included four interaction terms for gender/migration background.

Method Discussion

Studying cross-municipal patterns in PSS' work is challenging for several reasons. Each municipality has its own autonomous administration, and no uniform infrastructures for documentation of PSS' activities exist (cf. Billquist & Johnsson 2007). As regards national statistics about social assistance, the National Board of Health and Welfare collects monthly data about the municipalities' social assistance *transfers* (i.e., granted benefits). However, these figures do not account for negative decisions and thus offer poor insight into the role of the social services' processing of applications.

The survey upon which Study I is based provided a relatively large sample of individual data comprising comparable information about the applicants and PSS' processing of their cases across municipalities. In the Swedish context, the type of insight this enables into paths between social assistance applications and eligibility decisions, beyond the specific local context, is so far unique. The design of the data collection meant that case-specific information was retrieved from the specific professional in charge of each case. Compared to data collected by researchers from client personal files, this approach has advantages in terms of reliability as PSS' documentation may sometimes contain flawed information or be incomplete (cf. Billquist & Johnsson 2007). Here, the respondents' acquaintance with the clients meant that they could provide accurate information about aspects that perhaps were unclearly or incorrectly documented in some cases.

Like any method, however, the survey design also has drawbacks. While the external response rate for decision-making data was high, item nonresponses limited the study's abilities to take applicant income into account. Controlling for incomes could potentially have refined the analyses by giving indications about the role of (differences in) income deficits across groups.

Since the municipalities were selected randomly from the sample frame, it seems reasonable to expect that similar patterns to those observed in Study I would be possible to observe in other municipalities in the same population size range. However, the generalisability should be treated with caution, since

local conditions with relevance to the results might differ significantly in some respects. This applies especially to smaller and larger municipalities. Further, since the data collection took place in 2012, the results may, to an unknown extent, reflect conditions that have since changed. Worth mentioning here is, for instance, the arrival of a large number of refugees in 2015, which was followed by changes to local social assistance policies in some municipalities (e.g., Nordling & Persdotter, 2021).

One constraint on the study related to the family dimension. As discussed in previous chapters, decision-making about social assistance eligibility is based on income and expenditure of the household (not the individual). When the PSS processes couple households, the individuals are given different positions in the registration process. One of the individuals functions as the ‘head’ of the application, while the other one is assigned the position of ‘co-applicant’ (NBHW, 2021b). Decision-making data exclusively reflect the ‘head’ of the application, meaning that each married/cohabiting applicant also represents an additional adult who is not visible in the data. Further, there is little knowledge about how the positions of ‘head’ and ‘co-applicant’ are determined and how they come to matter in central stages of the policy-implementing process. Although this circumstance is unfortunate, it also linked to a contribution of the dissertation. Study I drew attention to the need for gender- and ethnicity-sensitive empirical studies on assessments of couple households, and the subject was further examined and discussed in Study III.

A final note on the study’s ambition of highlighting heterogeneity in the data. The analyses yielded a detailed review of a multiplicity of patterns, fulfilling the study’s aim. In retrospect, however, Study I might have gained from a more restrained analytical focus. Altogether, many potential patterns were examined, making both an intuitive overview and a detailed discussion of the results more challenging. The fact that relatively many significant tests were made also entails an increased risk of Type I errors.

Ethical Considerations

Research on the activities of social authorities – and the individuals subject to such activities – is often associated with ethical dilemmas. In the case of this dissertation, such dilemmas were particularly associated with Study I. In the collection of decision-making data, consent was not requested from the clients. Although the quantitative nature of the data entails that information at the individual level is neither a subject of the analyses nor visible in any reporting of the results, such a proceeding can never be dismissed as unproblematic.

The type of data that the social services hold about their clients is – almost by definition – of a sensitive nature. The very fact that they hold such information represents a power relation that is fundamentally unequal. For social assistance applicants, we know that the process of means-testing may

involve an intrusion upon personal privacy (e.g., Bergnehr, 2016). Hence, the client's subordinate position is both related to their need for support and to the conditions for claiming it. If they were not in great need, they would probably not agree to share certain information with the PSS.

While recognising this, it is nonetheless in the interests of society – including social assistance clients – that the activities of the social services be examined. The possible negative consequences for the clients must thus be weighed against the benefits and contributions of the research. As regards the decision-making data, requesting consent from clients for the PSS to share their personal information would have entailed significant difficulties. Aside from purely practical difficulties, the burden placed on the PSS agencies (at the expense of employees and clients) would be difficult to justify ethically. It should further be stressed that the decision-making data was collected, handled and analysed with great care to protect the personal information of both clients and the professionals. All data were anonymised and treated confidentially. The questionnaires were kept in a secured locker and were, like the data file, only accessible to those involved in the research project.

Vignette Data

Studies II, III and IV all addressed discriminatory bias and were based on data from a vignette study. Vignettes are short, carefully constructed case descriptions of hypothetical scenarios or individuals, designed to elicit some kind of response from the reader (Atzmüller and Steiner, 2010).

A total of 1005 social work professionals, all of whom worked with administering social assistance on a day-to-day basis, participated in the study. The empirical analyses concern their assessments of two vignettes. To capture possible occurrence of discriminatory bias, an experimental design was utilised. All the participants assessed identical vignettes with the exception that the names of the applicants were randomly varied. The names functioned as cues related to the applicants' gender, ethnicity and family roles. Thus, the experimental design enabled analyses of possible correlations between intersecting applicant characteristics and the professionals' propensity grant social assistance. The planning and orchestration of the data collection formed part of the present PhD project, meaning that I was engaged in all essential stages of the research process.

Data Collection and Sample

The data were collected through a cross-sectional survey carried out in 2018 as part of the research project *To Identify and Meet Economic Needs: Social*

Workers' Assessment of Social Assistance.¹⁴ In addition to addressing discriminatory bias, the project also aimed at following up two previous vignette studies (Bergmark & Stranz, 2022). More specifically, the follow-up referred to one vignette study conducted in the 1990s (Hydén et al., 1995) and one conducted in the 2000s (Stranz, 2007).

The wider purpose of the research project informed the selection of municipalities, which was made strategically to cover all municipalities that participated in the earlier studies (Hydén et al., 1995; Stranz, 2007). All but three of these municipalities agreed to participate. In addition, all of the city districts (n=27) in Sweden's three largest cities (Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö) were included, entailing a census survey of the bigger cities.¹⁵ Altogether, the sample comprised data from 43 social service offices in 19 municipalities ranging from sparsely populated rural communities to the most densely populated cities. Apart from the bigger cities, six of the participating municipalities were located across the country, and ten were located in the northern part of the Stockholm region.

Initially, complete lists of the staff involved with conducting social assistance assessments at the social service offices were collected from the managers of the respective units (N=1263). In addition to trained social workers, representing the vast majority of the study population, this also included the heads of the units and so-called administrative caseworkers. The latter title refers to employees working with 'simplified assessments'. These professionals typically lack training and are responsible for decision-making in cases that have been sorted out as relatively uncomplicated (Bergmark & Lundström, 2007).

In order to achieve a high response rate while increasing the study's reliability, data were collected through on-site visits. Data collection thus took place under the supervision of a research team member with time scheduled for respondent participation. To avoid disclosure of the name manipulation in the vignettes, participants were instructed not to speak to each other about the content of the vignettes until they had finished. Employees who were absent at the visits were contacted afterwards via e-mail, where they received a link to an online version of the questionnaire.¹⁶ The response rate was approximately 80 %, yielding a sample of 1005 respondents. As could be expected, the non-response rate was higher among those who missed the ordinary data collection sessions. A substantial proportion of the managers declined to participate, since conducting assessments was not one of their regular work tasks.

¹⁴ The project was funded by FORTE (Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare; Grant 2016-00438).

¹⁵ It should be noted that the number of city-districts in both Stockholm and Gothenburg has changed since 2018.

¹⁶ Respondents who were present during the ordinary data collecting sessions were instructed not to discuss the vignettes with their absent peers until the latter had concluded their participation.

Table 3 summarises the characteristics of the participants and gives some information about the organisational settings of the PSS units included in the sample.

Table 3. Characteristics and work context of the respondents (n=1005)¹⁷

| Variable | Per cent / mean (sd) |
|---|----------------------|
| Age, mean (sd) | 37.31 (11.55) |
| Gender | |
| <i>Female</i> | 85% |
| <i>Male</i> | 13% |
| <i>Other</i> | 2% |
| Country of birth | |
| <i>Sweden</i> | 73% |
| <i>Other</i> | 26% |
| Education | |
| <i>Bachelor's degree in social work (socionomexamen)</i> | 80% |
| <i>Other university education</i> | 15% |
| <i>Secondary school</i> | 4% |
| <i>Other</i> | 2% |
| Work position | |
| <i>Social worker</i> | 82% |
| <i>Manager</i> | 8% |
| <i>Deputy manager</i> | 3% |
| <i>Administrative caseworker</i> | 5% |
| <i>Other</i> | 3% |
| Organisation | |
| <i>Social assistance unit</i> | 68% |
| <i>Intake group/unit</i> | 16% |
| <i>Integrated unit</i> | 5% |
| <i>Other</i> | 10% |
| Employment | |
| <i>Working hours (% of full time), mean (sd)</i> | 97.02 (9.05) |
| <i>Percentage of working time spent on social assistance, mean (sd)</i> | 90.2 (21.00) |
| Experience | |
| <i>Years in recent job position, mean (sd)</i> | 4.56 (6.24) |
| <i>Years in social work, mean (sd)</i> | 8.59 (8.36) |
| <i>Years in working with SA, mean (sd)</i> | 6.12 (7.18) |

As shown, the vast majority of the respondents were women, which is representative of the field of social work in Sweden.¹⁸ Four in five were trained social workers. Almost all were employed full-time and the majority worked almost exclusively with social assistance. As regards the distribution of participants across different types of PSS organisations, it can be noted that the small share of respondents (5%) working in integrated units partly reflects the fact that this organisational solution typically occurs in small municipalities with relatively few employees.

¹⁷ The proportion of item non-responses was less than 3% for all variables in the table.

¹⁸ In 2018, 86% of the social workers in Sweden were women (Statistics Sweden, n.d.).

The Survey Context

The participants assessed a total of eight vignettes, all of which concerned social assistance applicants. Six of the vignettes addressed the follow-up objective of the study and had been employed in one or both of the previous studies. Two new vignettes were constructed for the purpose of this dissertation. Only the new vignettes employed the experimental component. Assessments of these two vignettes are analysed in Studies II, III and IV.

Table 4 illustrates the structure of the survey as a whole. As shown, all participants filled in a questionnaire about their background characteristics (Appendix 6). They also assessed fixed versions of Vignettes 1–6. The new vignettes (Vignettes 7 and 8) were prepared in four different versions (see Appendixes 2–5). Across the versions, all information was kept constant with the exception of applicant names and gender pronouns. Each participant assessed one specific version of Vignette 7 and one specific version of Vignette 8. The assignment of vignette versions across participants was determined randomly at the sample level.

Table 4. Structure of the survey and the vignette population

| Respondent questionnaire |
|---|
| Six vignettes without name manipulation |
| <i>Vignette 1</i> |
| <i>Vignette 2</i> |
| <i>Vignette 3</i> |
| <i>Vignette 4</i> |
| <i>Vignette 5</i> |
| <i>Vignette 6</i> |
| Two vignettes with name manipulation |
| <i>Vignette 7a</i> <i>Vignette 7b</i> <i>Vignette 7c</i> <i>Vignette 7d</i> |
| <i>Vignette 8a</i> <i>Vignette 8b</i> <i>Vignette 8c</i> <i>Vignette 8d</i> |

Vignette Construction and Name Attribution

To increase the external validity of the vignette study (cf. Hughes and Huby, 2002; Wason et al., 2002), two social workers with extensive experience of social assistance administration were consulted in the process of designing the vignettes. The dialogue with the social workers informed all stages of the vignette construction: from initial discussions about the overarching scenarios to the adjustment of details such as rental costs.

The construction of the new vignettes was guided by a combination of theoretical, empirical and practical considerations. To gain insight into the possible occurrence of bias in assessments of different family contexts, one of the vignettes concerned a single household, while the other one concerned a couple household. Further, Study I indicated gendered patterns in assessments related to substance abuse problems. This guided the choice of scenario for

the single applicant, who was described as being addicted to alcohol and prescription narcotics. The couple household vignette was designed to isolate questions related to gender, family roles and the household-based principle for means-testing. The vignette described a heterosexual couple who had *chosen* to share their parental leave days in a way that decreased their incomes. The details of the second vignette were not necessarily chosen to present a very typical social assistance case in statistical terms, but rather to obtain a credible scenario in which the leeway for professional discretion might produce ambiguity.

In order to further secure the quality of the vignettes, a pilot survey was conducted. The pilot participants were 35 social work professionals employed at a social assistance unit in the PSS in a middle-sized Swedish municipality. In addition to assessing the eligibility of the applicants in the vignettes, the pilot participants were asked to leave free-text comments about the vignettes' content and form. The pilot study did include random assignment of names, so that all versions of the vignettes were tested. The responses indicated that the vignettes were properly constructed.

Two vignette dimensions were varied in both vignettes. In the case of the single applicant, the varied dimensions were (a) gender (male/female) and (b) ethnicity (Swedish/Arabic). In the case of the couple household, the varied dimensions were (a) gendered family roles within the couple (traditional/non-traditional) and (b) ethnicity (Swedish/Arabic). This yielded four versions of the respective vignettes.

Gender-specific Swedish- and Arabic-sounding names were used as social cues. The choice to use Arabic-sounding names, specifically, was motivated by previous research. While knowledge about ethnicity bias in the field of social assistance is lacking, negative bias towards individuals categorised as Arabic and/or Muslim has been documented in many other areas in the Swedish context (e.g., Adman & Jansson, 2017; Ahmed & Hammarstedt, 2020; Ahmed, Andersson & Hammarstedt, 2010; Agerström & Rooth, 2009; Agerström et al., 2021; Bursell, 2021; Khosravi, 2012). Research on the labour market further suggests that ethnicity bias against Arabic-named jobseekers is gendered (e.g., Bursell, 2014; Arai et al., 2016a), providing an empirical motivation for this dissertation's comparison between assessments of Swedish- and Arabic-named social assistance applicants. Methodologically, the notion that Arabic-sounding names have been used in relatively many discrimination experiments in Western countries further supports this choice of social cue.

Except for the names, all other aspects of the vignettes were fixed. The name manipulation combined with the randomisation of vignettes enabled the influence of the names upon observed outcomes to be isolated analytically (cf. Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Carlsson & Agerström, 2015).

Analyses

Each vignette in the questionnaire was followed by a set of questions related to the respondent's assessment of the household's eligibility for social assistance (see Appendixes 3 and 5). As in Study I, the dichotomous eligibility item (eligible/non-eligible) represents a central variable in Studies II, III and IV. After specifying whether they would grant social assistance or not, respondents were asked if they considered an alternative decision possible. This items were used as an indicator of uncertainty, and is central to the analyses in Study IV.

The quantitative analyses in all three studies were performed in Stata, version 15.1. Further, in all of the multilevel logistic regression models, the PSS offices were defined as level 2 units. The intercept was allowed to vary between the clusters, whereby the independents' association with the dependent variable, irrespective of office-specific patterns, was estimated (cf. Skrondal & Rabe-Hesketh, 2010). In order to control for municipal patterns across the city-districts, the regression models in all three studies included dummy variables for the three major cities.

Study II was based on assessments of the vignette describing the single applicant. The analyses addressed, on the one hand, correlation between the applicant's intersectional position and the eligibility outcome of the assessment, and, on the other, whether such patterns could be linked to the professional's gender and migration background.

The principal part of the analysis was carried out using multilevel logistic regression models. Three sets of models were conducted, all of which independently comprised the whole sample (n=910 after accounting for item nonresponses). The P-values were adjusted using Benjamini and Hochberg's procedure for false discovery (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). The essential structure of the models in Study II, and the differences between the models, can be summarised as follows:

- The eligibility assessment outcome (granting/denial) served as the dependent variable.
- All models included control variables related to the professional's background characteristics¹⁹; one attitude item²⁰ and one variable representing their individual proportion of approvals in their assessments of the other seven vignettes.

¹⁹ Age, education, job title and engagement in social assistance administration within their work duties.

²⁰ The participant's position on the following claim: 'The social services should be given greater opportunity to require treatment of substance abuse and/or psychological problems in relation to applications for social assistance'.

- In the first model, the independent variables were dummies representing each of the four intersectional positions indicated by the applicant's name: a) Arabic + female; b) Arabic + male; c) Swedish + female and d) Swedish + male.
- In the second set of models, intersection terms were created which paired the four applicant positions with the professional's gender (male/female). This rendered eight unique dummies, each representing a specific combination of the applicant's intersectional position and the professional's gender. The eight interaction terms served as independent variables. The only difference between the models was that the reference category was varied, so that eight (otherwise identical) models were conducted within this block. In addition to the control variables listed above, the professional's migration background was also included as an independent variable in these models.
- The third set of models followed the same principles as the second set, but addressed the professional's migration background instead of gender. Intersection terms were created which paired the four applicant positions with the professional's migration background (born in/outside Sweden). This yielded eight unique dummies, each representing a specific combination of the applicant's intersectional position and the professional's migration background. The eight interaction terms served as the independent variables. The only difference between the models was that the reference category was varied, so that eight (otherwise identical) models were conducted within this block. In addition to the control variables listed above, the professional's gender was also included as an independent variable in these models.

Study III analysed assessments of the vignette describing the couple household. One multilevel regression model comprising the whole sample (n=899 after accounting for item nonresponses) was conducted. The model was designed in the same format as the first model in Study II.²¹ In addition to the control variables that were included in the first model in Study II, an additional attitude indicator was included. The inclusion of the attitude indicators aimed to provide sensitivity to different positions regarding the notion that the couple's need for social assistance resulted from their 'deliberate' choice. The model was structured as follows:

- The eligibility assessment outcome (granting/denial) served as the dependent variable.

²¹ Since only one multilevel logistic regression model was conducted, however, the P-values were not adjusted in Study III.

- The independent variables were dummies representing each of the four vignette versions. The versions were: a) Swedish + ‘gender-traditional’ family roles; b) Swedish + ‘non-traditional’ family roles; c) Arabic + ‘gender-traditional’ family roles and d) Arabic + ‘non-traditional’ family roles
- The control variables included items related to the professional’s background characteristics,²² two attitude items²³ and one variable representing the professional’s individual share of approvals in assessments of the other seven vignettes.

Study IV analysed assessments of both vignettes. Building on the dissertation’s theoretical framework, the analyses were aimed at achieving a better understanding of uncertainty in decision-making about social assistance eligibility. A further aim was to examine possible correlation between uncertainty and ethnicity bias in eligibility assessments.

The delineated focus on ethnicity bias in *Study IV* was based on results from *Studies II* and *III*. More specifically, *Studies II* and *III* revealed patterns that were, in part, similar as regarded the observable occurrence of ethnicity bias. However, it was difficult to draw parallels between the two vignettes as concerned gender bias and intersectional bias in the assessments.

The analysis consisted of two main parts. Respondents indicating uncertainty in their assessments were asked to briefly specify, in their own words, what other type of assessment they would consider. Directed-content analysis (cf. Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999) was used to examine the free-text responses to this question. In all, 239 comments related to the couple household vignette, and 467 comments related to the single applicant vignette were analysed. Guided by insights from the literature on uncertainty in street-level bureaucrats’ decision-making, a coding scheme was constructed to identify ‘information problems’ and ‘interpretation problems’ (Raaphorst, 2018) in the comments. The coding scheme facilitated a structured way for identifying rationales related to uncertainty in the comments.

Further, quantitative analyses were conducted to address possible correlation between uncertainty, ethnicity cues and eligibility outcomes. For this purpose, two multilevel logistic regression models were conducted, one for each vignette. The two models shared the following structure:

²² Age, education, work position, engagement in social assistance administration within their work duties.

²³ The participant’s positions on the following claims: ‘The social services should be given greater opportunity to require treatment of substance abuse and/or psychological problems in relation to applications for social assistance’; and ‘It is common for applicants to be granted social assistance even though they would be able to support themselves through their own incomes or savings’.

- The professional's indication of uncertainty in the assessment (yes/no) served as the dependent variable.
- The independent variables were dummies representing different intersections between the applicant's ethnicity and the assessment's eligibility outcome. The intersections were: a) Swedish + eligible; b) Swedish + non-eligible; c) Arabic + eligible; and d) Arabic + non-eligible
- Control variables related to the professional's background characteristics²⁴ were included. In addition, one variable representing the professional's total number of uncertainty indications in relation to the other seven vignettes was included.

Method Discussion

The design of the vignette study incorporated methodological benefits from both traditional survey research and vignette techniques (cf. Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010). The sampling procedure, combined with the relatively high response rate, can be said to create reasonable grounds for expecting the results to have bearing on the target population. This is especially true for the three major cities, where all city-districts were included.

The follow-up nature of part of the survey meant that its overarching design had been tested, which facilitated a well-planned procedure for the data collection (cf. Stranz, 2007). The participants were informed about the objectives of the project's follow-up approach, but not about the interest in discriminatory bias. The larger set of vignettes included both male and female applicants as well as one case featuring ethnicity cues. These notions can be said to decrease the risk of response bias caused by participants' awareness of researchers' discrimination hypotheses (cf. Carlsson & Agerström, 2015).

The degree of complexity of the vignette experiment was determined with respect to the expected sample size and the survey of which it formed part. Whereas a factorial survey design (e.g., Byers & Zeller, 1998; De Wilde, 2018; Wallander, 2012) could have refined the study of bias, such an approach was not applicable for practical reasons. One limitation of the design adopted here was that the impact of gender and ethnicity cues could not be isolated from the fixed elements in the vignettes (cf. Steiner & Atzmüller, 2006). Since only the applicants' names were varied, it must be taken into consideration that any observed correlation between cues and eligibility might be entangled, and interact, with certain aspects of the vignette scenarios.

When constructing the vignettes, this recognition served as an important point of departure. In accordance with the project's theoretical perspectives,

²⁴ Gender, migration background, age, education, work position, engagement in SA administration within the employment

the aim was not to seek to formulate ‘neutral’ or ‘universal’ vignettes. Instead, acknowledging the necessity of specificity, the vignette construction drew on theory and previous research to provide an adequate basis for analysis in relation to the dissertation’s aim (cf. Hughes & Huby, 2004). This is reflected in the thematic way of structuring the focus of the three articles based on the vignette study’s data. Study II and III enabled separate in-depth analyses that attended to and discussed the two vignettes’ specific and divergent contexts. Study IV then directed attention towards the sociological mechanism of discrimination by placing assessments of both vignettes side-by-side.

As is typically the case in vignette research, the case descriptions were intended to elicit some degree of ambiguity among the respondents (cf. Hughes & Huby, 2004). Given, in addition, the specificity of the vignettes, it could therefore be noted that the results might have limited bearing on assessments of social assistance cases that most professionals would judge to be in the outer ends of the eligibility continuum (that is, applicants considered as clearly eligible or non-eligible for support). However, since the relationship between street-level bureaucrats’ uncertainty and their tendencies to discriminate remain largely unexplored, any such a relationship should be seen, in the first instance, as an empirical question for future research to take up.

Finally, it is worth stressing that vignettes do not attempt to stage the full complexity of the reality they refer to (Hughes & Huby, 2004). Put the other way around, it would be impossible to ‘translate’ a vignette scenario into a corresponding real situation, since the latter would necessarily be richer and more complex in content. However, vignettes facilitate structured ways of studying phenomena that are difficult to capture in a natural setting (e.g., Atzmüller and Steiner, 2010; Gielens et al., 2019; Kübler et al., 2018; Shamshiri-Petersen & Krogh, 2020). As such, they provide powerful tools for analyses of mechanisms and patterns in policy implementation.

For the purposes of this project, the vignette study provided clues about mechanisms at play in the discretionary ‘black-box’ of decision-making on social assistance eligibility. When evaluating the vignette study’s external validity, it is worth stressing that patterns observable in the arranged research situation give some indications about – but can never reflect – the experiment’s counterpart in reality (that is, real social assistance assessments) (e.g., Hainmueller et al., 2015; Hughes & Huby, 2004). The experimental design means that the granting rate observable in assessments of a given vignette becomes interesting in relation to assessments of the *same* vignette provided with *different* cues carried out under *equal* conditions (Atzmüller and Steiner, 2010). Since this is not an exact science, tendencies to discriminate may be under- or overestimated. That said, vignette methods are well established and have shown to create good foundations for capturing bias and discrimination in human judgments (e.g., Hainmueller et al., 2015; Hughes & Huby, 2004). The external validity of the research was arguably strengthened by the sample size and the fact that the participants took

decisions about social assistance eligibility on a day-to-day basis. Further, the inclusion of the vignette experiment in the larger survey implied that the respondents shared the same contextual base for their responses. Analytically, each participant's aggregate amount of assessments in relation to the whole questionnaire (comprising a total of eight vignettes) provided a control measure for their general propensity to grant social assistance in the survey setting (cf. Aguinis and Bradley, 2014; Atzmüller and Steiner, 2010).

Summary of the Results

This chapter summarises the findings of the four empirical studies included in this dissertation, the wider implications of which are further discussed in the next chapter.

Study I

Intersectional Patterns of Social Assistance Eligibility in Sweden

Focusing on the applicants' gender, migration background and household composition, Study I mapped intersectional and subgroup-specific patterns in implemented decisions on social assistance eligibility. The study was based on decision-making data and the sample included all applications for social assistance that were registered in a selection of municipalities during one month in 2012. Eligibility decisions related to 423 social assistance cases were analysed.

Empirical Findings

Among those who applied for social assistance, men born in Sweden were less likely than both native-born women and foreign-born men or women to be granted support. The differences between the other three positions (native-born women, foreign-born women and foreign-born men) were small. Being female was linked to a higher granting rate among applicants born in Sweden, but not among applicants born outside Sweden.

Three factors were shown to predict granting for men but not for women: being born outside of Sweden, being head of a cohabiting household with children, and having contact with the Swedish social insurance agency and/or the public employment services. Among female applicants, being assessed as having problems with alcohol or illicit drugs was linked to a decreased likelihood of granting. This was not the case for men. Further, the results drew attention to a 'female family penalty': having children and/or living with a partner was linked to a lower granting rate among female-headed households.

Interpretations and Conclusions

The results from Study I provide a refined and much more complex picture of pathways between social assistance applications and eligibility decisions than has previously been available. While gender, migration background and household composition all are variables that, separately, correlate with eligibility decisions at the general level, Study I shows that such overarching patterns also conceal a high degree of diversity within and between different subgroups of applicants.

The patterns observed in Study I are likely explainable by a combination of factors. Since it was not possible to control for applicant income and expenditure, these factors include group-level differences in access to other sources of income as well as group-level differences in the propensity to apply for social assistance and assessment bias.

The Study I findings are consistent with previous vignette studies suggesting gender bias in social assistance assessments. Documented contacts with national authorities administering unemployment and social insurance funds can be seen as an indicator of the applicant's ability to 'prove' efforts to gain other sources of income. This indicator correlates with granting decisions for men, but not for women. These patterns might reflect a tendency among professionals to assess the work willingness test and the last resort test more strictly for men than for women.

The overrepresentation of negative eligibility decisions among Swedish-born men may be linked to the fact that this applicant group represent the least disadvantaged intersection when it comes to labour market prospects and income levels at the population level. This fact might lead both to a higher degree of native-born male applicants failing the deficit test (due to better possibilities of providing for themselves otherwise) and to a tendency among professionals, based on social cues, to perceive Swedish-born men's need for social assistance as less palpable. As regards the latter possibility, the results from the vignette study (which was conducted after Study I) gave no indications that bias would generally affect ethnic majority men either negatively or positively. If anything, the vignette study suggested that gender bias tends to affect ethnic minority men negatively, and ethnic majority women positively.

A somewhat unexpected finding in Study I pertains to the notion of a 'female family penalty'. Among female applicants, it is single women *without* children who most commonly qualify for support after means-testing. Considering the particularly prominent financial need among single women *with* children, the acknowledgement of which has been shown to be reflected in perceptions about different subgroups' deservingness of welfare, this finding has no apparent explanation but should be further examined in future research.

Lastly, Study I indicates that addiction problems might be assessed, and predict granting, according to different standards for men and women. The

results show that being assessed as having substance abuse problems was attached to a higher degree of conditionality for women, but not for men. Since little is known about the possible occurrence of both gender and ethnicity-related patterns in assessments of applicants with substance abuse problem, this finding guided the choice of vignette scenario upon which Study II was based.

Study II

Gender and Ethnicity in Social Assistance Assessments of Single Applicants with Substance Abuse Problems

Study II is the first empirical study that addresses the occurrence of ethnicity bias and intersectional bias in the context of social assistance in Sweden. As such, it also aimed at contributing to an extended and more nuanced understanding of gender bias in social assistance assessments. The study was further designed to capture possible interaction between the gender and migration background of professionals on the one hand, and discriminatory tendencies in their assessments on the other.

Based on data from the vignette study, the analyses in Study II addressed patterns in assessments by 910 professionals of the single applicant vignette. The vignette concerned a single adult with addiction problems who had been dependent on social assistance for a prolonged time. The applicant was described as having two children whom the other parent had custody. In assessments of applicants with substance abuse problems, the work willingness test may be associated with significant room for discretion. To address this, the scenario specified that the applicant had started a 12 step treatment programme but failed to show up at meetings in recent weeks. In the experimental design, four versions of the scenario were randomly distributed among the respondents in which the applicant had been given either an Arabic-sounding name (male or female), or a Swedish-sounding name (male or female). Except for the applicant names and gender pronouns, the four vignette versions were otherwise identical.

Empirical Findings

In assessments made by female professionals, two intersectional positions turned out to be linked to markedly different prospects for granting. The contrasting positions were an Arabic-sounding male name (Mohammed) and a Swedish-sounding female name (Malin). If the professional was a woman, 'Malin' was twice as likely to be assessed as eligible for social assistance compared with 'Mohammed', all else being equal. No bias could be

established with statistical certainty in assessments made by male professionals. It should be noted that approximately eight of ten professionals in the sample were women, which corresponds to the gender composition of social workers in Sweden.

In general terms, the proportion of granting was larger for Swedish-named applicants than for Arabic-named applicants. The overall granting rates also suggested a gender bias in favour of female applicants, but this was not found to be statistically significant. While no difference in the tendency to discriminate could be linked to the professional's migration background, native-born professionals were twice as prone to grant social assistance – irrespective of gender and ethnicity cues – as their foreign-born colleagues.

Interpretations and Conclusions

Considering the previous lack of knowledge as regards the occurrence of ethnicity bias in social assistance assessments, an important finding from Study II is that propensity to grant support can be linked to the ethnicity indicated by an applicant's name. The results further stress that in order to understand how notions of applicants' ethnicity – and gender – come to matter in social assistance assessments, we must account for intersectionality. In the light of previous vignette studies focusing on single parents, Study II only partly confirms the impression that men tend to be assessed more strictly than women. Insofar as Study II shows a gender bias, that bias is highly entangled with ethnicity. The difference in granting rate between Arabic-named women and Swedish-named men is small. Meanwhile, there is a tangible eligibility gap between the two positions where the dis/advantage of the ethnicity bias and the gender bias overlap.

The heightened disadvantage for Arabic-named men is consistent with findings from field experiments on the Swedish labour market. A number of studies from the past decade indicate that the negative implications of ethnic discrimination in hiring processes tend to affect ethnic minority men (especially Middle-Eastern/African/Muslim) to a higher degree than ethnic minority women.

Study III

Social Assistance Assessments of Couple Households: A Vignette Study on Applicants' Ethnicity and Gendered Family Roles

Seen from an international perspective, the recognition of the family as a social institution that may conceal, maintain and reproduce gender inequalities has shaped many aspects of the Swedish welfare state. Since the 1970s,

numerous gender equality reforms have sought to improve women's opportunities to provide for themselves independently from family relations. Individual-based entitlement to social security funds is a key principle within this policy approach.

Despite this, the fact that social assistance eligibility is based on the household – not the individual – as a financial unit has gone essentially unheeded in debates on gender equality.

Among social assistance recipients, couples constitute an underrepresented household type which has attracted little research attention. There is, in principle, no knowledge about how social assistance eligibility is determined for couple households. Meanwhile, much discretionary space – and bias – may arise for social work professionals when assessing aspects like work willingness and efforts to exhaust all possible sources of income at the household level.

Study III addressed this knowledge gap, drawing attention to the family as an arena where gender and ethnicity stereotypes might affect social work professionals' decision-making. The study analysed 899 assessments of the couple household vignette from the larger vignette study. This vignette described a heterosexual couple with a 10-months-old baby who had applied for social assistance after choosing to share parental leave days in a financially disadvantageous way. Four versions of the scenario were randomly distributed among the respondents. In each version, both parents had either Swedish- or Arabic-sounding names, and the gendered family roles were varied such that either the mother or the father had abstained from paid work in order to go on parental leave, while the other parent was unemployed. Except for the applicant names and gender pronouns, all four vignette versions were identical.

Empirical Findings

The results revealed that the combination of ethnicity cues and gendered family roles had an impact on the willingness of the professionals to grant social assistance. The difference was tangible for couples where the mother went from work to parental leave. Here, the likelihood of granting was approximately 40% higher if the applicants had Swedish-sounding names. The results strengthen two main findings from Study II: first, that ethnicity cues seem to affect the outcomes of social assistance assessments, and second, that the ways in which ethnicity come to matter intersect with gender.

Interpretations and Conclusions

The gender setting that gave rise to particular ethnicity bias implied that the mother went from being the breadwinner of the family to being the main carer of the child. One way to interpret this bias is that the shift to more 'gender-traditional' family roles is seen as more problematic when the applicants have Arabic-sounding names. Along with the development of discourses that

construct gender equality as a value system tied to the Swedish national identity, many scholars have noted tendencies to legitimise ethnic discrimination through gestures of ‘saving’ ethnic minority women from oppression posed by non-Western cultures. Previous research shows that individuals categorised as of Middle Eastern origins, especially, tend to be seen as carriers of undesirable (gender-conservative) family values that conflict with Swedish welfare state ideals. In the highly conditional context surrounding social assistance and activation policy, such stereotypes may – under the pretext of integration – find resonance in sanctioning practices.

Seen in a wider perspective, Study III sheds light on the contradictory relationship between the Swedish welfare state’s overarching approach to gender equality and the conditions for individuals in couples’ relationships to access the last safety net. In this context, it is worth stressing that social assistance disproportionately is received by individuals and families with ethnic minority backgrounds. Among couples that received social assistance in 2020, nine of ten households were composed of either one or two foreign-born adults.

Some parallels can be drawn between Study II and Study III. In both cases, applicants with Arabic-sounding names were found in positions corresponding to the lowest granting rate. While the ethnicity bias penalty seems to be gender-specific and affected by the different contexts of the vignette scenarios, both studies indicate a more lenient attitude to Swedish-named women.

Study IV

Eligibility Deliberations at the Frontline: Uncertainty and Ethnicity Bias in Decision-Making on Social Assistance

The indefinite nature of social assistance eligibility is inscribed in the *raison d’être* of street-level bureaucracies, that is, the necessity of human judgment in certain types of decision-making. For social work professionals, determining eligibility for support may pose dilemmas of ‘deciding the undecidable’, since experiences of uncertainty form a fundamental dimension of their work. In the street-level bureaucracy literature, it is widely acknowledged that discretionary decision-making runs the risk of producing discriminatory outcomes. A key assumption within this literature is that street-level bureaucrats use stereotypes to cope with uncertainty in decision-making, and that this can explain the emergence of discrimination in frontline policy implementation. However, the mechanism of this assumption has not been studied empirically.

To investigate the relationship between discretionary uncertainty and discrimination in the case of social assistance eligibility, Study IV applied the dissertation's theoretical framework to data from the vignette study. The study analysed 910 assessments of the single household vignette and 899 assessments of the couple household vignette. For both vignettes, the granting rate was lower for applicants with Arabic-sounding names. Using this parallel as a starting point, Study IV addressed possible correlation between the tendencies of professionals to discriminate and their acknowledgements of uncertainty in their assessments. The study further disentangled the rationales described in free-text comments about uncertainty in decision-making. This latter part of the analysis explored how professionals invoked policy directives and case-specific circumstances to 'stabilise' their perceptions of uncertainty when faced with choosing to grant or deny support.

Empirical Findings

For both the single and couple household vignettes, professionals were most likely to indicate uncertainty when deciding to deny social assistance to applicants with Arabic-sounding names. When commenting on their uncertainty, respondents sometimes used the very same policy directives and case-specific circumstances to rationalise different conclusions about eligibility. In other words, it was possible to use the benchmarks at hand either to depart from the 'regular', stricter application of the rules, or to motivate a choice to be more conditional.

Interpretations and Conclusions

The results support the assumption that uncertainty plays a role in the emergence of discrimination in street-level bureaucrats' decision-making. When provided with the same information about an applicant household, professionals may negotiate the implications of any given benchmarks to assess the household's suitability for social assistance eligibility differently. They may also perceive a varying degree of uncertainty in doing so.

Due to the discretionary nature of the work, it cannot be assumed that all professionals will perceive the same degree of un/certainty when assessing the same case. Study IV illustrates this empirically. Further, patterns in the propensity to specify uncertainty suggest that ethnicity cues determine, to some degree, the relationship between how *suitable* for eligibility professionals assess applicants to be, and how *definite* or *uncertain* they perceive their own assessments to be.

Given that the observed patterns reflect a mechanism that to some degree explain how discrimination takes form through discretionary decision-making, the inherent logic of this mechanism calls for further examination.

Discussion

Any welfare state with the ambition to support poor people by means of minimum income protection must resolve the issue of how to distribute such transfers. In Sweden, social workers' decision-making on social assistance is what ultimately determines access to the welfare state's last safety net. An important point of departure for this dissertation is that social work with social assistance plays a crucial role in the Swedish social policy system.

The significance of social workers' discretionary decision-making is well illustrated by the aggregate number of studies on social work with social assistance. Research examining the discretionary dimensions involved in means-testing has shown that a given household's likelihood of being granted support may vary between municipalities as well as with regard to social worker characteristics, while also depending on the gender of the applicant.

This dissertation expands upon this research by studying patterns at the applicant level. Using social categorisations related to gender, ethnicity and family, the empirical studies examined group-level differences in applicants' likelihood of being granted support. The objective was to analyse intersectional patterns and discriminatory bias in social worker assessments.

The concept of discrimination captures concisely the project's wider question, namely, whether different groups face different conditions when applying for social assistance. The short answer to that question is *yes*. This chapter summarises and reflects upon the patterns observed in the empirical studies, and discusses insights and questions raised by the project as a whole.

Patterns of Discrimination

If we want to understand the implications of policies that require human judgments to become a reality, we have to study how they are given practical meaning by the professionals who actually bring them into force. Drawing upon Lipsky's (2010) seminal work on street-level bureaucracy, this dissertation formulates a conceptual model for thinking about social assistance eligibility that emphasises uncertainty as an inescapable dimension of discretionary decision-making. A key point is that nobody 'is' eligible for social assistance before they have been determined to be so by a street-level bureaucrat, typically a social worker.

Because they have discretionary room for decision-making, in many cases, professionals are able to substantiate either a positive or a negative eligibility decision. However, they may also perceive and portray their conclusions about eligibility as being anchored in facts (see Study IV). While the risk of discrimination in social assistance assessments is inevitable, it tends to be concealed by the administrative arrangements through which policy comes to matter.

In view of current knowledge gaps, the first and perhaps most important empirical contribution of the dissertation lies in bringing the issue of ethnicity bias to light. Without in any way providing an exhaustive picture of this subject, the results clearly indicate that professionals are guided in their decision-making by ethnic stereotypes. In simple terms, assessments of eligibility seem to be marked by ethnic discrimination, producing outcomes that reinforce existing power asymmetries (see Studies II, III and IV). In both cases studied in the vignette experiment, applicants with Arabic-sounding names were found in the positions that were least likely to be granted support. Swedish-named applicants, in turn, were found in the positions with highest granting rates. When choosing between granting and denial, social workers were most likely to transform perceived uncertainty into negative decisions for Arabic-named applicants.

Further, the dissertation confirms the impression from previous research of social assistance assessments as being, in many senses, gendered. Overall, men's and women's likelihood of receiving support seems to be determined based on somewhat different standards (see Study I, II and III). In line with previous studies (e.g., Kullberg, 2005; Nybom, 2011; Stranz et al., 2017), the results of this dissertation suggest a tendency among social workers to assess work willingness more strictly for men than women. In addition, the results indicate that women's chances of granting decrease if they are assessed as having substance abuse problems (see Study I).

The intercategory intersectional approach provided a more complex and nuanced picture of gendered assessment patterns. Gender and ethnicity bias were shown to be essentially intertwined. Rather than suggesting that professionals were more lenient in their assessments of women in general, the results indicate a specific advantage of Swedish-named women (see Study II and III). Meanwhile, Arabic-named men, in particular, tended to be subjected to strict assessments (see Study II). This indicates that social workers discriminate according to logics similar to employers in their hiring processes (e.g., Arai et al., 2016a; Bursell, 2014; Dahl & Krog, 2018; Erlandsson, 2022).

The dichotomous notion of eligibility provided a useful measure of assessment differences. At the same time, it is worth noting that professionals commonly grant compensation for some expenditure items, while denying compensation for others. Discriminatory bias might thus be hidden within positive eligibility decisions, implying that some groups receive less compensation for their household deficits than others (cf. Bergmark & Stranz,

2022; Stranz, 2007; Stranz & Wiklund, 2012). Future research should address possible patterns of discrimination in the size of granted benefits.

Inequality Hidden in the Welfare State's Backyard

In order to properly contextualise the results, it is worth recalling in basic terms what social assistance is and whom this subsidy concerns. While keeping in mind that the target population for social assistance is heterogenous, individuals who need the subsidy have a low standard of living compared to the majority population. Their access to more favourable income sources is constrained, making it harder for them to cover basic household expenditure. Put simply, social assistance is targeted to the materially worst-off – the poor – in Sweden.

It is probably difficult to overestimate the importance of this notion for understanding the ease with which the majority society can remain indifferent to the conditions of social assistance clients. The minority part of the population that holds the lowest-class positions in a society not only suffers from material scarcity and social exclusion, but also tends to remain invisible in the general awareness and in public debate (e.g., Lister, 2015). Discrimination that operates through marginalisation is therefore debilitating at multiple levels. The institutional frameworks within which some people are referred to less favourable forms of social security tend to undermine their recognition as citizens with basic rights that are worth defending (cf. Fraser, 1994; Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

On this note, it should be said that social assistance clients' opportunities to organise politically are, in all senses of the word, poor, if not non-existent (e.g., Brady et al., 2016; Johansson et al., 2013). By virtue of the material, cultural, psychological and highly concrete implications of their social positions, their relation to the welfare state is one of subordination. Long-term recipients live from payment to payment. The undesirability of reciprocity is an intent of social assistance policy and is reflected in public opinion about recipients (cf. Hedegaard, 2014; Laenen, 2020). In order to be eligible for support, clients must continually show their willingness and efforts to stop being dependent. Decision-making takes place in an organisational setting that encourages discipline and suspicion towards clients (e.g., Ulmestig & Eriksson, 2017). The strong emphasis placed by the Social Services Act's on individual assessments can be used as leeway to apply the rules a little less strictly in some cases (see Study IV). Considering the organisational context in which this takes place, such 'goodwill' is highly conditional and typically dependent on the professional perceiving the applicant as cooperating.

Altogether, many factors can be said to contribute to making social assistance a policy field that is easy to look away from. Located in the welfare state's backyard, transformed into municipal, organisational, administrative

and ultimately individual case-by-case matters, the monitoring of the last safety net is difficult to grasp even for national authorities, local managers and researchers.

Meanwhile, bureaucracy has the power to make ideology invisible for stakeholders at all levels (Hasenfeld, 2010). When policy travels through a fragmented system, the ideas of policy-makers can easily be watered down along the way (e.g., Pålsson & Wiklund, 2021). The democratic problems associated with such watering-down lie not only in a lack of clarity about who bears responsibility for problematic outcomes. The even more basic problem is that we typically do not even know what the outcomes are and how to measure them.

At the street level, the policy process is difficult to overview outside the individual or organisational context (Lipsky, 2010). In the case of social assistance, there is an obvious risk that ‘what happens at the street-level stays at the street-level’, not as a consequence of any specific actor’s intent to hinder transparency, but as a result of a complex institutional system and the nature of the work it accommodates. This underlines the need for scholarly analysis that combines bottom-up perspectives with an interest in structural inequalities, relating street-level bureaucrats’ individual acts to quantitative outcomes (cf. Lotta & Pires, 2019).

An overarching ambition of this project has been to map patterns that can be observed extend beyond specific local contexts. The methods, data and analyses were chosen to account, as far as possible, for the local level and control for individual social worker variables. The random sampling strategy used to collect decision-making data makes it reasonable to view the results from Study I as primarily indicative of patterns formed in the specific subgroup of *middle-sized* municipalities. Given the implications of the municipal governance of social assistance, however, it should be stressed that it is difficult to assess the generalisability of this type of selection on substantiated grounds. The vignette experiment’s coverage of all the city-districts in the three largest cities provided a unique census study of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. Although the additional municipalities in the study displayed variation and geographical spread, the selection cannot be considered representative of Sweden as a whole.

Ethnic Discrimination Made Legitimate

As discussed above, social assistance is a subsidy for the poor that is often overlooked in the mainstream socio-political debate. The overall opacity that surrounds street-level work with social assistance is problematic as it concerns citizens’ access to a minimum standard of living, which can be considered a basic social right. If we are to go further and describe the composition of the poor, it is impossible not to speak of ethnicity.

In international comparisons, Sweden stands out for having larger gaps in poverty risks between natives and immigrants than many other EU countries (Eurostat, 2021; OECD/EU 2018). While the risk of poverty and social exclusion increases in Sweden, gaps between groups of different ethnic origins are also growing (OECD/EU, 2018; Mussida & Sciulli, 2022). In 2018, the risk of poverty in Sweden was 4.5 times higher for non-EU citizens than for native-born Swedes (Eurostat, 2021). The annual median disposable income among Swedish citizens born outside of the EU was less than 60% of that of the native-born (OECD/EU, 2018). As the work presented here has shown, ethnic minority individuals not only are more likely to fall short of the welfare state's first-tier system, but also seem to be disadvantaged when turning to its second-tier system, namely, social assistance (cf. Stranz & Wiklund, 2012).

This dissertation calls for an articulation of the chain of political rationales that allows social assistance administration to take place according to principles that attach poverty to a second-class form of social citizenship, while attaching foreign background to poverty. In a welfare state vertically segregated by ethnicity, social assistance risks functioning as a policy arena that simultaneously legitimises, de-politicises and hides away institutionalised forms of ethnic discrimination.

From a scholarly perspective, the results regarding ethnicity bias provide valuable empirical input on a sparsely studied issue. As such, they call for further examination. Differences in responses to Swedish- and Arabic-named individuals are a well-tested way of measuring ethnicity bias (e.g., Bursell, 2021). Meanwhile, it must be kept in mind that discrimination affects different ethnic minority groups differently. On the one hand, Arabic-named applicants are likely to be more disadvantaged than many other ethnic minorities in Sweden (e.g., Eliassi, 2017; Hedegaard & Larsen, 2022). On the other hand, it cannot be excluded that certain ethnic minority groups (including subgroups of Arabic-named applicants) are more severely affected by bias than the vignette experiment was able to capture. For instance, Afro-Swedes are a group that recent reports have highlighted as particularly subject to discrimination in Sweden (Brå, 2022; Wolgast et al., 2018). Moreover, while names serve as useful social cues in discrimination experiments, responses to clients in real assessments are affected by a wide range of factors, including but not limited to applicants' language skills and physical and cultural appearance (e.g., Arai et al., 2016b; Storm, 2018).

Overall, the results of this dissertation indicate *that* ethnicity bias affects social assistance assessments, but much remains to be examined as regards *how* such bias operates and what the consequences are.

Since institutional logics that set the organisational frameworks for means-testing vary, future analyses should pay attention to the role of local policy in discriminatory bias (cf. Fuertes et al., 2021; Soss et al., 2011). Formal policies as well as informal norms among colleagues within a unit or municipality are

likely to shape local assessment patterns (Stranz, 2007). The composition of the local population, the staff and the clients may further have bearing on the occurrence and character of discriminatory bias in different local contexts (cf. Altreiter & Leibetseder, 2015; Blomberg & Kroll, 1999; Harrits, 2019; Johansson Sevä, 2009; Soss et al., 2008). Another crucial question for future research is to further investigate how the attitudes and dispositions of individual professionals interact with local and organisational factors (cf. Schütze & Johansson, 2019).

No Gender Equality for the Poor

This project draws attention to the rarely-discussed dissonance between the household-based criterion for social assistance eligibility and the Swedish welfare state's gender equality regime.

Over half a century has passed since the joint taxation of spouses was abolished in Sweden. This and other reforms can be seen as symbolic of the gradual shift in the welfare state's normative position with regards to gendered family structures, which has generally implied a decoupling of social rights from marital status (Gunnarsson, 2016). Internationally, the Nordic welfare states' active encouragement of a dual breadwinner model has come to serve as a prototype for what progressive gender equality policies look like (e.g., Martinsson et al., 2016).

But reforms made to strengthen married and cohabiting women's autonomy in relation to their partners have not focused on families that live at the margins of Swedish universalism. In the context of social assistance, the welfare state treats the family as a unit within which resources are shared equally. As a rule, social assistance applicants are denied support if they have a partner whose incomes can cover their basic needs (NBHW, 2021b). The feminist critique of the male breadwinner model, which has otherwise won significant support in the Swedish welfare state's adoption of a dual breadwinner model, is thus disregarded for the least well-off in society (cf. Gunnarsson, 2016; Nyberg, 2012; 2014). As has been shown in this dissertation (see Studies I and II) as well as in previous research (e.g., Kullberg, 2005; Nybom, 2011; Stranz et al., 2017), the legacy of the male breadwinner model also persists in frontline work with social assistance, being enshrined in a propensity to place greater emphasis on men's work willingness than women's.

Also concerning is the lack of even basic knowledge about how social assistance eligibility is determined for couples. This can be viewed against the backdrop of the discussion above on social assistance as the welfare state's backyard. While social assistance tends to remain a non-issue in broad debates on social inequality, the conditions surrounding means-testing differ across the country and are difficult to overview.

Further, social assistance assessments of couples can be considered to be a blind spot that is highly intersectional. This concern extends beyond the welfare state's approach to gender equality among individuals in the lowest class positions. Couples who – despite being two potential earners – face economic scarcity severe enough to be granted social assistance have, in 90% of cases, foreign background (NBHW, 2021a).

Study III provides some valuable clues about the practical implications of the household-based criterion for social assistance eligibility. The results indicate that there is no agreement about how the requirement on individuals to depend on their partner should be implemented. In fact, *how* the criterion comes to matter seems to be subject to a significant extent to both gender and ethnicity bias. When morally charged dimensions of means-testing are assessed for two individuals as one unit, professionals' judgments about the applicants' gendered family roles seem to affect their propensity to grant support. Specifically, gender-traditional family roles correlated with positive decisions for Swedish-named couples, while Arabic-named couples with similarly arranged family roles were sanctioned.

This can be interpreted as a street-level expression of the tendency to construe people of Middle Eastern background as carriers of undesirable values that threaten Swedish gender equality ideals (e.g., Eliassi, 2017; Martinsson et al., 2016; Pringle 2010). The irony of such a trope is noteworthy since the gender equality project has not included social assistance. Groups tangibly disadvantaged by the imperative on full-time employment imposed by the so-called 'work line' (including, for instance, Middle Eastern immigrants) run the risk of being referred to a policy measure guided by principles otherwise considered outdated in the Swedish context.

Future research should further analyse how (intersectional) ideas related to aspects such as gender, family, ethnicity and heterosexuality come to matter in social assistance assessments of both single and couple households. As regards the practical implications of the household-based eligibility criterion, important issues that require examination include the occurrence of formal and informal local routines regarding the assignment of head-/co-applicant positions. Furthermore, the practical and gendered implications of such routines should also be subject to examination. Based on the sparse knowledge we currently have about these issues, the legacy of a male breadwinner model can be assumed to be more palpable in some local settings. Some municipalities follow a policy for heterosexual couples whereby the male partner is automatically assigned the position as head of the application. Such a principle may further entail that the PSS primarily base eligibility assessments on encounters with the male partner, and all granted benefits are paid to the male partner's bank account (cf. NBHW, 2018a).

At a national level, policy arrangements surrounding social assistance must be considered a poor fit with Sweden's self-image as a welfare state that has successfully promoted gender equality for 'all' (cf. Martinsson et al., 2016).

A Perfect Breeding Ground for Discrimination?

In keeping with a bottom-up perspective on administrative work, this dissertation stresses discretion as a necessity for the implementation of social assistance policies (e.g., Thomann et al., 2018). Professionals' interpretative practices are not seen in themselves as good or bad, but rather as core elements in how social assistance eligibility comes to matter. The risk of discrimination can be seen as an inevitable condition of social assistance administration, which is implied with the Social Services Act's end-to-end emphasis on individual assessments.

This study has observed the types of group-level patterns that can arise through discretionary decision-making. An overall impression is that social workers' assessments form patterns that do not challenge, but rather align with, established deservingness hierarchies and patterns of discrimination observed in the Swedish labour market (e.g., Bursell, 2014; Erlandsson, 2022; Kullberg, 2005; Reeskens & Van Der Meer, 2019). Considering that social workers operate in environments where group-level differences constitute the organisational 'input' as well as the 'output', while classifying practices are necessary to facilitate the work (Hasenfeld, 2010), this might seem like an expected outcome. But it is worth stressing that street-level bureaucrats are not predetermined to reinforce social inequalities. The Swedish professionals' negative bias towards ethnic minority clients recall patterns found in several other national contexts, including Denmark (Pedersen et al., 2018; Schram et al., 2009; Thomann & Rapp, 2018), but diverge from other patterns recently demonstrated in decision-making on social assistance in, for instance, Norway (Gschwin et al., 2022; Terum et al., 2018). The reasons for such differences are likely to be complex and involve mechanisms at multiple levels. Generally speaking, social workers' decision-making is embedded in wider structural power asymmetries where a range of factors are likely to affect the formation of patterns (e.g., Harrits & Østergaard Møller, 2011; Lotta & Pires, 2019; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Raaphorst, 2017).

Important questions for future research and practice alike concern the type of regulatory and organisational prerequisites that might reduce the risk of discrimination in social assistance assessments. Based on previous research, it can be expected that the ways in which work is organised will affect professionals' attitudes to clients as well as their ways of coping with organisational pressure (e.g., Baviskar & Winter, 2017; Blomberg Kroll et al., 2018). Recent studies indicate that higher work load increases discriminatory behaviour among street-level bureaucrats (Andersen & Guul, 2019) and correlates with negative perceptions of working with migrants (Schütze & Johansson, 2019). Professionals with longer work experience seem less prone to discriminate than their less-experienced colleagues (Pedersen et al., 2018). Furthermore, professionals perceiving a higher degree of discretion in their work are less likely to find encounters with migrants burdensome, whereas the

opposite applies to those with negative attitudes to immigration (Schütze & Johansson, 2019). Moreover, pronounced class differences between professionals and clients seem to increase the propensity of professionals to lean on stereotypes when making decisions (Harrits, 2019).

In light of these findings, the current conditions for social work with social assistance give cause for concern in several respects. Social assistance is a professional field marked by high workloads, high staff turnover, a low degree of perceived discretion and tangible class distance between professionals and clients (e.g., Blomberg et al., 2015; Dellgran & Höjer, 2005; Håkansson, 2016; Tham & Lynch, 2019; 2021; Welander et al., 2017).

Implications for Social Work Practice

There are different ways to approach the relationship between discretion and discrimination in the context of social assistance. If the leeway for discretion enabled by legislation is to be taken seriously, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that means-testing is surrounded by uncertainty and that this uncertainty translates into (varying degrees of) insecurity for economically vulnerable individuals. Politics of redistribution and institutional arrangements affect both *which* individuals become poor and *how* uncertainty translates into more or less severe patterns of insecurity for different subgroups.

This recognition, however, is not to deny that the discretionary flexibility inscribed in regulations has an important role to play in order for the bureaucratic machinery to work (Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). For professionals facing the human dimensions of formal rules in their day-to-day practices, discretion is thought to function as a ‘buffer’ that enhances their abilities to cope with conflicting demands, high work load and organisational pressure (e.g., Brodtkin, 2013; Lipsky, 2010; Schütze, & Johansson, 2019; cf. Weiss & Gren, 2021). Relatedly, discretionary room serves – at least ideally – the function of protecting citizens from the unreasonably rigid application of rules. This places a heavy responsibility on the managerial side to provide professionals with conditions in which they can use their delegated discretion in ethically justifiable ways (cf. Brodtkin, 2013; Lipsky, 2010; cf. Weiss & Gren, 2021).

Recalling the legacy of the male breadwinner model discussed above, responses to intimate partner violence (IPV) in social assistance administration can be used to illustrate the far-from-straightforward relationship between discretion and the tendency to reinforce intersectional disadvantages. As a rule, social assistance applicants in couples are required to depend on their partner financially. By invoking their discretionary room, however, social workers can make exceptions from the general rule if they detect domestic violence. Research shows that municipalities where locally

implemented routines encourage social workers to ask social assistance clients about violence more frequently discover such problems (Lundberg & Bergmark, 2018). Given that the local PSS can provide adequate support measures for IPV victims, social workers handling social assistance applications can use their professional knowledge and discretionary agency to support victims in leaving a violent relationship (Lundberg & Bergmark, 2018; Ulmestig & Eriksson, 2017). For applicants exposed to IPV who live in the ‘wrong’ municipality and/or meet the ‘wrong’ professional, the experience of applying for social assistance may instead worsen their vulnerability by exposing them to forms of abuse and disrespect similar to those that characterise violent relationships (Ulmestig & Eriksson, 2017).

Hence, the legislative leeway for local and individual discretion means that social workers in some organisational settings *can* and *do* use their discretion in ways that ensure their clients’ interests within the limits of the system. Nevertheless, the overall conditions for clients must be considered legally uncertain. In addition to organisational arrangements, bias may affect the ability of the PSS to discover IPV, to the disadvantage not least of groups that deviate from stereotypical ideas about victimhood (e.g., Korkmaz, 2021; Ovesen, 2021).

At the same time, stakeholders responsible for governing the activities of the PSS under strong budgetary pressure may have strong incentives to downplay the role of human judgment, and stress instead the administrative dimensions of the work. In times when austerity and efficiency are dominating logics in public-sector organisations, problem definitions that depict the human dimensions of means-testing as the root cause of undesirable outcomes may reasonably seem attractive to both national and local policy actors (cf. Germundsson, 2022).

As previous research shows, simply restraining the opportunities for professionals to take individual circumstances into account does not necessarily decrease discriminatory bias (e.g., Schütze & Johansson, 2019). Such measures might, in practice, increase clients’ insecurity even as they claiming to do the opposite. A higher degree of detailed regulation may, for instance – and contrary to policy-makers’ intentions – produce even more biased outcomes as professionals’ perception of their discretionary room decreases (cf. Stranz, 2007). Overall, this dissertation underscores that questions about how patterns arise in the policy process must be subject to empirical scrutiny.

In the wake of the rapidly growing trend, in recent years, of implementing digitally automated decision-support systems in social assistance administration, this applies not least to the practical implications of such reforms (often referred to as Robot Process Automation) (e.g., Germundsson, 2022; Ranerup & Henriksen, 2020; cf. Raso, 2017). The conceptual understanding of social assistance eligibility presented in this dissertation stresses that the question of who is eligible for support is – at least under the

existing regulatory framework – one that cannot be separated from ongoing discretionary processes of policy implementation. Since the framing of means-testing as merely an administrative task tends to obscure the risk of discrimination, actors involved with social assistance should guard against the tendency to claim that new technologies can magic away the human and moral dimensions of means-testing. Scholarly work should pay attention to (group-level differences in) how policy comes to matter through assumptions inscribed in new technological tools, as well as through professionals' ways of interacting with software.

Final Remarks

As stated in this dissertation's introductory chapter, the ways in which welfare states distinguish between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor are built upon specific assumptions and result in specific material consequences. Although they represent politically charged issues, however, the specificity of these differentiating processes risk remaining unrecognised, or even appearing natural, in the sociohistorical context that constitutes their scenery. The contextualisation of this project's empirical inquiry has been inspired by feminist and postcolonial perspectives on social policy. Social assistance is understood as one part of the welfare state's wider politics of redistribution and its coproduction of ideas that ultimately attach to the target population for the subsidy. The dissertation shows that social constructions of social assistance clients have an impact not only on policy design but also on the ways in which social workers implement policy at the street-level.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Ekonomiskt bistånd (tidigare kallat socialbidrag) är den svenska välfärdsstatens sista skyddsnät, och ska träda in när alla andra försörjningskällor är uttömda. Rätten till ekonomiskt bistånd avgörs från fall till fall genom socialarbetares bedömningar. Enskilda handläggare har förhållandevis stort handlingsutrymme i beslutsfattandet, och tidigare forskning visar att sannolikheten att beviljas stöd kan påverkas av vilken kommun den sökande bor i och vilken handläggare som gör bedömningen. Kunskap om hur rätten till ekonomiskt bistånd faktiskt avgörs i praktiken är emellertid i många avseenden begränsad.

Den här avhandlingen belyser socialt arbete med ekonomiskt bistånd ur ett diskrimineringsperspektiv. Avhandlingen omfattar fyra delstudier som alla undersöker mönster i *vilka* sökande som bedöms vara berättigade till ekonomiskt bistånd av de professionella som handlägger bidraget i sitt dagliga arbete. Intersektionella och diskriminerande bedömningsvariationer analyseras med fokus på betydelsen av faktorer relaterade till de sökandes kön, familj och etnicitet.

Den första delstudien bygger på enkätdata om alla beslut om ekonomiskt bistånd som fattades i 25 kommuner under en kalendermånad 2012 (n=472). De återstående tre delstudierna bygger på enkätdata från ett vinjettextperiment som genomfördes 2018, där drygt 1 000 socialarbetare från 19 kommuner, inklusive Stockholm, Göteborg och Malmö, deltog.

Studie I visade att sannolikheten att beviljas stöd var lägre bland inrikes födda män jämfört med både inrikes födda kvinnor och utrikes födda (oavsett kön). Vilka specifika faktorer som kunde kopplas till chansen att beviljas ekonomiskt bistånd skilde sig åt mellan kvinnor och män. Vidare uppmärksammades att kvinnor på det hela taget tycktes ha lägre chans att beviljas stöd om de hade familj. Kvinnor som var registerledare för ett parhushåll och/eller hade hemmavarande barn blev i lägre utsträckning beviljade ekonomiskt bistånd jämfört med ensamstående kvinnor utan barn.

Medan *Studie I* byggde på data om faktiska beslut, och som sådan inte kunde isolera betydelsen av bedömningsbias, undersökte *Studie II, III* och *IV* om handläggarna gjorde olika bedömningar av identiska fall där endast klienternas namn varierades.

Studie II undersökte bedömningar av rätten till ekonomiskt bistånd för en ensamstående klient med missbruksproblem. Resultaten visade att

bifallsgraden generellt sett var högre om den sökande hade ett svenskklingande namn jämfört med om hon/han hade ett arabiskt klingande namn. Resultaten visade vidare att två intersektionella positioner kunde kopplas till markant skilda förutsättningar att beviljas stöd i bedömningar gjorda av kvinnliga handläggare. Om klienten var en *kvinn*a med ett *svenskklingande* namn var chansen att beviljas ekonomiskt bistånd dubbelt så hög som om klienten var en *man* med ett *arabiskt klingande* namn.

Studie III undersökte förekomsten av bias i bedömningar av parhushåll. Handläggarna fick bedöma en vinjett som beskrev ett heterosexuellt par med en 10 månaders bebis. Parets försörjningsproblem kunde kopplas till deras sätt att fördela föräldraledigheten, och den experimentella analysdesignen innebar att betydelsen av föräldrarnas familjeroller och etnicitet undersöktes. Resultaten visade att kombinationen av dessa två dimensioner påverkade handläggarnas benägenhet att bevilja stöd. Skillnaden var påtaglig i bedömningar av par vars inkomstunderskott föranletts av att mamman gått från arbete till föräldraledighet. Här var sannolikheten för bifall cirka 40 % högre om de sökande hade svenskklingande namn jämfört med om de hade arabiskt klingande namn.

I förhållande till båda vinjetterna som studerades i *Studie II* och *Studie III* var bifallsgraden högre när de fiktiva klienterna hade svenskklingande namn. Med denna parallell som utgångspunkt undersökte *Studie IV* förekomsten av samband mellan etnisk diskriminering och indikationer på att handläggarna upplevt osäkerhet i bedömningarna. Vidare analyserades fritextsvar för att undersöka hur handläggarna återopade policydirektiv och fallspecifika omständigheter för att ”stabilisera” sina bedömningar i samband med upplevd osäkerhet. Resultaten visade att handläggarna var mest benägna att indikera osäkerhet när de valde att *neka* ekonomiskt bistånd till sökande med *arabiskt klingande* namn, och att samma policydirektiv och fallspecifika omständigheter kunde användas för att rationalisera slutsatser om både bifall och avslag.

Sammantaget visar avhandlingen att sannolikheten att beviljas ekonomiskt bistånd varierar avsevärt mellan grupper och att sådana mönster i allra högsta grad kan beskrivas som intersektionella. Resultaten från båda datakällorna förstärker intrycket från tidigare forskning av att rätten till ekonomiskt bistånd implementeras i förhållande till olika, genusspecifika, standarder för kvinnor och män. Ett viktigt bidrag ligger vidare i att belysa förekomsten av etnisk diskriminering. Resultaten från vinjettexperimentet tyder på att sökande med arabiskt klingande namn bedöms mer strikt än sökande med svenskklingande namn, och att sätten på vilka etnisk diskriminering kommer till uttryck är könade.

Teoretiskt bygger avhandlingen på feministiska och postkoloniala perspektiv på socialpolitik och en förståelse av socialarbetare som byråkrater på gatunivå. Därmed förstås ekonomiskt bistånd som en del av välfärdsstatens omfördelningspolitik, och kvantitativa mönster som tar form genom

socialarbetares individuella handlingar ses i ljuset av strukturella ojämlikheter. Avhandlingen presenterar också en analytisk modell för att tänka kring bedömningar av rätten till ekonomiskt bistånd, vilken framhåller osäkerhet som en ofrånkomlig dimension av behovsprövningen. Medan risken för diskriminering i handläggningen är oundviklig tenderar den att osynliggöras av arbetets administrativa inramning. Såväl empiriskt som teoretiskt bidrar avhandlingen till förståelsen av socialt arbete med ekonomiskt bistånd som en praktik som riskerar att förstärka existerande ojämlikheter.

References

- Adman, P. & Jansson, H. (2017) A field experiment on ethnic discrimination among local Swedish public officials, *Local Government Studies*, 43(1), 44-63, DOI: 10.1080/03003930.2016.1244052
- Agerström, J., & Rooth, D-O., (2009), Implicit prejudice and ethnic minorities: Arab-Muslims in Sweden, *International Journal of Manpower*, 30(1/2), 43-55, <https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:eme:ijmpps:v:30:y:2009:i:1/2:p:43-55>.
- Agerström, J., Carlsson, M., & Strinic, A. (2021). Intersected groups and discriminatory everyday behavior: Evidence from a lost email experiment. *Social Psychology*, 52(6), 351–361. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1027/1864-9335/a000464>
- Aguinis, H., & Bradley, K. J. (2014). Best practice recommendations for designing and implementing experimental vignette methodology studies. *Organizational Research Methods*, 17(4), 351–371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428114547952>
- Ahmed, A. M., Andersson, L., & Hammarstedt, M. (2010). Can Discrimination in the Housing Market Be Reduced by Increasing the Information about the Applicants? *Land Economics*, 86(1), 79–90.
- Ahmed, A., & Hammarstedt, M. (2020). Ethnic Discrimination in Contacts with Public Authorities: A Correspondence Test among Swedish Municipalities. *Applied Economics Letters*, 27(17), 1391–1394.
- Aldén, L. & Hammarstedt, M. (2015) Utrikes födda på 2000-talets arbetsmarknad. En översikt och förklaringar till situationen. *Ekonomisk Debatt*, 43(3): 77–89.
- Almqvist, A.-L., & Duvander, A.-Z. (2014). Changes in gender equality?: Swedish fathers' parental leave, division of childcare and housework. *Journal of Family Studies*, 20(1), 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.5172/jfs.2014.20.1.19>
- Altreiter C., & Leibetseder, B. (2015). Constructing Inequality: Deserving and Undeserving Clients in Austrian Social Assistance Offices. *Journal of Social Policy*, 44(1), 127–145. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1017/S0047279414000622>
- Andersen, S. C., & Guul, T. S. (2019). Reducing Minority Discrimination at the Front Line—Combined Survey and Field Experimental

- Evidence. *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory*, 29(3), 429–444.
- Andersson, L. (2022). *Addressing youth unemployment: what role for social work? Policy responses to youth unemployment in Sweden and Europe*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Stockholm University, Department of Social Work.
- Anttonen, A. (2002) Universalism and social policy: A Nordic-feminist reevaluation. *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 10(2), 71-80, DOI: 10.1080/080387402760262168
- Arai, M., Bursell, M., & Nekby, L. (2016a). The Reverse Gender Gap in Ethnic Discrimination: Employer Stereotypes of Men and Women with Arabic Names. *International Migration Review*, 50(2), 385–412. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12170>
- Arai, M., Gartell, M., Rödin, M., & Özcan, G. (2016b). *Stereotypes of physical appearance and labor market chances*. IFAU Working Paper.
- Atzmüller, C., & Steiner, P. M. (2010). Experimental vignette studies in survey research. *Methodology: European Journal of Research Methods for the Behavioral and Social Sciences*, 6(3), 128–138. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-2241/a000014>
- Bauer, P., & Wiezorek, C. (2016). »Vulnerable Families«: Reflections on a Difficult Category. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*. 6(4), 11-28. 10.26529/cepsj.41.
- Baviskar, S. & Winter, S. C. (2017) Street-Level Bureaucrats as Individual Policymakers: The Relationship between Attitudes and Coping Behavior toward Vulnerable Children and Youth. *International Public Management Journal*, 20(2), 316-353, DOI: 10.1080/10967494.2016.1235641
- Bengtsson, H. & Melke, A. (2014). *Vår offentliga förvaltning: samverkan i välfärdspolitiken*. Malmö: Gleerup.
- Benjamini, Y., & Hochberg, Y. (1995). Controlling the false discovery rate: A practical and powerful approach to multiple testing. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series B (Methodological)*, 57(1), 289–300. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2517-6161.1995.tb02031.x>
- Bennett, F. (2013), Researching Within-Household Distribution: Overview, Developments, Debates, and Methodological Challenges. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75(3): 582-597. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12020>
- Bergmark, Å. (2000). Arbete med socialbidrag – om organisation, metoder och insatser. In Puide, A. (red). *Socialbidrag i forskning och praktik*. Stockholm: Gothia.
- Bergmark, Å., (2013). Ekonomiskt bistånd – en urholkad stödform. *Socionomens forskningssupplement*, 34, 22-31.
- Bergmark, Å. (2016). *Ekonomiskt bistånd: försörjningsvillkor och marginalisering*. Stockholm: Socialdepartementet.

- Bergmark, Å., Bäckman, O., & Minas, R. (2013). *Vägar ur socialbidrag? Om socialtjänstens insatser och det ekonomiska biståndets varaktighet. Rapport i social arbete nr. 143*. Stockholm: US-AB.
- Bergmark, Å., Bäckman, O., & Minas, R. (2017). Organizing local social service measures to counteract long-term social assistance receipt. What works? Experiences from Sweden. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(4), 548–559.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2016.1206851>
- Bergmark, Å., & Lundström, T. (2007). Unitarian ideals and professional diversity in social work practice—the case of Sweden. *European Journal of Social Work*, 10(1), 55-72.
- Bergmark, Å., & Stranz, H. (2022). Utilized discretion: a vignette study of social assistance assessments in Sweden, *European Journal of Social Work*, DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2022.2113863
- Bergnehr, D. (2016). Unemployment and conditional welfare: Exclusion and belonging in immigrant women’s discourse on being long-term dependent on social assistance. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 25(1), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12158>
- Billquist, L. och Johnsson, L. (2016). Sociala akter som empiri. Om möjligheter och svårigheter med att använda socialarbetares dokumentation i forskningssyfte. *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 14(1). DOI: 10.3384/SVT.2007.14.1.2595.
- Blomberg, H., & Kroll, C. (1999). Do Structural Contexts Matter? Macro-Sociological Factors and Popular Attitudes Towards Public Welfare Services. *Acta Sociologica*, 42(4), 319–335.
- Blomberg, H., Kroll, C., Kallio, J., & Erola, J. (2013). Social workers’ perceptions of the causes of poverty in the Nordic countries. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 23(1), 68-82.
- Blomberg, H., Kroll, C., & Kallio, J. (2018). On the changing frontline of welfare delivery: Views on social assistance recipients among Finnish frontline workers. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 26(2), 263-280. DOI:10.1332/175982718X15232796966637.
- Blomqvist, P., & Palme, J. (2020). Universalism in Welfare Policy: The Swedish Case beyond 1990. *Social Inclusion*, 8(1), 114-123.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v8i1.2511>
- Boye, K. (2008). *Happy hour? Studies on well-being and time spent on paid and unpaid work*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Institutet för social forskning (SOFI).
- Brady, D., & Bostic, A. (2015). Paradoxes of Social Policy: Welfare Transfers, Relative Poverty, and Redistribution Preferences. *American Sociological Review*, 80(2), 268–298.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122415573049>.
- Brady, D. & Burroway, R. (2012). Targeting, Universalism, and Single-Mother Poverty: A Multilevel Analysis Across 18 Affluent

- Democracies. *Demography*, 49(2), 719-46. DOI: 10.1007/s13524-012-0094-z.
- Brady, D., Blome, A., & Kleider, H. (2016). How Politics and Institutions Shape Poverty and Inequality. In Brady, D. & Burton, L. M. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Poverty*, Oxford Handbooks. New York: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199914050.001.0001>
- Brodtkin, E. Z. (1997). Inside the Welfare Contract: Discretion and Accountability in State Welfare Administration. *Social Service Review*, 71(1), 1–33.
- Brottsförebyggande rådet [Brå]. *Afrofobiska hatbrott. Rapport 2022:7*. Stockholm: Brottsförebyggande rådet.
- Bursell, M. (2014). The Multiple Burdens of Foreign-Named Men—Evidence from a Field Experiment on Gendered Ethnic Hiring Discrimination in Sweden, *European Sociological Review*, 30(3), 399–409, <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcu047>
- Bursell, M. (2021). Perceptions of discrimination against Muslims. A study of formal complaints against public institutions in Sweden, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(5), 1162-1179, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1561250
- Byberg, I. (2002). *Kontroll eller handlingsfrihet? – En studie av organiseringens betydelse i socialbidragsarbetet*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Stockholm University, Department of Social Work.
- Byers, B., & Zeller, R. (1998). Measuring subgroup variation in social judgment research: A factorial survey approach. *Social Science Research*, 27(1), 73–84.
- Bäckman, O., and Bergmark, Å. (2011). Escaping welfare? Social assistance dynamics in Sweden. *Journal Of European Social Policy*, 21(5), 486-500.
- Callegari, J., Liedgren, P., & Kullberg, C. (2022). The making of the indebted wo/man: gendered constructions of fiscal identities and help-giving technologies in Swedish budget and debt counselling. *Nordic Social Work Research*, 12(1), 122–142.
- Carlsson, M. (2010). Experimental evidence of discrimination in hiring of first- and second-generation immigrants. *Labour*, 24(3): 263–278. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9914.2010.00482.x>
- Carlsson, R., Agerström, J. (2015). *Methodological issues in predicting discrimination from attitudes, prejudices, and stereotypes*. Working paper series: Linnaeus University Centre for Labour Market and Discrimination Studies; 2015:12.
- Carpentier, S. (2016). *Lost in transition? Essays on the Socio-Economic Trajectories of Social Assistance Beneficiaries in Belgium*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Antwerp]. Antwerp: University of Antwerp.

- Collet, B., (2017). How European Immigration Policies Interfere with Transnational Couples' Citizenship. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 48(3), 381.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Dahl, M., & Krog, N. (2018). Experimental evidence of discrimination in the labour market: Intersections between ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status. *European Sociological Review*, 34(4), 402–417–417. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1093/esr/jcy020>
- Dahlberg, M., Edmark, K., Hansen, J., & Mörk, E. (2009). Fattigdom i folkhemmet: Från socialbidrag till självförsörjning. IFAU Rapport 2009:4. Retrieved from <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-88574>
- Dellgran, P., & Höjer, S., (2005). Rörelser i tiden. Professionalisering och privatisering i socialt arbete. *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, (13).
- de los Reyes, P. (1998). Det problematiska systerskapet: om 'svenskheter' och 'invandrarskap' inom svensk genushistorisk forskning (The problematic sisterhood: the construction of 'Swedishness' and 'immigrant status' in Swedish gender history). *Historisk Tidskrift*, 118: 335–356.
- de los Reyes (ed.). (2014) *Inte bara jämställdhet: Intersektionella perspektiv på hinder och möjligheter i arbetslivet*. SOU 2014:34. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- De Wilde, M. (2018). *Between legislation and realisation comes implementation: The effect of the multi-layered implementation process on social policy outcomes*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Antwerp]. Antwerp: University of Antwerp.
- De Wilde, M., Meuleman, B., & Abts, K. (2018). *In a category of their own? A multigroup SEM comparison of the welfare state attitudes of social workers and the general public*. Working Papers No. 18/11, Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy, University of Antwerp, <https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:hdl:wpaper:1812>.
- De Wilde, M., & Marchal, S. (2019). Weighing up Work Willingness in Social Assistance: A Balancing Act on Multiple Levels. *European Sociological Review*, 35(5), 718–737.
- Duvander, A.-Z., & Ferrarini, T. (2013). *Sweden's family policy under change: Past, present, future*. Retrieved from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung website: <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-200324>
- Duvander, A.-Z., & Viklund, I. (2019). How long is a parental leave and for whom? An analysis of methodological and policy dimensions of leave length and division in Sweden. *International Journal of*

- Sociology and Social Policy*. Epub ahead of print.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-06-2019-0108>
- Eliassi, B. (2015). Constructing cultural Otherness within the Swedish welfare state: The cases of social workers in Sweden. *Qualitative Social Work*, 14(4), 554-571.
- Eliassi, B. (2017). Conceptions of Immigrant Integration and Racism Among Social Workers in Sweden. *Journal Of Progressive Human Services*, 28(1), 6-35.
- Ellingsæter, A. L., Kitterød, R. H., & Østbakken, K. M. (2020). Immigrants and the ‘caring father’: Inequality in access to and utilisation of parental leave in Norway. *Ethnicities*, 20(5), 959–982.
- Ellis, K. (2007). Direct Payments and Social Work Practice: The Significance of “Street-Level Bureaucracy” in Determining Eligibility. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 37(3), 405-422.
- Erlandsson, A. (2022). *Gender, Parenthood, Ethnicity and Discrimination in the Labor Market : Experimental Studies on Discrimination in Recruitment in Sweden*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Department of Sociology, Stockholm University.
- Esping, H. (1994). *Ramlagar i förvaltningspolitiken*. (1. uppl.) Stockholm: SNS.
- Eurostat. (2021). *Migrant integration statistics — 2020 edition*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. DOI: 10.2785/373334
- Evans, T., and Harris, J. (2004). Street-Level Bureaucracy, Social Work and the (Exaggerated) Death of Discretion. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 34(6), 871–895.
- Evans, S.C., Roberts, M.C., Keeley, J.W., Blossom, J.B., Amaro, C.M., Garcia, A.M. ..., Reed, G.M. (2015). Vignette methodologies for studying clinicians’ decision-making: Validity, utility, and application in ICD-11 field studies. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology*, 15 (2), 160-170
- Fahlgren, S. & Sawyer, L. (2005). Maktrelationer och normaliseringsprocesser i välfärdsstaten. *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, 2-3, 95-106
- Feldman, R., Sussman, A. L., & Zigler, E. (2004). Parental leave and work adaptation at the transition to parenthood: Individual, marital, and social correlates. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 25(4), 459-479.
- Ferrarini, T., & Duvander, A.-Z. (2010). Earner-Carer Model at the Crossroads: Reforms and Outcomes of Sweden’s Family Policy in Comparative Perspective. *International Journal of Health Services*, 40(3), 373–398.
- Ferrarini, T., Nelson, K., Palme, J., & Sjöberg, O.. (2012). Sveriges socialförsäkringar i jämförande perspektiv. En institutionell analys

- av sjuk-, arbetsskade- och arbetslöshetsförsäkringarna i 18 OECD-länder 1930 till 2010. Retrieved from Parlamentariska socialförsäkringsutredningen website:
<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-189499>
- Fording, R.C., Soss, J., & Schram, S.F. (2011). Race and the Local Politics of Punishment in the New World of Welfare. *American Journal of Sociology*, 116(5), 1610-1657
- Forslund, A., & Liljeberg, L. (2021). *Unga som varken arbetar eller studerar: En beskrivning av gruppen och effekter av insatser för att möta problemet*. IFAU Rapport 2021:12. Uppsala: Ehof Grafiska AB.
- Foster, C. H. (2008). The welfare queen: Race, gender, class, and public opinion. *Race, Gender & Class*, 15(3/4), 162-179.
- Fraser, N. (1987). Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation. *Hypatia*, 2(1), 103–121.
- Fraser, N., & Gordon, L. (1994). A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State. *Signs*, 19(2), 309–336.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174801>
- Frazer, H., & Marlier, E. (2016). *Minimum income schemes in Europe. A study of national policies*. European Social Policy Network (ESPN). Brussels: European Commission.
- Friedrich, B., Laun, L., & Meghir, C. (2021). “Earnings dynamics of immigrants and natives in Sweden 1985–2016”, Working Paper Series 2021:15, IFAU - Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy.
https://ideas.repec.org/p/hhs/ifauwp/2021_015.html
- Fritzell, J., Gähler, M., & Neremo, M. (2007). Vad hände med 1990-talets stora förlorargrupper? Välfärd och ofärd under 2000-talet. *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 14(2–3), 110–133.
- Fuertes, V., McQuaid, R. W., & Heidenreich, M. (2021). Institutional logics of service provision: The national and urban governance of activation policies in three European countries. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 31(1), 92–107. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1177/0958928720974178>
- Fäldt, J., & Kullberg, C. (2012). Implications of male and female same-gender dyads. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 38(5), 712–726.
- García, M. and Kazepov, Y. (2002) Why some people are more likely to be on social assistance than others, in: C. Saraceno (Ed.) *Social Assistance Dynamics in Europe*, pp. 127-172. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Girardi, S., Pulignano, V., & Maas, R. (2019). Activated and included? The social inclusion of social assistance beneficiaries engaged in “public works.” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 39(9/10), 738–751. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1108/IJSSP-01-2019-0023>

- Gielens, E., Roosma, F. and Achterberg, P. (2019), Deservingness in the eye of the beholder: A vignette study on the moderating role of cultural profiles in supporting activation policies. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 28(4): 442-453. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12392>
- Gilens, M. (1999). *Why Americans hate welfare: race, media, and the politics of antipoverty policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Germundsson, N. (2022). Promoting the digital future: the construction of digital automation in Swedish policy discourse on social assistance, *Critical Policy Studies*, DOI:10.1080/19460171.2021.2022507
- Gofen, A. (2014). Mind the Gap: Dimensions and Influence of Street-Level Divergence. *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory*, 24(2), 473–493.
- Grell, P., Ahmadi, N., & Blom, B. (2013). Hur inverkar organisationsstrukturen på socialtjänstens klientarbete? En sammanfattning av kunskapsläget. *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 20(3–4), 222–240.
- Grunow, D., & Evertsson, M. (2016). *Couples' Transitions to Parenthood*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Grönlund, A., & Fairbrother, M. (2022). No escape from tradition?: Source country culture and gendered employment patterns among immigrants in Sweden. *International Journal of Sociology*, 52(1), 49–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2021.1978192>
- Gschwind, L., Ratzmann, N., & Beste, J. (2021). Protected against all odds? A mixed-methods study on the risk of welfare sanctions for immigrants in Germany. *Social Policy & Administration*. 56(4). DOI: 10.1111/spol.12783.
- Gunnarsson, E. (2002). The Vulnerable Life Course: Poverty and Social Assistance among Middle-aged and Older Women. *Ageing and Society*. 22(6), 709-728. DOI: 10.1017/S0144686X02008978.
- Gunnarsson, Å. (2016). *Introducing independent income taxation in Sweden in 1971*. FairTax Working Paper Series No. 2. Retrieved from Umeå universitet website: <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-120827>
- Gunnarsson, Å., & Eriksson, M. (2017). Eliminating the secondary earner bias. Policy lessons from the introduction of partial individual taxation in Sweden in 1971. *Nordic Tax Journal*, 1, 89-99. DOI: 10.1515/ntaxj-2017-0006.
- Gustafsson, B. (2013). Social Assistance among Immigrants and Natives in Sweden. *International Journal of Manpower*, 34(2), 126–141.
- Gustafsson, B. & Zheng, J. (2006), Earnings of Immigrants in Sweden, 1978 to 1999. *International Migration*, 44: 79-117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2006.00365.x>
- Gustafsson, B., Hydén, L-C. & Salonen, T. (1990). *Beslut om socialbidrag i storstäder* (rapport nr 141). Stockholm: Stockholms socialförvaltning, FoU-Byrån.

- Gustafsson, B., Mac Innes, H., & Österberg, T. (2019). Older people in Sweden without means: on the importance of age at immigration for being 'twice poor'. *Ageing & Society*, 39(6), 1172-1199.
- Götz, N. (2004). "The Modern Home Sweet Home." In Almqvist, K., & Glans, K. (eds.) *The Swedish Success Story?* (pp. 97–107, 300–302.). Stockholm: Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation,
- Hainmueller, J., Hangartner, D., & Yamamoto, T. (2015). Validating Vignette and Conjoint Survey Experiments Against Real-World Behavior. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(8), 2395-2400. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1416587112>
- Hammarstedt, M., & Ekberg, J. (2004). Unemployment compensation and the use of social assistance among second-generation immigrants in Sweden. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 13(3), 254–265.
- Hammarstedt, M. & Shukur, G. (2006), Immigrants' Relative Earnings in Sweden — A Cohort Analysis. *Labour*, 20(2), 285-323. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9914.2006.00339.x>
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.2307/3178066>
- Harrits, G.S. (2019). Stereotypes in Context: How and When Do Street-Level Bureaucrats Use Class Stereotypes?. *Public Administration Review*, 79(1): 93-103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12952>
- Harrits, G.S. & Østergaard Møller, M. (2011). Categories and categorization: Towards a comprehensive sociological framework. *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*. 12. DOI: 10.1080/1600910X.2011.579450.
- Hasenfeld, Y. (ed.) (2010). *Human services as complex organizations*. (2. ed.) Los Angeles: Sage.
- Hedegaard, T. F. (2014). Stereotypes and welfare attitudes: a panel survey of how 'poor Carina' and 'lazy Robert' affected attitudes towards social assistance in Denmark. *Nordic Journal of Social Research*, 5. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.7577/njsr.2078>
- Hobson, B. (1990). No Exit, No Voice: Women's Economic Dependency and the Welfare State. *Acta Sociologica*, 33(3), 235–250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000169939003300305>
- Hobson, Barbara. (2004). The Individualised Worker, the Gender Participatory and the Gender Equity Models in Sweden. *Social Policy and Society*. 3(1), 75-83. DOI: 10.1017/S1474746403001519.
- Hooks, Bell (1981). *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Hort, S. (2014). *Social policy, welfare state and civil society in Sweden. Volume I: History, policies and institutions 1884–1988*. Lund: Arkiv Förlag.

- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Hughes, R. and Huby, M. (2002) The Application of Vignettes in Social and Nursing Research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 37(4), 382–386. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2002.02100.x>
- Hydén, L.-C., Kyhle Westermarck, P., & Stenberg, S.-Å. (1995). *Att besluta om socialbidrag. En studie i 11 kommuner*. Stockholm: Socialstyrelsen.
- Håkansson, H. (2016) *Vad får socialsekreterarna att stanna? En forskningsöversikt om arbetssituationen och påverkansfaktorer som gör att man stannar kvar i yrket som socialsekreterare inom ekonomiskt bistånd*. FoU i väst. <https://goteborgsregionen.se/download/18.2c9665f617704cb69f39fe/1612361280626/Vad%20f%C3%A5r%20socialsekreterarna%20att%20stanna.pdf>
- Idevall Hagren, K. (2022) Othering in discursive constructions of Swedish national identity, 1870–1940, *Critical Discourse Studies*, 19:4, 384–400, DOI: 10.1080/17405904.2021.1918195
- Johansson, H. (2001). *I det sociala medborgarskapets skugga: rätten till socialbidrag under 1980- och 1990-talen*. [Doctoral dissertation, Lund University]. Lund: Lunds universitet.
- Johansson, H., & Hvinden, B. (eds.) (2007). *Citizenship in Nordic welfare states: Dynamics of choice, duties and participation in a changing Europe*. Routledge.
- Johansson, H., Panican, Angelin, A. and Koch, M. (2013). *Combating Poverty in Europe: Multi-level, Multi-dimensional and Multi-stakeholder Models in Local Active Inclusion Policies*. Oldenburg: University of Oldenburg, Jean Monnet Centre for Europeanisation and Transnational Regulations. Institute for Social Sciences.
- Johansson, H., & Panican, A. (ed.) (2016). *Combating Poverty in Local Welfare Systems*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Johansson Sevä, I. (2009). *Welfare state attitudes in context: local contexts and attitude formation in Sweden*. [Doctoral dissertation, Umeå University]. Umeå: Department of Sociology, Umeå University.
- Junestav, M. (2004). *Arbetslinjer i svensk socialpolitisk debatt och lagstiftning 1930-2001*. [Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University]. Uppsala: Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Kallio, J., & Kouvo, A. (2015). Street-level Bureaucrats' and the General Public's Deservingness Perceptions of Social Assistance Recipients in Finland. *Social Policy & Administration*, 49(3), 316–334. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1111/spol.12094>
- Kangas, O. (Eds.), *Changing Social Equality: The Nordic Welfare Model in the 21st Century* (pp. 69–88). Bristol: Policy Press. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1332/policypress/9781847426604.003.0004>

- Keiser, L. R. (2010). Understanding Street-Level Bureaucrats' Decision Making: Determining Eligibility in the Social Security Disability Program. *Public Administration Review*, 70(2), 247–257.
- Keiser, L. R., Mueser, P. R., & Choi, S.-W. (2004). Race, bureaucratic discretion, and the implementation of welfare reform. *American Journal of Political Science*, 48, 314–327.
- Keskinen, S., Tuori, S., Irni, S., & Mulinari, D. (Eds.). (2009). *Complying with colonialism : Gender, race and ethnicity in the nordic region*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Khosravi, S. (2012). White Masks/Muslim Names: Name Changes among Muslim Immigrants in Sweden. *Race & Class*, 53(3), 65–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396811425986>
- Kim, J. W., & Choi, Y. J. (2013). Feminisation of poverty in 12 welfare states: Consolidating cross-regime variations?. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(4), 347-359.
- Kjellbom, P. (2014). *Påtvingad avflyttning från bostad: en rättssociologisk studie av socialtjänstens roll i teori och praktik*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet.
- Kjellbom, P. (2017). Barns rätt till rätt(en) vid vräkning och andra påtvingade avflyttningar från bostad. In Hall, P., & Pelling, L. (eds.) *Rätten till rättvisa. Om utsatta människors rättigheter och tillgång till rättvisa*. Falun: Scandbook.
- Knize, V. J. (2021). What Gender-Neutral Activation? Understanding the Gender Sanction Gap in Germany's Welfare System, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxab037>
- Knotz, C. M., Gandenberger, M. K., Fossati, F., & Bonoli, G. (2022). A Recast Framework for Welfare Deservingness Perceptions. *Social Indicators Research*, 159(3), 927-943–943. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1007/s11205-021-02774-9>
- Kootstra, A. (2016). Deserving and Undeserving Welfare Claimants in Britain and the Netherlands: Examining the Role of Ethnicity and Migration Status Using a Vignette Experiment. *European Sociological Review*, 3, 325-338
- Kootstra, A. (2017). *The new undeserving poor: An experimental study of welfare chauvinism in Britain and the Netherlands*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Manchester].
- Korkmaz, S. (2021). *Youth intimate partner violence in Sweden: prevalence and young people's experiences of violence and abuse in romantic relationships*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm university]. Stockholm: Stockholm university.
- Korpi, W. and Palme, J. (1998). The Paradox of Redistribution and Strategies of Equality: Welfare State Institutions, Inequality, and

- Poverty in the Western Countries. *American Sociological Review* 63(5): 661-687.
- Kreitzer, R. J., Maltby, E. A., & Smith, C. W. (2022). Fifty shades of deservingness: an analysis of state-level variation and effect of social constructions on policy outcomes. *Journal of Public Policy*, 42(3), 436-464-464. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1017/S0143814X21000222>
- Kuivalainen, S., & Nelson, K. (2011). Eroding minimum income protection in the Nordic countries? Reassessing the Nordic model of social assistance. In Kvist, J. Fritzell, J., Hvinden, B., &
- Kullberg, C. (2004). Work and Social Support: Social Workers' Assessments of Male and Female Clients' Problems and Needs. *Affilia: Journal of Women & Social Work*, 19(2), 199-210. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1177/0886109903262759>
- Kullberg, C. (2005). Differences in the Seriousness of Problems and Deservingness of Help: Swedish Social Workers' Assessments of Single Mothers and Fathers. *British Journal of Social Work*, 35(3), 373-386.
- Kullberg C, & Fäldt J. (2008). Gender differences in social workers' assessments and help-giving strategies towards single parents. *European Journal of Social Work*, 11(4), 445-458. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1080/13691450802075659>
- Kübler, D., Schmid, J., & Stüber, R. (2018). Gender Discrimination in Hiring Across Occupations: A Nationally-Representative Vignette Study. *Labour Economics*, 55, 215-229. DOI: 10.1016/j.labeco.2018.10.002.
- Laenen, T. (2020). *Welfare deservingness and welfare policy: popular deservingness opinions and their interaction with welfare state policies*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Larsen, C. A. (2008a). The political logic of labour market reforms and popular images of target groups. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 18(1), 50-63-63. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1177/0958928707084451>
- Larsen, C. A. (2008b). The Institutional Logic of Welfare Attitudes: How Welfare Regimes Influence Public Support. *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(2), 145-168.
- Leinonen, J., & Toivanen, M. (2014). Researching in/visibility in the Nordic context: Theoretical and empirical views. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 4(4), 161-167.
- Lens, V. (2006). Work Sanctions Under Welfare Reform: Are They Helping Women Achieve Self-Sufficiency?. *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy*, 13(1), 255-284.
- Lens, V. (2008). Welfare and Work Sanctions: Examining Discretion on the Front Lines. *Social Service Review*, 82(2), 197-222. DOI: 10.1086/589706

- Lewis, J. (1992). Gender and the Development of Welfare Regimes. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 2(3), 159.
- Lindellee, J., & Berglund, T. (2022). The Ghent system in transition: unions' evolving role in Sweden's multi-pillar unemployment benefit system. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 28(2), 211–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10242589221080885>
- Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-level bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public services*. (30th anniversary expanded ed.) New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lister, R. (2015). 'To count for nothing': Poverty beyond the statistics: British Academy Lecture read 5 February 2015. British Academy Lectures 2014-15. *Journal of the British Academy*, 3, 139-165. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.5871/bacad/9780197265987.003.0005>
- Lotta, G., & Pires, R. (2019). Street-level bureaucracy research and social inequality. In Hupe, P. (ed.), *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy* (pp. 86-101). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Lundberg, L., & Bergmark, Å. (2021). Self-perceived competence and willingness to ask about intimate partner violence among Swedish social workers. *European Journal of Social Work*, 24(2), 189–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1540970>
- Lundqvist, Å. (2011). *Family policy paradoxes: Gender equality and labour market regulation in Sweden, 1930-2010*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Lundqvist, Å. (2017). *Transforming gender and family relations: How active labour market policies shaped the dual earner model*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Pub.
- Lødemel, I., & Moreira, A. (Eds.). (2014). *Activation or workfare? Governance and the neo-liberal convergence*. Oxford University Press.
- Ma, L., Andersson, G., Duvander, A.-S., & Evertsson, M. (2020). Fathers' uptake of parental leave: Forerunners and laggards in Sweden, 1993-2010. *Journal of Social Policy*, 49(2), 361–381.
- Mattsson, T. (2014). Intersectionality as a Useful Tool: Anti-Oppressive Social Work and Critical Reflection. *Affilia*, 29(1), 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109913510659>
- Marchal, S., Kuypers, S., Marx, I., & Verbist, G. (2021). But what about that nice house you own? The impact of asset tests in minimum income schemes in Europe: An empirical exploration. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 31(1), 44–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928720970134>
- Martinsson, L., Griffin, G., & Nygren, G. (2016). *Challenging the Myth of Gender Equality in Sweden*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Marttila, A., Whitehead, M., Canvin, K. and Burström, B. (2010), Controlled and dependent: experiences of living on social assistance in Sweden.

- International Journal of Social Welfare, 19: 142-151.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2009.00638.x>
- Marx, I., Salanauskaite, L., & Verbist, G. (2016). For the Poor, but Not Only the Poor: On Optimal Pro-Poorness in Redistributive Policies. *Social Forces*, 95(1), 1–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24754263>
- Maynard-Moody, S., & Musheno, M. (2003). *Cops, Teachers, Counselors: Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service*. University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.11924>
- McCall, L. (2005). The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs*, (3), 1771-1800.
- McEachrane, M. (2018). Universal Human Rights and the Coloniality of Race in Sweden. *Human Rights Review*, 19, 471–493.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-018-0510-x>
- Mennerick, L. A. (1974). Client Typologies: A Method of Coping with Conflict in the Service Worker-Client Relationship. *Sociology of Work & Occupations*, 1(4), 396–418. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1177/073088847400100403>
- Merton, R.K. (1940). Bureaucratic structure and personality. *Social Forces*, 18(4), 560-568
- Meuleman, B., Roosma, F., & Abts, K. (2020). Welfare deservingness opinions from heuristic to measurable concept: The CARIN deservingness principles scale. *Social Science Research*, 85.
<https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2019.102352>
- Minas, R. (2005). *Administrating poverty: studies of intake organization and social assistance in Sweden*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Minas, R., Jakobsen, V., Kauppinen, T., Korpi, T., & Lorentzen, T. (2018). The governance of poverty: Welfare reform, activation policies, and social assistance benefits and caseloads in Nordic countries. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 28(5), 487–500.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928717753591>
- Monnat, S. M. (2010). The Color of Welfare Sanctioning: Exploring the Individual and Contextual Roles of Race on TANF Case Closures and Benefit Reductions. *Sociological Quarterly*, 51(4), 678–707.
<https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2010.01188.x>
- Morissens, A. (2006). Immigrants, Unemployment, and Europe’s Varying Welfare Regimes. In C. A. Parsons & T. M. Smeeding (Eds.), *Immigration and the Transformation of Europe* (pp. 172–199). Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press
- Morissens, A., & Sainsbury, D. (2005). Migrants’ social rights, ethnicity and welfare regimes. *Journal of Social Policy*, 34(4), 637–660. DOI: 10.1017/S0047279405009190
- Mussida, C., Sciulli, D. (2022). The dynamics of poverty in Europe: what has changed after the great recession?. *The Journal of Economic Inequality*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10888-022-09527-9>

- National Board of Health and Welfare [NBHW]. (2017). Instruktion för registrering av ekonomiskt bistånd – för handläggare av och ansvariga för ekonomiskt bistånd. Stockholm: NBHW. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/kunskapsstod/2017-1-26.pdf>
- National Board of Health and Welfare [NBHW]. (2018a). *Kartläggning av socialtjänstens arbete med ekonomiskt bistånd ur ett jämställdhetsperspektiv. Delredovisning av regeringsuppdrag*. Stockholm: NBHW. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/ovrigt/2018-11-7.pdf>
- National Board of Health and Welfare [NBHW]. (2018b). *Statistik om ekonomiskt bistånd 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/statistik/2018-11-12.pdf>
- National Board of Health and Welfare [NBHW]. (2021a). *Försörjningshinder och ändamål med ekonomiskt bistånd 2020*. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/statistik/2021-10-7600.pdf>
- National Board of Health and Welfare [NBHW]. (2021b). *Ekonomiskt bistånd. Handbok för socialtjänsten*. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/handbocker/2021-5-7389.pdf>
- National Board of Health and Welfare [NBHW]. (2022). *Statistik om ekonomiskt bistånd 2021*. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/statistik/2022-6-7999.pdf>
- Nelson, K. (2003). *Fighting Poverty: Comparative Studies on Social Insurance, Means-tested Benefits and Income Redistribution*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Swedish Institute for Social Research.
- Nelson, K. (2004). *Mechanisms of Poverty Alleviation*, No 372, LIS Working papers, LIS Cross-National Data Center in Luxembourg, <https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:lis:liswps:372>.
- Nelson, K. (2008). Minimum Income Protection and European Integration: Trends and Levels of Minimum Benefits in Comparative Perspective, 1990–2005. *International Journal of Health Services*, 38(1), 103–124. <https://doi.org/10.2190/HS.38.1.f>
- Nelson, K. (2010). Social assistance and minimum income benefits in old and new EU democracies. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 19, 367–378.
- Nelson, K. (2013). Social Assistance and EU Poverty Thresholds 1990–2008. Are European Welfare Systems Providing Just and Fair

- Protection Against Low Income? *European Sociological Review*, 29(2), 386–401.
- Nord, T. (2018). *Arbete som rättighet eller skyldighet: Föreställningar om arbetsmarknadsfrånvaro i välfärdsstaten*. (Doctoral dissertation, Karlstad university). Karlstad: Karlstad university.
- Nordling, V., & Persdotter, M. (2021). Bordering through destitution: the case of social assistance to irregularised migrants in Malmö, Sweden. *Nordic Social Work Research*, 11(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2021.1940246>
- Nyberg, A. (2012). Gender Equality Policy in Sweden: 1970s–2010s. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 2(4), 67–84.
<https://doi.org/10.19154/njwls.v2i4.2305>
- Nyberg, A. (2014). *Delmål 2: Ekonomisk Jämställdhet (Exklusive Utbildning) Underlag till Jämställdhetsutredningen (U2014:06)*. Stockholm: SOU.
- Nybom, J. (2011). Activation in social work with social assistance claimants in four Swedish municipalities. *European Journal of Social Work*, 14(3), 339–361.
- Nybom, J. (2012). *Aktivering av socialbidragstagare: om stöd och kontroll i socialtjänsten*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Nybom, J. (2013). Activation and “coercion” among Swedish social assistance claimants with different work barriers and socio-demographic characteristics: What is the logic? *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(1), 45–57. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2011.00858.x>
- Nygren, K., Walsh, J. C., Ellingsen, I. T., & Christie, A. (2021). Gender, Parenting and Practices in Child Welfare Social Work? A Comparative Study from England, Ireland, Norway and Sweden. *British Journal of Social Work*, 51(6), 2116–2133. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa085>
- O’Connor, J. S. (1993). Gender, Class and Citizenship in the Comparative Analysis of Welfare State Regimes: Theoretical and Methodological Issues. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 44(3), 501–518.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/591814>
- Obućina, O. (2014). Paths into and out of poverty among immigrants in Sweden. *Acta Sociologica*, 57(1), 5–23.
- OECD/European Union (2018), *Settling In 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration*. OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264307216-en>.
- Orloff, A.S. (1993). Gender and the Social Rights of Citizenship. The Comparative Analysis of Gender Relations and Welfare states. *American Sociological Review*, 58(3), 303–328.
- Orloff, A. (2009). Gendering the Comparative Analysis of Welfare States: An Unfinished Agenda. *Sociological Theory*, 27(3), 317–343.

- Ovesen, N. (2021). *Intimate partner violence and help-seeking in lesbian and queer relationships: challenging recognition*. [Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala university]. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Paju, J. (2019). Internal coordination of social security in Sweden. *European Journal of Social Security*, 21(2), 174–182.
- Panican, A. & Ulmestig, R. (2016). Social rights in the shadow of poor relief – social assistance in the universal Swedish welfare state. *Citizenship Studies*, 20(3-4), 475-489. DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2016.1139053
- Panican, A., & Ulmestig, R. (2019). Vad är nytt? - kunskapssammanställning av kommunal arbetsmarknadspolitik. *Arbetsmarknad & Arbetsliv*, 25(3–4), 108–128.
- Parsland, E., & Ulmestig, R. (2021). Gendered Activation at the Expense of Gender Equality?: Activation and Gender Equality as Competing Logics in the Swedish Welfare State. *Affilia*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08861099211045977>
- Pedersen, M., Stritch, J., & Thuesen, F. (2018). Punishment on the Frontlines of Public Service Delivery: Client Ethnicity and Caseworker Sanctioning Decisions in a Scandinavian Welfare State. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(3), 339-354. DOI: 10.1093/jopart/muy018.
- Perlinski, M., Blom, B., & Morén, S. (2013). Getting a sense of the client: Working methods in the personal social services in Sweden. *Journal of Social Work*, 13(5), 508–532. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017311435047>
- Petersen, M. B., Slothuus, R., Stubager, R., & Togeby, L. (2011). Deservingness versus values in public opinion on welfare: The automaticity of the deservingness heuristic. *European Journal of Political Research*, 50(1), 24–52. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2010.01923.x>
- Potter, W. J. , & Levine-Donnerstein, D. (1999). Rethinking validity and reliability in content analysis. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 27(3), 258-284.
- Pringle, K. (2010). Swedish welfare responses to ethnicity: the case of children and their families, *European Journal of Social Work*, 13(1), 19-34, DOI: 10.1080/13691450903135659
- Proposition 1979/80:1. *Om socialtjänsten*.
- Proposition 1996/97:124. *Ändring i socialtjänstlagen*.
- Prottas, J. M. (1979). *People processing: the street-level bureaucrat in public service bureaucracies*. Lexington: Lexington Books.
- Pålsson, D., & Wiklund, S. (2021). A Policy Decoupled from Practice : Children’s Participation in Swedish Social Assistance. *British Journal of Social Work*, 52(2), 964–981. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab089>

- Raaphorst, N. (2017). *Uncertainty in Bureaucracy: Toward a Sociological Understanding of Frontline Decision Making*. [Doctoral dissertation, Leiden University].
- Raaphorst, N. (2018). How to prove, how to interpret and what to do? Uncertainty experiences of street-level tax officials. *Public Management Review*, 20(4), 485-502, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2017.1299199
- Raaphorst, N., Van de Walle, S. (2018) A signaling perspective on bureaucratic encounters: How public officials interpret signals and cues. *Social Policy & Administration*. 52(7): 1367– 1378. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12369>
- Ranerup, A., and H. Z. Henriksen. (2020). Digital Discretion: Unpacking Human and Technological Agency in Automated Decision Making in Sweden’s Social Services. *Social Science Computer Review*. 1–17. doi:10.1177/0894439320980434.
- Raso, J. (2017). Displacement as Regulation: New Regulatory Technologies and Front-Line Decision-Making in Ontario Works. *Canadian Journal of Law & Society*, 32(1), 75-96.
- Ratzmann, N. (2021). Deserving of Social Support? Street-Level Bureaucrats’ Decisions on EU Migrants’ Benefit Claims in Germany. *Social Policy and Society*, 20(3), 1-12. DOI: 10.1017/S1474746421000026.
- Reeskens, T., & van der Meer, T. (2019). The inevitable deservingness gap: A study into the insurmountable immigrant penalty in perceived welfare deservingness. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 29(2), 166–181.
- Rich, C. (2016). Reclaiming the welfare queen: feminist and critical race theory alternatives to existing anti-poverty discourse. *Southern California Interdisciplinary Law Journal*, 25(2), 257-288.
- Ridgeway, C. L., & Kricheli-Katz, T. (2013). Intersecting Cultural Beliefs in Social Relations: Gender, Race, and Class Binds and Freedoms. *Gender & Society*, 27(3), 294–318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243213479445>
- Rooth, D-O., & Ekberg, J. (2003). Unemployment and Earnings for Second Generation Immigrants in Sweden – Ethnic Background and Parent Composition. *Journal of Population Economics*, 16(4), 787-814.
- Rothstein, B. (1986). *Den socialdemokratiska staten. Reformer och förvaltning inom svensk arbetsmarknads- och skolpolitik*. [Doctoral dissertation, Lund University]. Lund: Lund University
- Rothstein, B. (1998). State Building and Capitalism: The Rise of the Swedish Bureaucracy. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 21(4): 287-306. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.1998.tb00016.x>
- Sainsbury, D. (1999). Gender and Social Democratic Welfare States. In *Gender and Welfare State Regimes*, ed. Sainsbury, D. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Sainsbury, D. (2019). Policy constructions, immigrants' social rights and gender: The case of Swedish childcare policies. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 29(2), 213–227. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1177/0958928718762311>
- Sainsbury, D., & Morissens, A. (2010). 'Sweden: The Feminization of Poverty?' In *Poor Women in Rich Countries: The Feminization of Poverty over the Life Course* (pp. 28–60).
- Samuelsson, E. (2015). Substance Use and Treatment Needs: Constructions of Gender in Swedish Addiction Care. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 42(3): 188-208.
- Schadauer, A. (2022). The racialization of welfare support as means to further welfare state cutbacks - spillover effects in survey populations and media reports in Austria. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 45(16), 308–334. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1080/01419870.2022.2080511>
- Schall, C.E. (2012). (Social) Democracy in the Blood? Civic and Ethnic Idioms of Nation and the Consolidation of Swedish Social Democratic Power, 1928–1932. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 25(3): 440-474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.2012.01428.x>
- Schall, C.E.. (2016). *The Rise and Fall of the Miraculous Welfare Machine: Immigration and Social Democracy in 20th Century Sweden*. New York: Ithaca.
- Schneider, A., & Ingram, H. (1993). Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy. *The American Political Science Review*, 87(2), 334–347. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2939044>
- Schram, S.F., Soss, J., Fording, R.F., & Houser, L. (2009). Deciding to Discipline: Race, Choice, and Punishment at the Frontlines of Welfare Reform. *American Sociological Review*, 74(3), 398.
- Schütze, C., & Johansson, H. (2020). The importance of discretion for welfare services to minorities: Examining workload and anti-immigration attitudes. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 79(4), 426–443. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1111/1467-8500.12410>
- SFS 2001:453. *Socialtjänstlag*. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/socialtjanstlag-2001453_sfs-2001-453
- Shamshiri-Petersen, D. and Krogh, C. (2020). Disability Disqualifies: A Vignette Experiment on Danish Employers' Intentions to Hire Applicants with Physical Disabilities. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 22(1), 198–209. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.661>
- Skogens, L. (2012). Approaching drinking problems in single male clients receiving social assistance. *European Journal of Social Work*, 15(2), 257–274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2010.516496>

- Skrondal, A. and Rabe-Hesketh, S. (2010). *Multilevel Modelling*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Snijders, T A B (2004). Multilevel analysis. In: Lewis-Beck, M S, Bryman, A, Futing Liao, T (eds) *The SAGE encyclopedia of social science research methods* (pp. 673–677). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Soss, J., Fording, R. C., & Schram, S.F. (2008). The Color of Devolution: Race, Federalism, and the Politics of Social Control. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(3), 536.
- Soss, J., Fording, R.C., & Schram, S.F. (2011). The organization of discipline: From performance management to perversity and punishment. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 21(suppl. 2), i203-i232.
- Spierings, N. (2012). The inclusion of quantitative techniques and diversity in the mainstream of feminist research. *European Journal Of Womens Studies*, 19(3), 331-347.
- Stanfors, M. (2019). Familjen i välfärdspolitiken. *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift*. 26(3-4), 257-281. 10.3384/SVT.2019.26.3-4.3090.
- Statistics Sweden [Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB]. (2010). *Könsstruktur per utbildning och yrke 1990-2030*. Stockholm: SCB.
- Statistics Sweden [Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB]. (n.d.). *Employees 16-64 years at national level by occupation (4-digit SSYK 2012), orientation of education (SUN 2000), age and sex. Year 2014 - 2018* [Dataset]. Retrieved September 8th, 2022 from https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/START__AM__AM0208__AM0208E/YREG52/
- Statistics Sweden [Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB]. (2016). *En av tre födda utanför EU i risk för fattigdom i Sverige*. Retrieved from: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/2016/En-av-tre-fodda-utanfor-EU-i-risk-for-fattigdom-i-Sverige/>
- Statistics Sweden [Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB]. (2018). *På tal om kvinnor och män. Lathund om jämställdhet 2018*. Stockholm: SCB
- Statistics Sweden [Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB]. (2019). *Sverige har lägre materiell fattigdom än de flesta andra länder i EU. Statistiknyhet från SCB 2019-10-16 9.30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/levnadsforhallanden/levnadsforhallanden/undersokningarna-av-levnadsforhallanden-ulf-silc/pong/statistiknyhet/namnlos/>

- Statistics Sweden [Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB]. (2020). *At-risk-of-poverty rate by country of birth and number of years in Sweden 1991-2020*. Retrieved January 16th, 2023 from <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/household-finances/income-and-income-distribution/income-and-tax-statistics/pong/tables-and-graphs/income--consumption-unit-the-entire-country/at-risk-of-poverty-rate-by-country-of-birth-and-number-of-years-in-sweden-1991-2020/>
- Storm, P. (2018). *Betydelsen av kön och hudfärg i äldreboendets vardag under olika organisatoriska villkor*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Stockholm university
- Stranz, H. (2007). *Utrymme för variation*. [Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University]. Stockholm: Stockholm university.
- Stranz, H. (2019). Med oddsden på sin sida? Om bedömningen av rätten till ekonomiskt bistånd. In Hjorth, T. (ed.) *Det yttersta skyddsnätet: om arbete med socialbidrag* (pp. 131–152).
- Stranz, H., & Minas, R. (2019). Styrning, specialisering och sortering: om organiseringen av arbetet med ekonomiskt bistånd. In Hjort, T. (ed.), *Det yttersta skyddsnätet: om arbete med socialbidrag* (pp. 105–129). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Stranz, H., & Wiklund, S. (2012). Risk factors of long-term social assistance reciprocity among lone mothers. The case of Sweden. *European Journal of Social Work, 15*(4), 514–531.
- Stranz, H., Wiklund, S., & Karlsson, P. (2016). People processing in Swedish personal social services : On the individuals, their predicaments and the outcomes of organisational screening. *Nordic Social Work Research, 6*(3), 174–187.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2015.1134630>
- Stranz, H., Karlsson, P., & Wiklund, S.. (2017). The wide-meshed safety net: Decision-making on social assistance eligibility in Sweden. *European Journal of Social Work, 20*(5), 711–723.
- Svallfors, S. (1999). Välfärdsregimer och välfärdsopinioner: En jämförelse mellan åtta västländer / Welfare regimes and welfare opinions — a comparison of eight Western countries. *Sociologisk Forskning, 36*(1), 93–119.
- Svallfors, S. (2016). Politics as organised combat – New players and new rules of the game in Sweden. *New Political Economy, 21*(6), 505–519, DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2016.1156662
- Svensson, L. G. (2012). Profession, organisation, kollegialitet och ansvar. *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift, 18*(4), 301–319.
- Swedish Research Council [Vetenskapsrådet]. (2019). *Act on responsibility for good research practice and the examination of research misconduct* (2019:504).
- Terum, L., Torsvik, G., & Øverbye, E. (2018). Discrimination Against Ethnic Minorities in Activation Programme? Evidence from a

- Vignette Experiment. *Journal of Social Policy*, 47(1), 39-56.
doi:10.1017/S0047279417000113
- Tervola, J., Mesiäislehto, M., & Ollonqvist, J. (2022). Smaller net or just fewer to catch? Disentangling the causes for the varying sizes of minimum income schemes. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12553>
- Tervola, J., Duvander, A.-Z., & Mussino, E. (2017). Promoting Parental Leave for Immigrant Fathers-What Role Does Policy Play? *Social Politics*, 24(3), 269–297.
- Tham, P. & Lynch, D. (2019). ‘Lost in transition?’ – Newly educated social workers’ reflections on their first months in practice, *European Journal of Social Work*, 22(3), 400-411, DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2017.1364701
- Tham, P., Lynch, D. (2021). ‘Perhaps I should be working with potted plants or standing in the fish counter instead?’: Newly educated social workers' reflections on their first years in practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 24(3): 541-553.
- Thomann, E., van Engen, N., & Tummers, L. (2018). The Necessity of Discretion: A Behavioral Evaluation of Bottom-Up Implementation Theory. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(4), 583–601. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1093/jopart/muy024>
- Thomann, E., & Rapp, C. (2018). Who Deserves Solidarity? Unequal Treatment of Immigrants in Swiss Welfare Policy Delivery. *Policy Studies Journal*, 46(3), 531–552. <https://doi-org.ezp.sub.su.se/10.1111/psj.12225>
- Thorén, K.H. (2008). Activation policy in action: A street-level study of social assistance in the Swedish welfare state. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago]. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Thun, C. (2015). Inclusive and Women-friendly in a time of Diversity? The Scandinavian citizenship regime – the ‘childcare lesson’. *Nordic Journal of Social Research*, 6.
- Tollin, K. (2011). Sida vid sida: En studie av jämställdhetspolitikens genealogi 1971-2006 (PhD dissertation, Atlas Akademi). Retrieved from <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-63851>
- Trägårdh, L. (2020), The Swedish social contract. *IPPR Progressive Review*, 27(19), 28-38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/newe.12196>
- Tussing, A.D. (1974). The dual welfare system. *Society*, 11(2), 50–58. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02695193>
- Ulmestig, R., & Eriksson, M. (2017). Financial consequences of leaving violent men: Women survivors of domestic violence and the social assistance system in Sweden. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(4), 560–571.
- van Oorschot, W. (2000). Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public. *Policy*

- & *Politics*, 28(1), 33–48.
<https://doi.org/10.1332/0305573002500811>
- van Oorschot, W. (2006). Making the difference in social Europe: deservingness perceptions among citizens of European welfare states. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 16(1), 23–42.
- van Oorschot, W., Roosma, F., Meuleman, B. & Reeskens, T. (eds.) (2017). *The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare: Attitudes to Welfare Deservingness*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Van Parys, L. (2019). Specifying the dependent variable in street-level bureaucracy research. In Hupe, P. (ed.), *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy* (pp. 49-69). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Wahlström Henriksson, H. & Goedecke, K. (eds.) (2021). *Close relations: family, kinship, and beyond*. Singapore: Springer.
- Wallander, L. (2012). Measuring Social Workers' Judgements: Why and How to use the Factorial Survey Approach in the Study of Professional Judgements. *Journal of Social Work*, 12(4), 364-384.
- Wason, K.; Polonsky, M., & Hyman, M. (2002). Designing vignette studies in marketing. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 10(3), 41-58. DOI: 10.1016/S1441-3582(02)70157-2.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Welander, J., Astvik W., & Isaksson, K. (2017). Corrosion of trust: violation of psychological contracts as a reason for turnover amongst social workers, *Nordic Social Work Research*, 7:1, 67-79, DOI: 10.1080/2156857X.2016.1203814
- Weiss, G.I., Gal, J. (2007), Social workers' attitudes towards social welfare policy. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 16(4), 349-357. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2397.2007.00492.x
- Weiss, N. & Gren, N. (2021). Mission Impossible? : The Moral Discomfort among Swedish and Norwegian Welfare Bureaucrats Encountering Refugees. *Nordisk Vårldsforsknin / Nordic Welfare Research*, 6(3), 192–203.
- Wells, M. & Bergnehr, D. (2014). Families and family policies in Sweden, pp. 91-107. In Robila, M. (ed.), *Handbook of Family Policies Across the Globe*. New York: Springer.
- Wolgast, S., Molina, I. & Gardell, M. (2018). *Antisvart rasism och diskriminering på arbetsmarknaden: Skillnader mellan afrosvenskar och den övriga befolkningen i bruttolön, disponibel inkomst och möjlighet att göra karriär på den svenska arbetsmarknaden*. Rapport 2018:21. Stockholm: Länsstyrelsen Stockholm.
- Yelland, L.N., Salter, A.B., Ryan, P. and Makrides, M. (2011), Analysis of binary outcomes from randomised trials including

- multiple births: when should clustering be taken into account?.
Paediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology, 25: 283-297.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-3016.2011.01196.x>
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2011). *Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging*. Institut for Kultur og Globale Studier, Aalborg Universitet. FREIA's tekstserie No. 75
<https://doi.org/10.5278/freia.58024502>
- Zagel, H., Hubgen, S., & Nieuwenhuis, R. (2022). Diverging Trends in Single-Mother Poverty across Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom: Toward a Comprehensive Explanatory Framework. *Social Forces*, 101(2), 606–638.
- Zou, G. (2004). A modified poisson regression approach to prospective studies with binary data. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 159(7):702-6. doi: 10.1093/aje/kwh090. PMID: 15033648.

Appendixes

Appendix 1. Questionnaire, decision-making data

A. Bakgrund

OBS! Om inte annat anges avser samtliga frågor förhållanden som gällde vid tidpunkten när utredningen inleddes.

1. Klientens kön

- kvinna
- man

2. Födelseår

19.....

3. Födelseland

- född i Sverige
- född i annat land, vilket.....

4. Familjesituation

- gift/sambo
- ensamstående
- annat, vad.....

5. Hemmavarande barn?

- ja,..... stycken
- nej

5a. Om "ja" på fråga 5

Ange barnets/barnens ålder/åldrar

6. Hur bor klienten?

- bostadsrätt/äganderätt (villa/radhus) el motsv.
- hyresrätt, första hand
- hyresrätt, andra hand
- inneboende
- bostadslös
- annat, vad

B. Utbildning, sysselsättning och inkomster

7. Klientens högsta avslutade utbildning

- ej genomgått/färdigställt grundskola
- grundskola 9 år el. folkskola
- gymnasial utbildning högst 2-årig

- gymnasial utbildning 3-4 år
- KY/YH-utbildning (kvalificerad yrkesutbildning)
- universitets-/högskoleutbildning kortare än 3 år
- universitets-/högskoleutbildning 3 år eller längre

- vet ej

8. Vad var klientens huvudsakliga sysselsättning *månaden innan* utredningen påbörjades?

- heltidsarbetande
- deltidsarbetandetimmar/vecka (ca)
- studerande, vid
 - Komvux el motsv.
 - universitet/högskola
 - andra studier, vad
- SFI
- arbetsmarknadsåtgärd
- arbetsträning
- arbetslös
- sjukskriven
- föräldraledig
- pensionär (inkl. sjukersatta)
- annat, vad.....

Om klienten inte heltidsarbetade/-studerade:

8a. När heltidsarbetade klienten senast (år)

har aldrig heltidsarbetat

8b. Aktivt arbetssökande ja nej

8c. Ersatt från A-kassa ja nej

8d. Om klienten inte mottog ersättning från A-kassa, vad var skälet till detta?

ej medlem utförsäkrad karenstid

annat skäl, vad.....

Försörjningssituation (uppgifterna avser månadsinkomster/-ersättningar vid söktillfället)

9. Skattepliktiga inkomster **efter skatt**

- inkomst från lön kronor
- arbetslöshetsersättning kronor
- aktivitetsstöd kronor
- aktivitetsersättning kronor
- utvecklingsersättning kronor
- sjukpenning kronor
- sjukersättningkronor

- föräldrapenning kronor
- annan beskattad inkomst, ange typ kronor

skattepliktiga inkomster saknades under aktuell månad

10. Bidrag, ersättningar och eventuella sparade medel

- bostadsbidragkronor
- bostadstilläggkronor
- studielån kronor
- studiebidrag kronor
- barnbidrag kronor
- underhållsbidrag kronor
- underhållsstöd kronor
- skattefritt vårdbidragkronor
- andra bidrag, vilka kronor
- sparade medel (el motsv.) kronor

inkomster från bidrag och ersättningar saknades under aktuell månad

C. Tidigare aktualitet

11. Har klienten tidigare varit aktuell för ekonomiskt bistånd i kommunen?

- ja
- nej

Om "ja" på fråga 11

11a. Första gången klienten var ett nytt ärende avseende ekonomiskt bistånd i kommunen var

år..... månad.....

11b. När var klienten *senast* aktuell för ekonomiskt bistånd i kommunen (söktilfälle 201203 och eventuella därefter följande söktilfällen undantagna)?

år..... månad.....

12. Befann sig klienten i någon form av arbetsmarknadsåtgärd vid utredningens inledande?

- ja
- nej

Om "ja" på fråga 12

12a. Hur länge har han/hon gjort det?

..... månader

13. Var klienten aktuell vid andra enheter inom IFO vid utredningens inledande?

- ja, hon/han var aktuell vid (flera svar möjliga)
- missbruks-/vuxenenhet
 - barn-/ungdomsenhet (med avseende på klienten själv)
 - barn-/ungdomsenhet (med avseende på egna barn)
 - annan enhet, vilken.....
- nej

14. Har klienten tidigare varit aktuell för ekonomiskt bistånd i någon annan kommun?

- ja
- nej
- vet ej

D. Aktualisering, handläggning och bistånd

15. Var utreddes och handlades ärendet?

- enhet för ekonomiskt bistånd (el motsv.)
- särskild enhet/verksamhet för mottagning av nya ärenden
- specialiserad utrednings/myndighetsenhet
- integrerad enhet (barna- och/eller missbrukarvård ingår)
- annan enhet, var
.....

Om ärendet handlades vid särskild enhet/verksamhet för mottagning av nya ärenden

15a. Hänvisades klienten till enhet för ekonomiskt bistånd (el motsv.)?

- ja
- nej
- nej, det sker om klienten är fortsatt aktuell efter.....

månader

16. Vem ansvarade för utredningen och handläggningen av ärendet?

- socialsekreterare
- SOFT-/administrativ handläggare el motsv.
- sektionschef/1:e socialsekreterare, gruppchef el motsv.

17. Hade klienten kontakt med någon av följande myndigheter/organisationer när utredningen inleddes (flera alternativ kan anges)?

- arbetsförmedling
- försäkringskassa
- somatisk vårdgivare
- psykiatri
- beroendemottagning
- kvinnojour
- annan organisation/myndighet/enhet, vilken
.....

nej, klienten hade inte kontakt med någon annan myndighet/organisation

vet ej

18. Föranledde utredningen att klienten fick kontakt med någon av följande myndigheter/organisationer (flera alternativ kan anges)?

arbetsförmedling

försäkringskassa

somatisk vårdgivare

psykiatri

beroendemottagning

kvinnojour

annan organisation/myndighet/enhet,

vilken.....

nej, klienten fick inte kontakt med någon annan myndighet/organisation

19. Inleddes utredningen med anledning av att klienten själv kontaktade enheten?

ja

nej

Om ”nej”, hur initierades utredningen?

via annan IFO-enhet i denna kommun, vilken (OBS! gäller ej mottagningsenhet el motsv.)?

missbruks-/vuxenenhet

barn-/ungdomsenhet (med avseende på klienten själv)

barn-/ungdomsenhet (med avseende på egna barn)

annan enhet, vilken.....

via annan enhet/avdelning/instans, vilken

annat, hur

.....

20. Hur stort belopp ansökte klienten om?..... kronor

21. Beviljades ekonomiskt bistånd ja, kronor nej

22. Ledde utredningen till att någon annan form av insats beviljades?

ja

nej

Om ”ja” på fråga 22

Vilken/vilka insatser beviljades?

22a. Arbetsmarknadsåtgärd? ja nej

22b. Annan insats, vilken/vilka?
.....

23. Föranledde utredningen att klienten fick kontakt med annan enhet inom IFO?

- ja
- nej

Om "ja" på fråga 23

Vilken av följande enheter hänvisades klienten till? (flera svar kan anges)

- missbruks-/vuxenenhet
- barn-/ungdomsenhet (med avseende på klienten själv)
- barn-/ungdomsenhet (med avseende på egna barn)
- annan enhet, vilken

.....

24. Användes någon form av bedömningsinstrument (t ex ASI, det sk "Instrument X") i utredningen?

- ja
- nej

Om "ja" på fråga 24

24a. Vilket/vilka instrument användes?

.....

Värdera instrumentet/det vanligast använda instrumentet:

24b. I vilken utsträckning tycker du att
.....(ange instrument) underlättade din
bedömning av klientens behov?

- i mycket stor utsträckning
- i ganska stor utsträckning
- i ganska liten utsträckning
- inte alls

På vilket sätt underlättades/underlättades inte bedömningen?

.....

Om ytterligare instrument användes, värdera det näst vanligaste:

24c. I vilken utsträckning tycker du att
.....(ange instrument) underlättade din
bedömning av klientens behov?

- i mycket stor utsträckning
- i ganska stor utsträckning
- i ganska liten utsträckning
- inte alls

På vilket sätt underlättades/underlättades inte bedömningen?

.....

E. Problembilder och hjälpbehov

25. Vänligen, markera förekomsten av olika psykosociala/hälsorelaterade problem hos klienten (flera alternativ kan anges):

Missbruk, av

- alkohol
- narkotika
- läkemedel
- spel
- annat,

vad.....

Psykisk problematik, i form av (ange problem) som är:

- diagnostiserad (styrkt via läkarintyg)
- ej diagnostiserad (skattad av klient/socialarbetare)

Somatisk problematik, i form av (ange problem) som är

- diagnostiserad (styrkt via läkarintyg)
- ej diagnostiserad (skattad av klient/socialarbetare)

Övrig problematik, i form av

- bostadslöshet
- skuldproblem
- våldsutsatt
- annan problematik, vad

.....

26. Hur sannolikt tror du att det är att klienten kommer att vara aktuell vid denna IFO-enhet om 6 månader?

- inte alls
- ganska osannolikt
- ganska sannolikt
- mycket sannolikt

27. Hur sannolikt tror du att det är att klienten kommer att vara aktuell vid denna IFO-enhet om 1 år?

- inte alls
- ganska osannolikt
- ganska sannolikt
- mycket sannolikt

Plats för synpunkter eller kommentarer

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Appendix 2. Vignette, couple household (four versions with name manipulation)

The complete vignette with specified income and expenditure for the couple is presented together with the questionnaire in Appendix 3 (where version 1 is used as example).

Version 1 – Swedish-sounding names, mother changing from work to parental leave ('gender-traditional' family roles)

Jenny är 31 år och arbetar deltid som vårdbiträde. Hon är sammanboende med Gustav, som är arbetslös, och de har ett gemensamt barn som är tio månader gammalt. Under barnets tre första månader tog båda ut föräldrapenning, och därefter har Gustav varit hemma och uppburit föräldrapenning (fyra månader på sjukpenningnivå och tre månader på lägstanivå) medan Jenny har arbetat. Gustav saknar SGI. Paret har nu 90 dagar med föräldrapenning på sjukpenningnivå kvar, och har gemensamt beslutat att Jenny ska ta ut dessa, medan Gustav söker jobb. Gustav saknar rätt till ersättning från A-kassa och Arbetsförmedling. Detta innebär att deras gemensamma inkomster reduceras markant. Paret ansöker om försörjningsstöd på grund av inkomstbortfallet vid Jennys föräldraledighet.

Version 2– Arabic-sounding names, mother changing from work to parental leave ('gender-traditional' family roles)

Fatima är 31 år och arbetar deltid som vårdbiträde. Hon är sammanboende med Ahmed, som är arbetslös, och de har ett gemensamt barn som är tio månader gammalt. Under barnets tre första månader tog båda ut föräldrapenning, och därefter har Ahmed varit hemma och uppburit föräldrapenning (fyra månader på sjukpenningnivå och tre månader på lägstanivå) medan Fatima har arbetat. Ahmed saknar SGI. Paret har nu 90 dagar med föräldrapenning på sjukpenningnivå kvar, och har gemensamt beslutat att Fatima ska ta ut dessa, medan Ahmed söker jobb. Ahmed saknar rätt till ersättning från A-kassa och Arbetsförmedling. Detta innebär att deras gemensamma inkomster reduceras markant. Paret ansöker om försörjningsstöd på grund av inkomstbortfallet vid Fatimas föräldraledighet.

Version 3 – Swedish-sounding names, father changing from work to parental leave ('non-traditional' family roles)

Gustav är 31 år och arbetar deltid som vårdbiträde. Han är sammanboende med Jenny, som är arbetslös, och de har ett gemensamt barn som är tio månader gammalt. Under barnets tre första månader tog båda ut föräldrapenning, och därefter har Jenny varit hemma och uppburit föräldrapenning (fyra månader på sjukpenningnivå och tre månader på lägstanivå) medan Gustav har arbetat. Jenny saknar SGI. Paret har nu 90 dagar med föräldrapenning på sjukpenningnivå kvar, och har gemensamt beslutat att Gustav ska ta ut dessa, medan Jenny söker jobb. Jenny saknar rätt till ersättning från A-kassa och Arbetsförmedling. Detta innebär att deras gemensamma inkomster reduceras markant. Paret ansöker om försörjningsstöd på grund av inkomstbortfallet vid Gustavs föräldraledighet.

Version 4 – Arabic-sounding names, father changing from work to parental leave ('non-traditional' family roles)

Ahmed är 31 år och arbetar deltid som vårdbiträde. Han är sammanboende med Fatima, som är arbetslös, och de har ett gemensamt barn som är tio månader gammalt. Under barnets tre första månader tog båda ut föräldrapenning, och därefter har Fatima varit hemma och uppburit föräldrapenning (fyra månader på sjukpenningnivå och tre månader på lägstanivå) medan Ahmed har arbetat. Fatima saknar SGI. Paret har nu 90 dagar med föräldrapenning på sjukpenningnivå kvar, och har gemensamt beslutat att Ahmed ska ta ut dessa, medan Fatima söker jobb. Fatima saknar rätt till ersättning från A-kassa och Arbetsförmedling. Detta innebär att deras gemensamma inkomster reduceras markant. Paret ansöker om försörjningsstöd på grund av inkomstbortfallet vid Ahmeds föräldraledighet.

Appendix 3. Vignette, couple household + questionnaire

Fall 7

Jenny är 31 år och arbetar deltid som vårdbiträde. Hon är sammanboende med Gustav, som är arbetslös, och de har ett gemensamt barn som är tio månader gammalt. Under barnets tre första månader tog båda ut föräldrapenning, och därefter har Gustav varit hemma och uppburit föräldrapenning (fyra månader på sjukpenningnivå och tre månader på lägstanivå) medan Jenny har arbetat. Gustav saknar SGI. Paret har nu 90 dagar med föräldrapenning på sjukpenningnivå kvar, och har gemensamt beslutat att Jenny ska ta ut dessa, medan Gustav söker jobb. Gustav saknar rätt till ersättning från A-kassa och Arbetsförmedling. Detta innebär att deras gemensamma inkomster reduceras markant. Paret ansöker om försörjningsstöd på grund av inkomstbortfallet vid Jennys föräldraledighet.

Bostad: hyreslägenhet, 3 rum och kök

Inkomster netto:

Föräldrapenning (SGI) 9330 kronor/månad

Bostadsbidrag 1100 kronor/månad

Barnbidrag: 1100 kronor/månad

Utgifter:

Hyra 8150 kronor/månad

42. Ansökan om ekonomiskt bistånd...

- Beviljas, med _____ kronor
- Avslås

43. Finns det någon/några förutsättningar kopplade till beslutet?

- Nej
- Ja, nämligen:

44. Vem/vilka har rätt att fatta beslutet (flera alternativ möjliga):

- Soft-handläggare

- Socialsekreterare
- Sektionschef/1:e socialsekreterare
- Socialnämnd/kommundelsnämnd
- Annan typ av handläggare, vilken:

45. Anser du att det finns utrymme att fatta annat beslut än ovan?

- Nej
- Ja, vilket:

Appendix 4. Vignette, single household (four versions with name manipulation)

The complete vignette with specified income and expenditure for the couple is presented together with the questionnaire in Appendix 5 (where version 1 is used as example).

Version 1 -Swedish-sounding female name

Malin är 37 år och ensamstående. Hon har ett beroende av alkohol och narkotikaklassade mediciner. Malin har uppburit försörjningsstöd sedan en längre tid tillbaka. Hon har kontakt med missbruksenheten och går en 12-stegsbehandling, men missbruksenheten har informerat om att hon inte har kommit på inplanerade möten de senaste två veckorna. Hon har två barn, sju och nio år gamla, vilka bor hos sin pappa. Malin har umgänge varannan helg avtalat via beslut i tingsrätten, men hon har inte träffat barnen på en dryg månad. Hon ansöker om försörjningsstöd inklusive umgängesnorm (totalt fyra dagar) för barnen.

Version 2 - Arabic-sounding female name

Aisha är 37 år och ensamstående. Hon har ett beroende av alkohol och narkotikaklassade mediciner. Aisha har uppburit försörjningsstöd sedan en längre tid tillbaka. Hon har kontakt med missbruksenheten och går en 12-stegsbehandling, men missbruksenheten har informerat om att hon inte har kommit på inplanerade möten de senaste två veckorna. Hon har två barn, sju och nio år gamla, vilka bor hos sin pappa. Aisha har umgänge varannan helg avtalat via beslut i tingsrätten, men hon har inte träffat barnen på en dryg månad. Hon ansöker om försörjningsstöd inklusive umgängesnorm (totalt fyra dagar) för barnen.

Version 3 - Arabic-sounding male name

Mohammed är 37 år och ensamstående. Han har ett beroende av alkohol och narkotikaklassade mediciner. Mohammed har uppburit försörjningsstöd sedan en längre tid tillbaka. Han har kontakt med missbruksenheten och går en 12-stegsbehandling, men missbruksenheten har informerat om att han inte har kommit på inplanerade möten de senaste två veckorna. Han har två barn, sju och nio år gamla, vilka bor hos sin mamma. Mohammed har umgänge varannan helg avtalat via beslut i tingsrätten, men han har inte träffat barnen på en dryg månad. Han ansöker om försörjningsstöd inklusive umgängesnorm (totalt fyra dagar) för barnen.

Version 4 -Swedish-sounding male name

Jonas är 37 år och ensamstående. Han har ett beroende av alkohol och narkotikaklassade mediciner. Jonas har uppburit försörjningsstöd sedan en längre tid tillbaka. Han har kontakt med missbruksenheten och går en 12-stegsbehandling, men missbruksenheten har informerat om att han inte har kommit på inplanerade möten de senaste två veckorna. Han har två barn, sju och nio år gamla, vilka bor hos sin mamma. Jonas har umgänge varannan helg avtalat via beslut i tingsrätten, men han har inte träffat barnen på en dryg månad. Han ansöker om försörjningsstöd inklusive umgängesnorm (totalt fyra dagar) för barnen.

Appendix 5. Vignette, single household + questionnaire

Fall 8

Malin är 37 år och ensamstående. Hon har ett beroende av alkohol och narkotikaklassade mediciner. Malin har uppburit försörjningsstöd sedan en längre tid tillbaka. Hon har kontakt med missbruksenheten och går en 12-stegsbehandling, men missbruksenheten har informerat om att hon inte har kommit på inplanerade möten de senaste två veckorna. Hon har två barn, sju och nio år gamla, vilka bor hos sin pappa. Malin har umgänge varannan helg avtalat via beslut i tingsrätten, men hon har inte träffat barnen på en dryg månad. Hon ansöker om försörjningsstöd inklusive umgängesnorm (totalt fyra dagar) för barnen.

Bostad: hyreslägenhet, 2 rum och kök

Inkomster netto:

Bostadsbidrag: 2100 kronor/månad

Utgifter:

Hyra 5140 kronor/månad

46. Ansökan om ekonomiskt bistånd...

- Beviljas, med _____ kronor
- Avslås

47. Finns det någon/några förutsättningar kopplade till beslutet?

- Nej
- Ja, nämligen:

48. Vem/vilka har rätt att fatta beslutet (flera alternativ möjliga):

- Soft-handläggare
- Socialsekreterare
- Sektionschef/1:e socialsekreterare

- Socialnämnd/kommundelsnämnd
- Annan typ av handläggare, vilken:

49. Anser du att det finns utrymme att fatta annat beslut än ovan?

- Nej
- Ja, vilket:

Appendix 6. The vignette study's respondent questionnaire

A. Bakgrundsdata

Vänligen fyll i grundläggande information om din bakgrund.

1. Vilket år är du född? _____
2. Kön: _____
3. Är du född:
 - I Sverige
 - Utanför Sverige
4. Arbetar du i en:
 - Ekonomigrupp
 - Mottagningsgrupp
 - Integrerad grupp
 - Annan, vilken _____
5. Vilken typ av tjänst arbetar du på?
 - Sektionschef / 1:e socialsekreterare
 - Biträdande sektionschef
 - Socialsekreterare
 - SOFT-/ekonomihandläggare
 - Annan typ av tjänst, vilken: _____
6. Vilken **grundutbildning** har du?
 - Socionom
 - Annan universitetsutbildning
 - Gymnasium el motsvarande
 - Annan, vilken: _____
7. Har du deltagit i någon form av utbildning i ekonomiskt bistånd (ej grundutbildning)?
 - Ja
 - Nej
 - Om ja, vad: _____
8. Har du någon annan vidareutbildning i socialt arbete (t. ex. master/magister-, terapeututbildning, etcetera)?
 - Ja
 - Nej
 - Om ja, vad: _____

9. I vilken omfattning arbetar du (anges i % av en heltidstjänst): _____ %
10. Hur stor andel av ditt arbete avser arbete med ekonomiskt bistånd:
_____ %
11. Hur många år har du arbetat med nuvarande arbetsuppgifter i **kommunen**:
_____ år
12. Hur många år har du arbetat med ekonomiskt bistånd (**oavsett** kommun):
_____ år
13. Hur många år har du arbetat med socialt arbete (**oavsett arbetsuppgifter**):
_____ år

B. Uppskattad handläggning under föregående månad

14. Om en ny bidragssökande idag hör av sig till socialkontoret för ett nybesök (ej akut sådant), efter ungefär hur många arbetsdagar kan hen tas emot:
_____ dagar.
15. Ungefär hur många ansökningar om ekonomiskt bistånd har du handlagt under föregående månad: _____ stycken.
16. Ungefär hur många formella avslag har du handlagt under föregående månad:
helt avslag: _____ stycken
delvis avslag: _____ stycken
17. Vem får en ny bidragssökande, som aldrig tidigare varit aktuell inom socialtjänsten, möta vid sitt första besök vid socialkontoret (flera alternativ kan anges)?
- Socialsekreterare som enbart handlägger ekonomiskt bistånd
 - Socialsekreterare i mottagningsgrupp
 - Socialsekreterare som handlägger ekonomiskt bistånd, men inom ramen för annat socialt arbete
 - SOFT-/ekonomihandläggare

Avhandlingar i socialt arbete framlagda vid Stockholms universitet sedan 2005

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Minas, Renate | 2005 |
| Administrating Poverty – Studies of intake organization and social assistance in Sweden. | SSSW 21 |
| Piuva, Katarina | 2005 |
| Normalitetens gränser – En studie om 1900-talets mentalhygieniska diskurser | Rapport 111 |
| Jess, Kari | 2005 |
| Att räkna med nytta – samhällsekonomisk utvärdering av socialt arbete | Rapport 113 |
| Jegermalm, Magnus | 2005 |
| Carers in the Welfare State – On Informal Care and Support for Carers in Sweden | SSSW 23 |
| Börjeson, Martin | 2005 |
| ”Vi vet inte vilka metoder vi ska använda” – om relationen mellan kunskap, praktik och politik när det gäller det sociala arbetet med hemlöshetsfrågor | Rapport 116 |
| Wiklund, Stefan | 2006 |
| Den kommunala barnvården – om anmälningar, organisation och utfall | Rapport 117 |
| Svensson, Lupita | 2006 |
| Häktad eller omedelbart omhändertagen? – en studie om akuta frihetsberövanden av unga lagöverträdare | Rapport 118 |
| Karlsson, Patrik | 2006 |
| Margins of Prevention – On Older Adolescents’ Positive and Negative Beliefs about Illicit Drug Use | SSSW 23 |
| Stranz, Hugo | 2007 |
| Utrymme för variation – om prövning av soialbidrag | Rapport 119 |
| Högdin, Sara | 2007 |
| Utbildning på (o)lika villkor – om kön och etnisk bakgrund i grundskolan | Rapport 120 |
| Backlund, Åsa | 2007 |
| Elevvård i grundskolan – resurser, organisering och praktik | Rapport 121 |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Batljan, Ilija F. | 2007 |
| Demographic and Future Needs for Public Long Term Care and Services among the Elderly in Sweden – The Need for Planning | SSSW 24 |
| Tärnfalk, Michael | 2007 |
| Barn och brott – en studie om socialtjänstens yttranden i straffprocessen för unga lagöverträdare | Rapport 122 |
| Karlsson, Lis-Bodil | 2007 |
| Berättelser om inre röster – ett fenomenologiskt och kommunikativt perspektiv | Rapport 123 |
| Kejerfors, Johan | 2007 |
| Parenting in Urban Slum Areas – Families with Children in a Shantytown of Rio de Janeiro | SSSW 25 |
| Skogens, Lisa | 2007 |
| Hur bemöts manliga socialbidragstagare med alkoholproblem? - regler, kunskap och kontext i socialt arbete | Rapport 124 |
| Meinow, Bettina | 2008 |
| Capturing health in the elderly population: Complex health problems, mortality, and allocation of home-help services | SSSW 26 |
| Tham, Pia | 2008 |
| Arbetsvillkor i den sociala barnvården: förutsättningar för ett kvalificerat arbete | Rapport 128 |
| von Greiff, Ninive | 2008 |
| Ungdomsinriktad alkohol- och drogprevention: förutsättningar, evidens och legitimitet | Rapport 129 |
| Schön, Ulla-Karin | 2009 |
| Kvinnors och mäns återhämtning från psykisk ohälsa | Rapport 130 |
| Andersson Collins, Gunnel | 2009 |
| Vardagsliv och boendestöd: En studie om människor med psykiska funktionshinder | Rapport 131 |
| Östberg, Francesca | 2010 |
| Bedömningar och beslut: Från anmälan till insats i den sociala barnvården | Rapport 134 |
| Fors, Stefan | 2010 |
| Blood on the tracks: Life-course perspectives on health inequalities in later life | SSSW27 |
| Ljungwald, Carina | 2011 |
| The Emergence of the Crime Victim in the Swedish Social Services Act | SSSW28 |
| Schön, Pär | 2011 |
| Gender Matters: Differences and change in disability and health among our oldest women and men | SSSW29 |
| Spånberger Weitz, Ylva | 2011 |

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Ungas erfarenheter av skola, samhällsvård och vuxenblivande: En studie av fem livsberättelser | Rapport 136 |
| Lagerlöf, Hélène | 2012 |
| Samhällsvård och välfärdsresurser: En studie av skolgång, fritid och kamratrelationer bland unga i familjehem och institutioner | Rapport 137 |
| Grosse, Julia | 2012 |
| Kommer tid kommer tillit?: Unga vuxnas och medelålders erfarenheter | Rapport 139 |
| Andersson Vogel, Maria | 2012 |
| Särskilda ungdomshem och vårdkedjor: Om ungdomar, kön, klass och etnicitet | Rapport 140 |
| Nyblom, Jenny | 2012 |
| Aktivering av socialbidragstagare - om stöd och kontroll i socialtjänsten | Rapport 141 |
| Hammare, Ulf | 2013 |
| Mellan löften om särart och krav på evidens: En studie av kunskap och kunskapssyn i socialt inriktade ideella, privata och offentliga organisationer | Rapport 142 |
| Stranz, Anneli | 2013 |
| Omsorgsarbetets vardag och villkor i Sverige och Danmark: Ett feministiskt kritiskt perspektiv | Rapport 144 |
| Erlandsson, Sara | 2014 |
| Hjälp för att bevara eller förändra? Åldersrelaterade diskurser om omsorg, stöd och service. | Rapport 145 |
| Kjellbom, Pia | 2014 |
| Påtvingad avflyttning från bostad: En rättssociologisk studie av socialtjänstens roll i teori och praktik | Rapport 146 |
| Samuelsson, Eva | 2014 |
| Use or Misuse?: Addiction Care Practitioners' Perceptions of Substance Use and Treatment | SSW 31 |
| Skerfving, Annemi | 2015 |
| Barndom och uppväxtvillkor - barn till föräldrar med psykisk ohälsa | Rapport 149 |
| Ulmanen, Petra | 2015 |
| Omsorgens pris i åttioårsåldern: anhörigomsorg för äldre ur ett könsperspektiv | Rapport 150 |
| Björk, Alexander | 2016 |
| Evidence-based practise behind the scenes | SSSW 32 |
| Shanks, Emelie | 2016 |
| Managing social work. Organisational conditions and everyday work for managers in the Swedish social services | SSSW 33 |
| Heap, Josephine | 2016 |
| Living conditions in old age: Coexisting disadvantages across life domains | SSSW34 |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Månsson, Josefin | 2017 |
| Cannabis discourses in contemporary Sweden Continuity and change | SSSW35 |
| Linell, Hanna | 2017 |
| Child protection through an abuse-focused lens. Adolescent victimization and Swedish social services responses | SSSW36 |
| Storm, Palle | 2018 |
| Betydelsen av kön och hudfärg i äldreboendets vardag under olika organisatoriska villkor | Rapport 151 |
| Pålsson, David | 2018 |
| The Prerequisites and Practices of Auditing Residential Care | SSSW 38 |
| von Braun, Therese | 2018 |
| Theorizing the therapeutic process in substance use-related dependency treatment | SSSW 39 |
| Forsman, Hilma | 2019 |
| Addressing poor educational outcomes among children with out-of-home care experience | SSSW 40 |
| Andersson, Peter | 2021 |
| Hot, våld och emotionellt arbete på de särskilda ungdomshemmen | Rapport 152 |
| Heimdahl Vepsä, Karin | 2021 |
| Substance use, pregnancy, and parenthood | SSSW 41 |
| Sibel Korkmaz | 2021 |
| Youth Intimate Partner Violence in Sweden | SSSW 42 |
| Fredrik Brunnström | 2021 |
| Flernivåstyrning med olika medel | Rapport 153 |
| Lisa Andersson | 2022 |
| Addressing youth unemployment: what role for social work - Policy responses to youth unemployment in Sweden and Europe. | SSSW 43 |
| Rebecka Strandell | 2022 |
| Omsorgsarbete i hemtjänsten – förändringar, utmaningar och möjligheter | Rapport 154 |
| Klara Hussénus | SSSW 44 |
| Differentiating the Poor: Patterns of Discrimination in Decision-Making on Social Assistance Eligibility | 2023 |