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ABSTRACT

In all European countries, social assistance receipt is conditional upon the willingness to work. Yet despite the harsh consequences of losing social assistance, we know surprisingly little about how social assistance agencies and social workers implement this policy in day-to-day practice. In this paper, we focus on three important questions regarding the implementation of work willingness as a condition for continued social assistance benefit receipt. First, how does the actual implementation of the work willingness condition take place in light of specific client characteristics, circumstances and behaviour? Second, is the interpretation of such behaviour similar across case managers and municipalities, or does the combination of vague work willingness legislation and a decentralized organisation lead to variation in implementation? Third, can such variation be seen as the express objective of decentralization and personalized work willingness assessments? We build on an innovative and purpose-designed factorial survey of social workers in Belgium. We identified the determinants of 582 social workers' sanction decisions upon a job refusal, clustered in 89 municipalities, on almost 5000 experimentally varied client cases. These unique data allow to distinguish between the effects of individual client characteristics, characteristics of the social workers assessing the individual cases and the characteristics of the local welfare agency and municipality in which she operates. Moreover, we assess how characteristics within and between these levels interact. In line with the literature, we find substantial variation in sanctions related to work unwillingness at the client level, that can be explained by individual client characteristics. Variation between municipalities is relatively limited, and can be fully explained by municipality characteristics. Surprisingly, we find the largest variation at the social worker level. Whereas some of this variation is random, a substantial part can be explained by the characteristics of the social worker. This finding raises concerns about the unintended consequences of the large discretion awarded to social workers within contemporary social assistance schemes.

1   Introduction

In all European countries, social assistance receipt is conditional upon the willingness to work. Legislation allows or even mandates to withdraw or reduce benefits from beneficiaries who fail to demonstrate a motivation to work, for instance by refusing a reasonable job offer (Marchal & van Mechelen, 2017; MISSOC, 2015). Yet despite the harsh consequences of losing social assistance, we know surprisingly little about how social assistance agencies and social workers implement this policy in day-to-day practice (Pavetti, Derr, & Hesketh, 2003; Scott, 1997).

This lack of research is unsurprising as work willingness is not an objective criterion that can be implemented and investigated in a straightforward manner (Heidenreich & Aurich-Beerheide, 2014; van Berkel, 2010a, 2010b; Watkins-Hayes, 2009). Although some guidelines, such as suitable job offer specifications can be listed in legislation, it is impossible to completely prescribe behavioural conditions. Its implementation necessarily hinges on decisions of social assistance beneficiary's case managers, who are trained to translate legislation to individual cases. In addition, social assistance is notoriously decentralized, both for historical reasons and to facilitate taking account of local circumstances (Sabatinelli, 2010). More recently, scholars and policy makers alike have started to see decentralization as an incubator for innovative policies (Kazepov, 2010). In sum, it is fair to expect that the specification and the assessment of behaviour that can be considered as work (un)willingness are to a large extent subject to both the organisation and the social worker that is following the client.

In this paper, we focus on three important questions regarding the implementation of work willingness in social assistance legislation that have so far remained under investigated. First, how does the actual implementation of the work willingness condition take place in light of specific client characteristics, circumstances and behaviour? Second, is the interpretation of such behaviour similar across case managers and municipalities, or does the combination of vague work willingness legislation and a decentralized organisation lead to variation in implementation? Third, can such variation be seen as the express objective of decentralization and personalized work willingness assessments? To open up this black box of social assistance activation policies' implementation, we bring together academic

research streams on conditionality, decentralization, discretion and professionalization (De Wilde & Goos, 2017; Priem, Walters, & Li, 2011; Rice, 2012).

This paper is the first study to quantitatively assess these questions while expressly taking account of the different relevant implementation levels. Past research on the topic generally focused on only one or two levels of decision-making. Examples include descriptions of national or local legislation (e.g., Eleveld, 2016), studies on large-scale register data (e.g., Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011) and evidence in qualitative case studies or in case law on the specific considerations concerning particular cases (e.g. Brodkin, 2011).

A detailed examination of the determinants of work conditionality assessments at different levels is thus far lacking.

We build on an innovative and purpose-designed factorial survey of social workers in Belgium. We identified the determinants of 582 social workers' sanction decisions upon a job refusal, clustered in 89 municipalities, on almost 5000 experimentally varied client cases. These unique data allow to distinguish between the effects of individual client characteristics, characteristics of the social workers assessing the individual cases and the characteristics of the local welfare agency and municipality in which she operates. Moreover, we can assess how characteristics within and between these levels interact. Belgium is a particularly interesting case for an analysis of work willingness implementation as work conditionality is a key factor in federal social assistance legislation. Actual implementation is left to local social assistance agencies and to the professionals handling client cases.

In the following section, we identify for each of these levels likely determinants of the implementation of a work willingness related sanction. Next, we describe the Belgian social assistance scheme. We then present the data and the multi-level method we use to identify the determinants of sanctioning implementation at the client, agency and social worker level, and their interactions. After the presentation and discussion of the results, we conclude.

2 Literature review

It is an open question which considerations at the client, the municipality and the case manager level, may impact on the implementation of work unwillingness sanctions. Social assistance legislation is generally vague on work willingness, so that actual assessments can take individual client characteristics and circumstances into account. Certain characteristics are by most people and in most cases considered as reasons to sanction clients (van Oorschot, Meuleman, Roosma, & Reeskens, 2017), which is what we focus on in the first section. Yet the different levels at which work willingness is assessed may give rise to variation in actual implementation. In the second section, we review the legislator's express intent and acceptance of variation by decentralising policy implementation. The last section focusses on the inevitable variation due to the human case managers applying legislation in real-world cases.

2.1 The assessment of client characteristics

Client characteristics that should or should not lead to sanctions are in some countries to a certain extent detailed in legislation. However, most of the social assistance legislation is aimed at a personalized assessment of a client's individual situation. It can be expected that such an assessment is influenced by the same considerations that apply for the society at large when thinking about solidarity, as a common personal and professional understanding (Jasso, 2006; Keiser, Mueser, & Choi, 2004; B. J. Taylor, 2006; Wallander, 2012).

Such an understanding would be guided by the assessment of 'deservingness' (van Oorschot, 2000). We expect that the need to demonstrate work willingness or to be exempt originates from the traditional deservingness criteria, namely reciprocity, attitude, control, need and identity (De Wilde, 2017; van Oorschot et al., 2017).

There is only little quantitative evidence on how deservingness characteristics are weighted against activity-related infringements and possible exemptions for work willingness in treatment reality. Studies based on administrative data only provide insight into which groups are more often sanctioned. These studies show that sanctioned recipients are often foreign, young, never married, poorly educated, parents, sick, caring for a sick child,

addicted, experiencing domestic violence, long-term welfare recipients, experiencing human capital deficits such as limited education, or have a poor work history and transportation problems (Cherlin, Bogen, Quane, & Burton, 2002; Fording, Soss, & Schram, 2007; Hasenfeld, Ghose, & Larson, 2004; Keiser et al., 2004; Monnat, 2010; Pavetti et al., 2003; Soss et al., 2011; Tabin & Perriard, 2016). Groups that are less often sanctioned are people who are pregnant, (young) parents, disabled, participating in mental health or substance abuse treatment, experiencing domestic violence, have unstable housing, difficulties in finding childcare, are non-native language speakers or enrolled in language courses (Cherlin et al., 2002; Hasenfeld, 2010; Keiser et al., 2004; Maloy, Pavetti, Shin, Darnell, & Scarpulla-Nolan, 1998; Pavetti et al., 2003; Rehwald, Rosholm, & Rouland, 2016; Tabin & Perriard, 2016).

Some of these sanction categories are in line with deservingness criteria, as some of the groups that are more often sanctioned can be seen as having a lower need (e.g. the young), to be more responsible for their situation of need (e.g. addicted), or seen as different (e.g. of foreign background). Also when considering groups that are less often sanctioned, a higher need and less control over one's own situation appear to be characteristics that are taken into account as mitigating factors when deciding upon the implementation of a sanction. Yet for some of the groups with higher sanction rates we would rather expect a more lenient treatment based on the deservingness criteria. The administrative datasets on which these studies build however only include static information, and do not provide information on the activity infringements that gave rise to these sanctions (Keiser et al., 2004). It is conceivable that groups confronted with numerous problems will have more trouble to adhere to activity requirements than others. This indicates the need to assess client characteristics and transgressions in combination when looking into the implementation of work willingness criteria.

Considerations based on client characteristics can be summarised in the following hypotheses:

H1: Sanction treatment in case of work unwillingness depends on the clients' characteristics.

H1a: Client characteristics that reflect a negative (work) attitude and high control over one's own situation increase the client's likelihood to be sanctioned upon a clear manifestation of work unwillingness.

H1b: Elements that make unwillingness to work understandable in line with the deservingness theory will decrease the sanction likelihood.

2.2 Devolution to the local level

In most countries, social assistance policy implementation (and often even policy making) is devolved to the local level. Reasons are manifold, and include increasing the legitimacy of anti-poverty policies (Fording et al., 2007; Kazepov, 2010; Soss et al., 2011), adapting social assistance and activation measures to the local labour market situation (Fording et al., 2007; Kazepov, 2010; Sheely, 2012; Soss, Schram, Vartanian, & O'Brien, 2001; Vandenbroucke, Luigjes, & Lievens, 2016), and opening up opportunities for policy innovation (Kazepov, 2010). This literature leads us to expect that decentralization of social assistance policy implementation will result in local variation in line with these motives to decentralize.

Earlier research has indeed found local variation in social assistance outcomes that can be linked to these explicit aims. Some empirical studies have shown that sanction rates vary in line with the local socio-demographic and economic situation, although the evidence is mixed and direction of the association is unclear (Bell, 2005; Fording et al., 2007; Keiser et al., 2004; Monnat, 2010; Soss et al., 2011; van Oorschot, 2000). Sanction rates do appear to be higher in more conservative regions (Fording et al., 2007) and implementation of activation measures depends on the importance local policy makers attach to it (May & Winter, 2009).

The local level can have an impact in yet another way. Local welfare agencies' organizational structure may differ in ways that are unlikely to be neutral. Blom (2004) highlighted the likely difference between specialized and more generalist teams, arguing that the latter allow for a more holistic view of clients and to consider more aspects of a client's life simultaneously. Other researchers have stressed the importance of decision structures. Structures that allow the case manager, team and team manager to be actively involved in decision making are claimed to have a decreasing impact on sanction decisions (Jessen & Tufte, 2014; Raeymaeckers & Dierckx, 2013). Raeymaeckers & Dierckx (2013) expect such an involvement to boost the case managers' creativity in finding solutions for difficult clients, which would in turn result in fewer sanctions. Other qualitative studies furthermore hint at

the extent to which the importance of work is stressed by the head of the team or by colleagues (Brodkin, 2011; Fording et al., 2007), to the effect of staff workloads and to the complexity of the service delivery system (Fording et al., 2007). Experimenting with these elements can be considered as a local agency's quest for the best strategies to combat poverty. Furthermore, the composition of a team may indirectly influence actual implementation (Rice, 2012).

In sum, we hypothesise that:

H2: There will be variation in work willingness implementation across municipalities.

H2a: This variation can be partly explained by socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the municipality .

H2b: Local implementation of work willingness will be in line with local political preferences.

H2c: The specialisation of case manager teams will increase sanctioning.

H2d: The more involved case managers are in the decision-making process, the lower the implementation of sanctions.

H2e: The local composition of the case manager team and the preferences of the team manager will have an effect.

2.3   The discretion of the case manager

Case managers are important actors with regard to implementation of work willingness (Evans, 2011; Lipsky, 1980). As it is a rather vague eligibility condition, that only to a certain extent can be detailed in legislation, it leaves substantial implementation discretion to social workers. Kazepov and Barberis (2013) term such discretion, that arises from a lack of concrete (or consistent) rules *interpretative discretion*. Whereas leaving important discretion in the hands of individual caseworkers may give rise to substantial variation in work willingness treatment, its main aim is to translate existing legislation to local circumstances in line with client needs. We would therefore expect a tendency towards a general

treatment that mainly depends on client characteristics, and on local circumstances. Remaining variation should then ideally be random.

Qualitative research, however, gives some evidence of explicators that put doubt on the random character of variation at the case manager level. First, several social work scholars acknowledge the likely importance of socio-demographic characteristics of the case manager (Dubois, 2010; Rice, 2012; B. Taylor, 2012), yet they do not provide clear indications that could inform hypotheses. Based on preparatory talks with stake holders and on generation literature, we expect older case managers to sanction less. For one, the more life and work experience case managers have, the more they are aware of the difficulties people in poverty face and the more they reframe non-compliant behaviour. In addition, younger people are more easily influenced by new ideas, so they might be more influenced by the shift towards deservingness considerations in general public opinion (Blomberg, Kroll, Kallio, & Erola, 2013). This contradicts with findings for the general population, where older people are usually more strict (van Oorschot, 2006). Socio-demographic characteristics may also matter as they impact on feelings of identity with the client. The identity hypothesis formulated by Van Oorschot (De Wilde, 2017; van Oorschot et al., 2017) state that we are more likely to help those that are similar to us or have experienced similar problems, as we can more easily imagine ourselves to be in their situation (Krumer-Nevo & Lev-Wiesel, 2005). Second, job related characteristics, such as caseload, work regime, the extent of specialisation, and possibilities for counselling with colleagues or experts are often assumed to have an effect on the preference and behaviour of case manager and, hence, impact on treatment (Bell, 2005; Fording et al., 2007; Godfrey & Yoshikawa, 2012; Hasenfeld et al., 2004; Lipsky, 1980; van Berkel & Knies, 2016). Finally, psychology literature consistently finds that behaviour is to some extent predicted by attitudes linked to this behaviour (Kraus, 1995). When social workers are granted a degree of discretion to assess clients' deservingness in line with legislation and local circumstances, it then only seems logical that their general ideas about the goals and the functioning of the welfare state will influence their actual treatment decisions (Bell, 2005; Blomberg et al., 2013; Brodkin, 2011; Castillo & Becerra, 2012; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; De Wilde, 2016; Reingold & Liu, 2009).

In sum, we expect case managers' characteristics to impact on sanction implementation in the following ways:

H3: There will be variation in work willingness implementation across case managers.

H3a: We expect older case managers to sanction less. Also other socio-demographic characteristics of the case managers may impact on the sanction probability.

H3b: Case managers will sanction clients with characteristics similar to their own less frequently, in line with the identity hypothesis.

H3c: Job characteristics will impact the sanctioning behaviour of case managers.

H3d: Negative welfare state attitudes held by case managers will be associated with more sanctions.

3   The Belgian situation

We test our hypotheses using a purpose-designed survey conducted in Belgium. Social assistance in Belgium is regulated by federal law and implemented by local welfare agencies. In short, federal law guarantees financial assistance, access to a project of social integration, or both, to all adult citizens with the Belgian nationality or a legal residence status who i) are willing to work   , ii) have an income that is below a certain level (Law 'Recht op Maatschappelijke Integratie', 2002, henceforth RMI law). These conditions are assessed by professional social workers at the local (municipal) level. Financing is divided between the federal and the local level, with the federal level responsible for 60% to 100% of the awarded benefits, depending on the local caseload burden.

The RMI law is a framework law in the sense that it does not detail how social workers should interpret the willingness to work is not detailed in the RMI law, (Stranz, Karlsson, & Wiklund, 2016). It states that sanctions for activation related infringements can amount to a suspension or a temporary withdrawal of the benefit. It further refers to reasons for exemption from activation as 'health reasons' or 'fairness reasons', but no clearly described categories are included. The only detailed condition involves enrolment in full-time studies that will improve the client's chances on the labour market. In documents accompanying the RMI-law some examples are added. Health reasons might be invoked in the case of a young drug-addicted person receiving medical care or a pregnant woman exempted from doing

physical labour. A possible 'fairness' reason might involve a single mother with several (perhaps disabled) children and difficulties in transportation (Vande Lanotte, 2002). Clearly, the RMI law leaves important leeway to local regulations and preferences and the professional opinion and assessment of social workers.

At the local level, each Belgian municipality has a social welfare agency headed by a politically composed non-professional board. Decisions about whether claimants are eligible for financial assistance are made by this board – within the framework of the law – based on client files put together by the social workers who are in contact with the claimants. Even though the federal law stipulates a number of fixed elements in the social investigation, municipalities still have considerable freedom in how exactly to organize the process leading up to these files (which are essentially social workers' recommendations on individual cases to the decision board) and the files themselves.

The case managers' tasks may differ between municipalities. In some municipalities the same case manager will guide clients through their entire period at the welfare agency. Elsewhere, tasks are divided, with some case managers being responsible for activation measures, others only for intake, etc. Nonetheless, it is always a qualified social worker (minimally a Bachelor's degree in social work) who prepares the file (with recommendations) for the board. In the preparation of this file, the social worker can use her own discretionary judgement to highlight certain options to move forward with a specific client and to assess the eligibility conditions, including the willingness to work or possible 'health or fairness' reasons.

In sum, both the decentralization and the explicit recognition of the case manager as a qualified professional with important interpretative discretion within the RMI law make Belgium an interesting case to look at the different determinants (and their interaction) of willingness to work implementation.

4 Data and method

4.1 Data

We use a factorial survey carried out in 89 Belgian[1] municipalities among 582 social workers involved in eligibility decision-making. Factorial survey experiments require each respondent to read stories (vignettes) about individuals or situations before rating these individuals or situations. Every vignette consists of several factors (e.g. gender), each with their own levels or categories (e.g. male and female). We asked the respondents to rate experimentally varied vignettes on hypothetical social assistance clients according to the likelihood that they would lose their social assistance benefits if they refused a job offer. Each respondent rated nine vignettes that varied across 14 client characteristics. We selected the vignette attributes on the basis of the existing literature and on interviews with case managers, team leaders and academics (B. Taylor, 2012; Wallander, 2009). The characteristics kept constant in all vignettes were age (22 years), marital status (single), income (none), debts (none), contact with parents (none) and physical health (healthy). The 14 client characteristics that varied concerned socio-demographic characteristics, and characteristics that according to the deservingness literature will impact on case managers' assessment of individual situations, i.e. characteristics pointing at work willingness and possible exemption criteria.

These experimentally varied vignettes were D-efficient[2] distributed over the respondents. The respondents themselves were selected in a two stage (first municipalities, then respondents) stratified probability sample. We invited 105 municipalities, 15 of which declined to participate mainly due to time constraints and one that did not provide enough responses to be included in the research. In the second stage, 839 social workers were invited to fill out the online survey, of which 582 provided a completed questionnaire (see Appendix 1 for more information on the sampling procedure). The survey ran from March to

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[1] All municipalities are located in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Flanders). Results hence refer to the Flemish municipalities. In the text, we discuss the Belgian situation, as all policy levers were at the Belgian or the local level (and not at the regional level) at the time of the survey.

[2] The D-efficient sample consists of an orthogonal design in which, for each factor (e.g. gender), the categories (e.g. male/female) occur as equally often as possible (Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010; Auspurg & Hinz, 2014; De Wilde & Goos, 2017; Dülmer, 2007, 2016).

November 2015. The resulting survey is particularly innovative as it not only includes the respondent's assessments of vignettes, but also information on these respondents and the organisations they work in. This provides us with three different levels of analysis: the experimentally varied client characteristics, the characteristics of the social workers themselves, and those of the local social assistance agencies and municipalities they operate in.

Self-evidently, the vignette method is not without flaws. Questions have been raised about the external validity of the method[3] (Auspurg & Hinz, 2014; B. J. Taylor, 2006; Wallander, 2009). This criticism equally applies to our factorial survey, with the added risk that respondents' answers may lack realism as they were asked to predict the final decision of the political, non-professional board on each specific case rather than their own preferences. Whereas case managers in Belgium do have an impact on this final decision through the case file and case recommendations they formulate (see above), ultimately this decision is not in their hands, which increases the risk of response error. However, we should not overstate this risk. Respondents indicated that they expected the board to follow their legally required advice in 80% of all files. This means that even if the results in the survey are based on what the case manager would advise (rather than on a prediction), this would be close to any practical decision in reality. Even more importantly, a sanction is typically initiated by the case manager: she decides when the work willingness requirement is sufficiently violated to propose a sanction to the decision board (Fording et al., 2007; Pavetti et al., 2003).

4.2   Method

We estimate a multi-level model[4] of the determinants of the respondent's assessment of the likelihood of a sanction for 4700 hypothetical clients with different experimentally varied characteristics after declining the offer of a job that starts early in the morning (5 am)[5].

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[3] Its internal validity is high since the method operates on an experimental basis (B. J. Taylor, 2006; Wallander, 2012) which ensures that no systematic errors occur.

[4] All analyses in this paper were done with the stata software package, runmlwin command.

[5] The analyses were also done for two other dependent variables that indicate the implementation of work willingness requirements: the assessed likelihood of a sanction upon the refusal of a job that only lasts one day,

We include three levels: the client level, the social worker level and the municipal (welfare agency) level.

In

$$y = \alpha + \beta_1 x_{1ijk} + \cdots + \beta_n x_{n\,ijk} + \varepsilon_1 x_{1ijk} x_{2\,ijk} + \cdots + \varepsilon_n x_{n-1\,ijk} x_{n\,ijk} + \gamma_1 x_{1\,jk} + \cdots + \gamma_m x_{m\,jk} + \zeta_1 x_{1\,ijk} x_{1\,jk} + \cdots + \zeta_n x_{n\,ijk} x_{m\,jk} + \delta_1 x_{1k} + \cdots + \delta_p x_{p\,k} + z_k + u_{jk} + e_{ijk}\,,$$

i indexes individual clients, j the social workers, and k the municipal welfare agencies. y then is the likelihood of a sanction upon refusal of the job offer (as perceived by the respondents, see section 4.1), x_{ijk} are the n individual (experimentally varied) characteristics of the hypothetical clients, x_{jk} are the m characteristics of the respondents (the case managers), and x_k are the p characteristics of the municipality. $z_k, u_{jk}\ and\ e_{ijk}$ are the error terms at each level. We estimate the coefficients of the different independent variables x (β at the individual level, γ for the case managers' level and δ for the municipal level). In addition, we include specific interaction terms between different client characteristics (ε) in order to assess whether certain characteristics have a different impact on the likelihood of sanction upon a job refusal when they occur in combination. Finally, we also include interaction terms between the characteristics of the case manager and the hypothetical client, in order to assess the impact of case managers recognizing themselves in clients (ζ).

The model was built in the following way: we first estimated a model without explanatory variables, in order to determine the unexplained variance at each level (Model 1). In a next step, we only included explanatory variables at the client level (Model 2). This second model describes the effect of the perceived unwillingness to work and its interaction with possible exemption criteria over all case managers and municipalities included in the survey. Hence we added all client characteristics (vignette attributes) and all interaction terms between the number of work refusals and the exemption criteria to the original empty three-level Model 1. All client characteristics, including those that were non-significant, remained in the model. We re-excluded the interaction terms that proved not significant.

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and of a job that is not in line with the client's qualifications. Results were broadly in line with those for a job that starts early. The results of these robustness checks are provided in the appendix.

The final model is the result of a stepwise exclusion of variables until we obtained an optimal model fit. In a first step, we entered the independent variables at the second (case manager) and third level (municipality). Next, we step by step excluded variables. For each new model we tested the model fit reduction with a likelihood ratio test. We put the alpha-to-remove significance at 0.1, which means that we re-entered a variable if the model fit worsened with $p < 0.1$ by removing it. This stepwise re-exclusion of variables means that only the highly significant explaining variables are included in our final Model 3. Furthermore, some variables may have an influence, but do not turn out significant, due to low frequency in the respondent sample (e.g. almost no case managers with a foreign background; see Appendix 3 for independent variables with low frequencies). We use z-scores to compare the importance of different variables over the three levels

Table 1 shows the full list of variables that are included in our model, with their expected effect on the dependent variable, i.e. the likelihood of a sanction upon a clear manifestation of work unwillingness (the refusal of a job offer), as predicted by the interviewed social workers. We assess how specific client characteristics are weighted in the implementation of this sanction. These characteristics are selected based on the deservingness criteria, and either show a clear additional (on top of the job refusal) violation of deservingness criteria control, attitude and reciprocity, or hint at characteristics that might excuse the client for his or her job refusal (for instance because the situation of need is deemed beyond the client's control, or the need is very high due to adverse life experiences[6]). Aggravating characteristics when deciding upon a willingness to work sanction can be whether it is the first refusal, or the second or third, whether the client had negative work or activation experiences in the past, and a lack of diligence on one or more occasions without a real explanation for this behaviour.

At the level of the case manager, we assess the impact of socio-demographic characteristics, the impact of job characteristics, and the impact of the case workers' own convictions. Job characteristics include among other things the level of specialization of the job. The specialization variable reflects the number of tasks (out of four: intake, treatment, activation

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[6] Vignettes should be as realistic as possible. Therefore, the adverse life experiences refer to rather detailed circumstances. A full list is provided in appendix 8.2

and management). We also included two latent variables that reflected respondents' views regarding their impact on the decision-making processes in their social assistance agencies. *Decision_eligibility* reflects to what extent case managers, think that they themselves, the team managers and the team are involved in the actual decision concerning eligibility made by the board. *Decision_activation* reflects case managers' view on their impact on the decisions regarding clients' activation trajectories. Finally, we include case managers' opinions on the welfare state. We include straightforward opinion statements (developed by the University of Leuven's Institute for Social and Political Opinion Research), as well as three latent variables, that reflect case managers' views on the consequences of the welfare state (*Welfare State Criticism*, higher values reflect negative opinion about the consequences), on the need for more monitoring of welfare state claimants (*Welfare State Strictness*), and on the likelihood of over-use of different types of benefits (*Welfare State Overuse*) (for a full list of the variables see Appendix 3).

Table 1. Included variables and expected effects on predicted sanctioning likelihood upon job refusal, with for categorical variables the reference category in bold

Level 1 = Client level (n=4785)		
	Number of work refusals (**1**/2/3)	↑
	Motivation (**willing to work**/wants to study/not motivated to work or study)	↓/↑
	Diligence (**yes** / missed one appointment / missed several appointments	↑
	Work experience (**none**/positive/negative)	↓/↑
	Activation experience (**none**/one negative/two negative)	↑
	Parenthood (**no**/healthy child/sick child)	↓
	Housing situation (**stable**/unstable/homeless)	↓
	Mental health (**healthy**/undiagnosed depression/ undiagnosed intellectually disabled)	↓
	Addiction (**none**/slightly/severely)	↓
	Life experiences (**none**/child loss/youth with poverty and abuse)	↓
Interactions between aggravating and mitigating characteristics		?
Level 2 = Case manager level (n=582)		
Socio-demographic characteristics		
	Age	↓
	Other: Gender (**female**/male); Parenthood (**no**/yes); Ethnicity (**both parents born in Belgium**/both born in Europe/at least one born outside Europe); owner (**n**/y); Qualification (**Bachelor's degree**/Master's)	?
Identity hypothesis		
	Interaction terms client and respondent on parenthood, ethnicity, gender and housing	↓
	Experience with long-term unemployment (**no**/yes)	↓
Job characteristics		
	Seniority	↓
	Work regime in percentages	?
Organisational characteristics – measured on the case manager's level		
	Specialisation (number of tasks) (**one**/two/three or four)	↓
	Decision_eligibility	↓
	Decision_activation	↓
	Board follows advice of case manager (1-7)	↓
	Involvement of board in decision making (1-7)	↑
Ideology		
	Primary cause of unemployment (**no control**/laziness)	↑
	Political orientation (1: left – 10 : right)	↑
	Responsibility of welfare of citizens (1: individual – 10 : state)	↓
	WS Criticism / WS Strictness / WS Overuse	↑
Level 3 = municipality/social assistance agency (n=89)		
Socio-demographic characteristics		
	Percentages of social assistance receivers	↓
	Size municipality	↑
	Poverty	↑
	Other: Unemployment; welfare index; percentage inhabitants with foreign background; job centre (**no**/yes); subsidised psycho-social organisation (**no**/yes)	?
Ideology		
	Political party of the chair of the board of the agency (**N-VA**/CD&V/Open VLD/Sp.a/other)	↓
	WS Criticism_munic / WS Strictness_munic / WS Overuse_munic	↑
Organisational characteristics		
	Eligibility_munic	↓
	Activation_munic	↓
	Specialisation (average number of tasks) (**1**/2/3/no clear specialisation pattern)	↓
Team composition		
	Average age social workers	↓
	Other: Percentage female case managers; Percentage case managers with children, average seniority	?

Notes: NVA: nationalist right-wing party ; CD&V: Centrist Christian Democratic party; Open VLD: Centre-right liberal party; Sp.a Centre-left socialist party. Specialization: tasks: intake, activation, treatment, management

At the local level, we include the socio-demographic characteristics of the municipality, the local political views (reflected both by the political party of the chair of the board, and as an additional proxy, the average of the case managers' view on the welfare state), and organizational characteristics of the local welfare agency, including the socio-demographic composition of the team. The organizational characteristics of the local welfare agency include the averages of case managers perception of the decision-making process in the organization (*Eligibility_munic* and *Activation_munic*). Overall specialization in the organization is constructed based on the scores on individual specialization: If most case managers in a municipality fulfilled only one tasks the new variable was scored 1, in the reverse case 3. If there was a lot of variation in the individual specialization variable (1, 2 and 3), the category 'other' was chosen. We furthermore included the averages of the socio-demographic characteristics of the case managers in each local welfare agency.

5 Results

The respondents were asked to estimate the likelihood that hypothetical clients, refusing a job offer that started early in the morning, would be sanctioned in their office. The predicted treatment variation was substantial. The respondents rated the sanction probability on a 7 point scale. On this scale, all answer categories were chosen almost equally often over the entire population of experimental client cases. We first established at which level most of this variation was situated, by estimating a model without independent variables (Model 1). Unexpectedly, the unexplained variance at the municipality level was remarkably small, with only 6% of all variance situated at that level (Table 2, Model 1, Row 4). The unexplained variance at the case manager level was more substantive than expected, lying around 49% (Row 5). The variation at the client level was 45%[7] (Row 6).

In a second model we included several client characteristics that could be interpreted by the social worker to assess whether the manifestation of work unwillingness (the job refusal) is a

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[7] The two last percentages may be respectively an overestimation and an underestimation of up to 11 ppt due to the set-up of the survey, as some of the client characteristics had to be fixed at the case managers' level.

specific circumstance, or part of a more general attitude (see aggravating characteristics in Table 1). Furthermore, this model includes deservingness characteristics that might weaken the effect of apparent work unwillingness.

Respondents predicted that it is not certain that a client will keep his or her benefit if a first job offer is refused. For clients without special characteristics, the likelihood of losing the benefit in such a situation was around 52% (Table 2, Model 2, Row 10), with an increasing likelihood upon repeated refusals. The likelihood of being sanctioned increased to 70% if the client refused for a third time (Table 2, Model 2, Row 22). Not being motivated to work or not being diligent had no significant independent effect (Table 2, Model 2, Row 14-20).

We tested the effect of four potential mitigating factors on sanction likelihood upon work unwillingness. Having a child (-13%) or a child that was often and unexpectedly sick (-19%) strongly decreased the sanction likelihood, but it did not make refusing a job completely acceptable. Neither did the presence of a child mitigate the increasing sanction likelihood upon repeated refusals. Other significant, but small effects result from being homeless (-1%), being depressed (-2%), having (undiagnosed) mental health problems (-4%), and having lost a child in the previous year (-4%). The effect of being addicted is not significant as such, but the interaction term is, which means that the decreasing addiction effect became stronger with the frequency of work refusal.

The next step in the analysis aimed to explain the variation in sanction likelihood among case managers and municipalities by including variables at these levels. Whereas all independent variables listed in Table 1 were initially included in the analyses (see Table 1), for the final model only the variables that could not be excluded without decreasing the model fit were kept (i.e. the final Model 3 – see method section).

Socio-demographic features, be it of the individual case managers, aggregated at the team level, or in interaction with similar client characteristics (in line with the identity hypothesis) had no significant effect on predicted sanction likelihood and are hence not included in Table 2[8]. The demographic and socio-economic situation of the municipality did have some

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[8] In the robustness checks based on alternative job offers (Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix) some socio-demographic variables did turn out significant.

predicting power. First, the larger the town, the less likely it is that its case managers predict sanctioning (Table 2, Model 3, Row 53). Second, the higher the unemployment rate in a municipality, the more often case managers predict sanctioning upon a job refusal (Row 54). Third, the more beneficiaries are participating in an activation measure, the more case managers predict sanctioning (Row 55). Other characteristics, such as the percentage of social assistance claimants or the socio-economic welfare index of a municipality, did not prove significant. A strong predicting variable was the presence of a job centre in the municipality. Case managers in municipalities with a job centre predicted the sanctioning likelihood to be up to 10% lower than their colleagues in other municipalities (Row 56).

Two of the variables connected to the work situation at the case managers' level proved significant. First, a higher seniority decreased the likelihood to predict sanctioning (Row 44). Second, case managers with two types of tasks (intake, treatment, activation or management) predicted more sanctioning than their colleagues with only one type of task (Row 45). The aggregated variable at the municipal level (average specialisation of the case managers team) was also relevant, but in the opposite sense. The less specialised the agency is organised, the less often its case managers predict sanctioning (Row 58 and 59).

The attitudes of the case managers and the political affiliations of the chair of the agency boards were the variables with overall the largest predictive power. Case managers who perceive the welfare state as a system that has a negative influence on citizens (Row 48) or who think that benefit receivers should be more intensively monitored and sanctioned (Row 49) predict more sanctioning. The mean attitudes across all case managers per agency and the attitudes of the head(s) of the case managers' teams (as a proxy for the agency's culture) were not significant. In addition, the political affiliation of the chair of the local welfare agency turned out significant. Sanction predictions were higher in social assistance organizations headed by a representative of the nationalist right-wing party, than those with social-democratic chair persons (Table 2, Model 3 Row 64)[9]. The municipalities with chairs from parties other than the nationalist right-wing party did not significantly differ from each other (not shown in the Table 2).

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[9] This effect was even stronger with regard to the two variables used as robustness checks (see Table 1 in the Appendix).

As a model fit test we calculated the decrease of the unexplained variance discussed in Table 2. The unexplained variance at the case manager level decreased 12 percentage points by including case manager and organisation characteristics, compared to the model with only client characteristics (Table 2, Model 3, Row 5). Moreover, the unexplained variance at the municipality level disappeared after including the independent variables at that level (Row 4). In total, around 26% (Row 7 – 12.74% + 12.79%) of the unexplained variance was explained by adding client, case manager and organisation characteristics.

Table 2. The effect of case manager and agency/municipality characteristics on the likelihood of being sanctioned when refusing a job offer that starts early in the morning, percentages

1	LIKELIHOOD TO BE SANCTIONED	Model1		Model2		Model3	
2		Coef	% of total	Coef	comp to M1	Coef	comp to M2
3	**Variances**						
4	Level 3 = municipality	54.47*	6.02%	51.64*	-5.2%	0	-100%
5	Level 2 = case manager	442.62***	48.92%	405.72***	-8.34%	356.42***	-12.15%
6	Level 1 = client	407.76***	45.06%	332.21***	-18.53%	332.17***	-0.0%
7	Total	904.85	100%	789.57	-12.74%	688.59	-12.79%
8							
9		Coef	z-score	Coef	z-score	Coef	z-score
10	**Intercept**	46.24***	31.69	52.36***	20.77	74.42***	15.33
11							
12	**Level 1 = client characteristics**						
13	**Aggravating characteristics**						
14	Not motivated to work (ref = willing to work)			-0.77	-1.14	-0.78	-1.16
15	Missed one appointment (ref = diligent)			-0.26	-0.22	-0.24	-0.2
16	Missed several appointments (ref = diligent)			-0.85	-0.73	-0.79	-0.68
17	Negative work experience (ref = none)			0.13	0.18	0.12	0.18
18	Positive work experience (ref = none)			0.61	0.88	0.64	0.92
19	One negative activation experience (ref = none)			-0.39	-0.57	-0.34	-0.5
20	Several negative activation exp (ref = none)			-0.69	-1.01	-0.68	-0.99
21	2 work refusals (ref = 1)			11.06***	4.57	11.14	4.87
22	3 work refusals (ref = 1)			17.21***	7.12	17.17	7.45
23	**Mitigating characteristics**						
24	One healthy child (ref = none)			-13.3***	-19.52	-13.33***	-19.56
25	One sick child (ref = none)			-18.65***	-26.88	-18.69***	-26.96
26	Unstable housing (ref = stable housing)			0.35	0.52	0.33	0.5
27	Homeless (ref = stable housing)			-1.46*	-2.12	-1.529*	-2.22
28	Depressed (ref = no mental health problems)			-2.43***	-3.54	-2.4***	-3.5
29	Intellectually disabled (ref = no mental health problems)			-4.05***	-5.58	-4.09***	-5.63
30	Beginning addiction (ref = none)			-0.41	-0.27	-0.43	-0.28
31	Severe addiction (ref = none)			-1.71	-1.07	-1.81	-1.14
32	Lost a child (ref = no special life exp mentioned)			-2.05**	-2.96	-2.12**	-3.05
33	Violent & abusive upbringing (ref = no special life exp)			-0.41	-0.6	-0.44	-0.64
34	**Interaction between work willingness and exemption criteria**						
35	Several missed appointments * beginning addiction			3.34*	2.01	3.33*	2.0

Table 2. The effect of case manager and agency/municipality characteristics on the likelihood of being sanctioned when refusing a job offer that starts early in the morning, percentages - ctd

		LIKELIHOOD TO BE SANCTIONED	Model1		Model2		Model3	
			Coef	z-score	Coef	z-score	Coef	z-score
36		Several missed appointments * severe addiction			1.3	0.77	1.31	0.78
37		2 work refusals * beginning addiction			-1.22	-0.73	-1.19	-0.71
38		2 work refusals * severe addiction			-3.45*	-2.01	-3.39*	-1.98
39		3 work refusals * beginning addiction			0.33	0.2	0.34	0.21
40		3 work refusals * severe addiction			-3.0	-1.74	-2.9	-1.69
41								
42		**Level 2 = Case manager level**						
43		**Job characteristics**						
44		Seniority					-0.29**	-3.17
45		2 tasks of intake, treatment, activation or management (ref = 1)					7.19***	3.43
46		3-4 tasks of intake, treatment, activation or management (ref = 1)					2.49	1.08
47		**Ideology**						
48		*WS Criticism*					5.11**	2.86
49		*WS Strictness*					9.97***	4.21
50								
51		**Level 3 = Municipalities**						
52		**Socio-demographic characteristics**						
53		Number of inhabitants					-0.00004**	-2.95
54		Unemployment rate					0.02***	3.96
55		% beneficiaries in activation					0.29*	2.38
56		Job centre (VDAB) (ref. = no)					-10.31***	-3.97
57		**Organisational characteristics**						
58		Most cm's two tasks (ref = 1)					-5.24*	-1.98
59		Most cm's three or four tasks (ref = 1)					-18.82***	-3.92
60		No clear specialisation pattern (ref = 1)					-6.63*	-2.0
61		**Ideology / party of the chair of the board**						
62		Centrist Christian Democratic party (CD&V) (ref = nationalist right-wing party, N-VA)					-2.09	-0.67
63		Centre-right liberal party (Open VLD) (ref = N-VA)					-1.74	-0.41
64		Centre-left socialist party (Sp.a) (ref = N-VA)					-9.9***	-3.45
65		Other					-10.25*	-2.33
66								
67	N	Municipalities	89		89		89	
68		Case managers	582		582		582	
69		Vignettes	4785		4785		4785	

6   Discussion and conclusion

In this paper we used a factorial survey to assess how rather vague work willingness criteria in the Belgian social assistance legislation are implemented. We investigated which client behaviour or characteristics aggravated or mitigated the implementation of a sanction upon the a clear violation of the work willingness requirement. Law makers in Belgium and Europe explicitly aim for variation with regard to this assessment, as the express purpose of

activation within social assistance is to be tailored to a clients' needs and characteristics. For such a tailor-made assessment, case managers should use their discretionary power (Evans, 2011; Kazepov & Barberis, 2013; Lipsky, 1980), within a local welfare agency that takes account of the local context (Fording et al., 2007; Kazepov, 2010; Soss et al., 2001; Vandenbroucke et al., 2016). This paper is the first to quantitatively assess the determinants of implementation at these three different levels, allowing us to identify and compare the impact of each level vis-à-vis one another.

We expected to find variation on all three levels included in our multilevel model. We hypothesized this variation to be substantial at client and municipality level, and in line with client and municipality characteristics, and present, but mainly random, at the case manager level. In line with our hypothesis (H1), we did find substantial variance at the client level. Sanction treatment is clearly tailored treatment and depends on both the needs and the responsibilities of the client. We found a strong effect of client's behaviour that clearly indicated work unwillingness, namely the refusal of job offers. The likelihood to be sanctioned after a first work refusal is considerable (50%) and it only increases with further work refusals. Exemption criteria, selected in line with the deservingness criteria, have a modest mitigating impact. The largest effect stems from having sick children, but even then the predicted sanction likelihood after one refusal remains around 33%. Other characteristics indicating need or absence of control had almost no effect. The combination of the strong effects of aggravating behaviour, with only a weak mitigating impact of possible exemption criteria - and a quasi-absence of interaction effects between both - might explain the higher sanction rates among vulnerable groups found in administrative registers (Cherlin et al., 2002; Fording et al., 2007; Hasenfeld et al., 2004; Keiser et al., 2004; Monnat, 2010; Pavetti et al., 2003). For these individuals activation infringements might go hand in hand with their higher deservingness. Our study showed that characteristics such as need and lack of control only partly overrule demonstrated work unwillingness in (predicted) sanction decisions.

The variance at the client level that can be explained by specific client characteristics is an indication of a deservingness assessment that is similar across agencies and professionals. As expected, our results also show variation in work willingness assessment at the municipal and the case manager level. At the municipal level, this variation is surprisingly small. Despite a quite strong decentralization in Belgium that should allow for establishing local policies

(Vandenbroucke et al., 2016), municipalities do not appear to develop different sanction treatments in practice. Furthermore, we fully explained the variation found by the hypotheses put forward: local socioeconomic context (H2a), political party of the board of the organisation (H2b) and organisational characteristics of the social assistance agency (H2c-d). Socioeconomic characteristics of the municipality clearly have an impact. Both the unemployment rate and the presence of a job centre in the municipality are influential. Clearly, as unemployment is high, social assistance clients are expected to take the rare available job opportunities. The decreasing effect on sanction predictions of the availability of a job centre is harder to interpret. In future research we should investigate whether this effect remains after inclusion of potentially omitted variables. A second reason to decentralize policies is to increase the legitimacy of these policies for local governors and citizens (Fording et al., 2007; Kazepov, 2010; Soss et al., 2011). This led us to expect that political preferences influence treatment decisions. This hypothesis was confirmed in our study, as case managers in social assistance agencies governed by the Flemish right wing party predicted sanctions to be more likely. Finally, we hypothesized that the organizational characteristics are unlikely to be neutral. We did find that the specialization choices of the agency appeared to matter: the more specialized the teams, the more the case managers tended to predict sanctioning (Blom, 2004). These organisational differences can be seen as ways to experiment with new local settings aimed at a more efficient poverty reduction (Kazepov, 2010).

The most surprising finding of this study is the substantial variation at the case manager's level. Given the lack of clear work willingness criteria set out in the social assistance legislation, case managers have an important degree of discretion to interpret legislation while tailoring it to the needs of the client. Self-evidently, this should result in treatment differences between colleagues. However, the magnitude of this variance, that is as substantial as the variation found at the client level, raises the crucial question whether this variation is indeed random and unavoidable in a context of professional discretion, or whether there are specific explanatory factors. An important finding of this paper is that it shows that this variance is not completely random. The case managers' attitudes have a high influence on sanction predictions. Their perception of the need to monitor and sanction welfare state recipients in general strongly influences their predictions concerning sanctioning the hypothetical clients in our study. This observation confirms the previously

claimed but seldom empirically investigated idea that attitudes and beliefs may influence treatment choices (Blomberg et al., 2013; Castillo & Becerra, 2012; Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Reingold & Liu, 2009). This personal attitude effect remained relevant also after controlling for the general attitude in a social assistance agency and the attitudes of a team manager. The hypotheses on socio-demographic characteristics (H3a), identity (H3b) and job characteristics (H3c) were not, or only partially confirmed.

A second observation is that a large part of the variation at the case manager level remained unexplained. It needs to be said, that part of this unexplained variation among case managers may be caused by methodological shortcomings, in particular the external validity of the method. Vignettes remain descriptions, not real life observations (see method section). Further, even though we took great efforts in constructing realistic vignettes, the method leaves important aspects, such as body language and presence, to the imagination of the social worker, which might inflate variance to some extent. Second, despite our thorough literature review, we might miss important explaining factors not integrated in our analyses, possibly decreasing the randomness of the variation. However, if these factors are not determined, the policy question is then whether the high unexplained variance at the case manager's level is the result of an inevitable random variation that allows professionals to use their creativity in treating clients or that this variation is actually too high to call it a natural and desirable variation. Both issues represent an important future research agenda, as the policy and theoretical implications are large.

Table 3. Overview of affirmed and not affirmed hypotheses

	Hypothesis	Affirmed
Variation at which level?	H1: Sanction treatment depends on the clients' characteristics	Yes
	H2: There will be variation in work willingness implementation across region or municipalities.	Limited
	H3: There will be variation in work willingness implementation across case managers (in the same organisation).	Yes
Explaining factors at client level	H1a: Client characteristics that are a sign of unwillingness to work increase the client's likelihood to be sanctioned.	Yes
	H1b: Elements that make this unwillingness understandable (in line with the deservingness theory) will decrease or eliminate the sanction likelihood.	Limited
Explaining factors at Municipality level	H2a: Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the municipality will have an effect on the assessment of work willingness	Yes
	H2b: Local implementation of work willingness will be in line with local political preferences.	Yes
	H2c: The specialisation of teams will increase sanctioning.	Yes
	H2d: The more involved case managers are in the decision-making process, the lower the predicted implementation of sanctions.	No
	H2e: The local composition of the case manager team and the preferences of the team manager will have an effect.	No
Explaining factors at case manager's level	H3a: We expect older case managers to predict sanctioning less and other socio-demographic characteristics to have an effect on the predicted sanction probability.	Limited
	H3b: Case managers will predict to sanction clients with characteristics similar to their own less frequently (identity hypothesis).	No
	H3c: Job characteristics will impact the predicted sanctioning behavior of case managers.	Limited
	H3d: Case managers own beliefs on social policy will influence their predictions of implemented sanctions.	Yes

In sum, the findings of this study shed new light on the implementation of activation related sanctions, and show how case managers balance different deservingness criteria against one another in making sanction decisions upon manifestations of work unwillingness. In addition, the findings of this study contribute to important discussions on the merits of discretion and decentralization. In both cases, our findings caution against an overoptimistic view. Whereas we do find that differences at the municipal level are driven by the local socioeconomic context and political preferences, in line with the expected benefits of decentralization, the actual variation between municipalities is very limited. This is surprising in a context where

municipalities have large power in the implementation of activation within social assistance, and suggests that other expected benefits of decentralization, such as policy experimentation, may not naturally manifest. As for the expected benefits of discretionary power of social workers, we do find a lot of variance at the level of the case manager, even for exactly the same clients in our experimental set up. Despite a clear choice for professional social workers in Belgium, discretion does lead to a lot of variance. Insofar as this variation is random, it may be an unfortunate but inevitable side-effect of an otherwise beneficial aspect. Yet this study found that a substantial part of this variation can be traced back to the personal attitudes and ideological beliefs of the social workers. This clearly is, although partly natural, a cause of concern. Self-evidently, further research is needed to further substantiate these findings. In future analyses we will focus more closely on the variance at the case manager's level, the magnitude of the explaining factors and the organisational elements that in- or decrease the inter case manager variation. Further, we are convinced that a repeat of this study in different institutional contexts, for instance with more and less thorough decentralization and where case managers are also the final decision makers, will bring new insights.

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7   Appendix

7.1   Appendix 1: respondent sample procedure

We divided the 306 Flemish municipalities into 38 strata based on number of inhabitants, relative number of benefit recipients and a socioeconomic index (Belfius, 2007). Drawing a stratified sample from these groups, we selected around 90 municipalities to ask to participate in the first wave. When a municipality declined to participate, we drew another municipality from the same stratum. In total, we invited 105 municipalities, 15 of which declined to participate mainly due to time constraints and one that did not provide enough responses to be included in the research. In the selected municipalities we surveyed case managers who were both in direct contact with clients and who were involved in the

decision-making process concerning eligibility to social assistance[10]. In each stratum we chose one municipality at random in which all employees involved in the decision-making process were invited to participate. In the other municipalities, we invited 25% of the employees stratified by gender, age and job title (management position or not). If a case manager declined to participate, one of her colleagues with similar characteristics was asked to participate instead, as we aimed to include 600 case managers. In total, 839 social workers were invited, of which 582 provided a completed questionnaire.

7.2 Appendix 2: exemption criteria in vignettes

More background for the exemption criteria included in the vignettes: the sick child had an immune system disorder, the symptoms of the illness were unpredictable, or no sufficient medical assistance was available, which made working difficult (knowing that the client had no network to fall back on); the mental health problems had not been diagnosed by a doctor; the drug-addicted clients refused help; or the deceased child (adverse life experience) had been born with heart problems.

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[10] This means that case managers who were only responsible for activation trajectories or for debt counselling were not included in the survey.

7.3 Appendix 3: Descriptive statistics

Level 1 = Client level (n=4785)		Fre-quency	Mean	Min-Max
Number of work refusals (**1**)	2	33%		
	3	33%		
Motivation (**willing to work**)	Wants to study	33%		
	Not motivated to work or study	33%		
Diligence (**yes**)	Missed one appointment	33%		
	Missed several appointments	33%		
Work experience (**none**)	Positive	33%		
	Negative	33%		
Activation experience (**none**)	1 negative experience	33%		
	2 negative experiences	34%		
Parenthood (**no**)	Healthy child	34%		
	Sick child	33%		
Housing situation (**stable**/unstable/homeless)	Unstable	33%		
	Homeless	33%		
Mental health (**healthy**)	Undiagnosed depression	33%		
	Undiagnosed mentally retarded	34%		
Addiction (**none**)	Slightly	33%		
	Severely	33%		
Life experiences (**none mentioned**)	Child loss	33%		
	Youth with poverty and abuse	33%		
Level 2 = Case manager level (n=582)				
Age			38	22-64
Gender (**female**)	Male	20%		
Ethnicity (**both parents born in Belgium**)	Both born in Europe	3%		
	At least one born outside of Europe	3%		
Housing (**tenant**)	House owner	79%		
Qualification (**Bachelor's degree**)	Master's	11%		
Experience with long-term unemployment (**no**)	Yes	44%		
Seniority			12	0-40
Work regime in percentages			90	33-100
Specialisation (number of tasks) (**1**)	2	41%		
	3 or 4	28%		
Decision_eligibility			0	-2.9-2.2
Decision_activation			0	-1.2-0.9
Board follows advice of case manager (1-7)			5.82	3-7
Involvement of board in decision making (1-7)			6.32	1-7
Primary cause of unemployment (**other**)	Laziness	7%		
Political orientation (1: left – 10 : right)			4.23	1-10
Responsibility of welfare of citizens (1: individual – 10 : state)			5.53	1-10
WS Criticism			0	-1.3-2.0
WS Strictness			0	-1.3-0.9
WS Overuse			0	-1.4-1.6
Level 3 = municipality/social assistance agency (n=89)				
Percentages of social assistance receivers			0.56	0.1-2.2

Size municipality			30661	2110-502604
Poverty				
Unemployment rate			7.0	3.4-16.3
Welfare index			108	88-139
Percentage inhabitants with foreign background				
Job centre in the same municipality (**no**)	Yes	39%		
Subsidised psycho-social organisation in the same municipality (**no**)	Yes	24%		
Political party of the chair of the board of the agency (**N-VA**)	CD&V	40%		
	Open VLD	10%		
	Sp.a	8%		
	Other	13%		
WS Criticism_munic			-0.0	-1.2-0.7
WS Strictness_munic			0.0	-0.6-0.6
WS Overuse_munic			0.0	-0.6-0.6
Eligibility_munic			0.1	-2.9-2.2
Activation_munic			0.1	-0.7-0.9
Specialisation (average number of tasks) (**1**)	2	39%		
	3	14%		
	No clear specialisation pattern	26%		
Average age social workers			39	25-59
Percentage male case managers			17.4	0-100
Percentage case managers with children			67.3	0-100
Average seniority				

7.4 Appendix 4: latent attitude variables

In Model 3 we included the respondent specific predictions of three latent case manager's attitude variables as explanatory variables in our analysis (see Section 4.2): 'perceived negative consequences of the welfare state (Welfare State Criticism)', 'opinion on the extent to which uncooperative social assistance recipients should be monitored or punished (Welfare State Strictness)' and 'opinion on over use of benefits (Welfare State Over-use)'. Latent variables are based on confirmatory factor analyses on different Likert-scale (1 to 5) variables reflecting the respondent's answers on the below questions.

The latent variable Welfare State Criticism including four items (1-5 Likert scale), namely:

- The welfare state costs too much money compared to what it yields (*costs*).
- The welfare state makes people irresponsible and lazy (*lazy*).
- The welfare state is too much of a hammock that people become dependent on (*dependent*).
- The welfare state causes people to no longer be able to take care of themselves (*noself*).

The second latent variable, W*elfare State Strictness*, was expected to influence the following items (1-5 Likert scale):

- The government is too strict on social benefit recipients (*toostrict*).
- The government should check more closely whether the unemployed are applying for jobs sufficiently (*contrjob*).
- Social benefit beneficiaries who do not do what is required of them should be punished more harshly (*morepuni*).
- The government should check more closely whether the unemployed do additional illicit work (*controlil*).

Finally, W*elfare State Over-use* is the latent construct capturing perceptions about how often (1-5 Likert scale) the following situations occur:

- People use their health insurance although they are not sick (*sick*).
- People receive unemployment benefits although they could get a job if they wanted (*unemploy*).
- People receive a living wage (minimum income) although they are not actually poor (*welfare*).

7.5   Appendix 5: Results for other dependent variables

Table 1.

The effect of case manager and agency/municipality characteristics on the likelihood (1 to 7) of being sanctioned when refusing a job offer that lasts one day, percentages

					Model1		Model2		Model3	
2					Coef	% of total	Coef	compared to M1	Coef	compared to M1
3	Variances									
4		Level 3 = municipality			75.18**	8.9%	69.28**	-7.85%	8.7	-88,43%
5		Level 2 = case manager			489.12***	57.89%	409.33***	-16.31%	367.7***	-24.82%
6		Level 1 = client			280.55***	33.21%	253.21***	-9.75%	252.81***	-9.89%
7		Total			844.85	100%	721.72	-14.57%	628.21	-25.64%
8					Coef	z-score	Coef	z-score	Coef	z-score
9	Intercept				60.52***	31.69	56.56***	22.55	65.96***	12.2
10	Level 1 = client characteristics									
11		Aggravating characteristics								
12			Not motivated to work (ref = wants to work)				-0.24	-0.4	-0.26	-0.44
13			One time late for an appointment (ref = diligent)				-2.15*	-2.06	-2.22*	-2.13
14			Several times late for an appointment (ref = diligent)				-0.16	-0.16	-0.16	-0.15

#						Coef		Coef	
15		Negative work experience (ref = no work experience)				0.0	*0.0*	0.01	*0.02*
16		Positive work experience (ref = no work experience)				0.36	*0.58*	0.35	*0.58*
17		One negative activation experience (ref = no activ exp.)				0.02	*0.03*	-0.01	*-0.01*
18		Several negative activation exp (ref = no activ exp.)				0.05	*0.08*	0.06	*0.1*
19		2nd work refusal (ref = 1st)				16.58***	*6.65*	15.93***	*6.68*
20		3rd work refusal (ref = 1st)				25.47***	*10.25*	26.27***	*11.05*
21	**Mitigating characteristics**								
22		One healthy child of 2 years (ref = no children)				-1.31	*-1.25*	-1.23	*-1.07*
23		One sick child of 2 years (ref = no children)				-4.76***	*-4.01*	-5.35***	*-4.59*
24		Unstable housing (ref = stable housing)				-0.73	*-1.22*	-0.72	*-1.2*
25		Homeless (ref = stable housing)				-1.86**	*-3.08*	-1.91***	*-3.18*
26		Depressed (ref = no mental problems)				-0.19	*-0.18*	-0.23	*-0.22*
27		Mental health problems (ref = no mental problems)				-1.88	*-1.77*	-1.84	*-1.73*
28		Beginning addiction (ref = no addiction)				-0.36	*-0.61*	-0.34	*-0.58*
29		Severe addiction (ref = no addiction)				-5.89***	*-9.69*	-5.91***	*-9.74*
30		Lost a child (ref = no special life exp mentioned)				-4.76***	*-4.56*	-4.79***	*-4.6*
31		Violent & abusive upbringing (ref = no special life exp)				-3.07**	*-2.94*	-3.18**	*-3.05*
32	**Interaction between aggravating and mitigating characteristics**								
33		2nd work refusal * healthy child				-1.79	*-1.22*	-1.67	*-1.15*
34		2nd work refusal * sick child				-4.71**	*-3.12*	-4.71**	*-3.13*
35		3rd work refusal * healthy child				-0.81	*-0.54*	-0.66	*-0.45*
36		3rd work refusal * sick child				-3.63*	*-2.46*	-3.31*	*-2.23*
37		2nd work refusal * depression				-4.06**	*-2.76*	-3.94**	*-2.68*
38		2nd work refusal * mental health problems				-1.31	*-0.89*	-1.34	*-0.91*
39		3rd work refusal * depression				-1.14	*-0.44*	-1.13	*-0.76*
40		3rd work refusal * mental health problems				-1.53	*-1.04*	-1.6	*-1.09*
41	**Level 2 = Case manager level**								
42	**Socio-demographic characteristics**								
43		Parenthood cm (ref = no)	Yes					0.27	*0.13*
44		Parenthood client * parenthood cm	Client healthy child * cm child(ren)					0.36	*0.29*
45			Client sick child * cm child(ren)					-2.81*	*-2.2*
46	**Job characteristics**								
47		Involvement board with activation						1.76***	*3.17*
48		Specialisation (ref = 2 tasks)	2 tasks					7.22***	*3.44*
49		1 task of intake, treatment, activation or management	3 or 4 tasks					2.48	*1.07*
50	**Ideology**								
51		*WS Strictness*						10.3***	*4.24*
52		*WS Over-use*						6.22**	*2.87*
53	**Level 3 = Municipalities**								
54	**Socio-demographic characteristics**								
55		% inhabitants with foreign background						0.002*	*2.16*
56		Availability of a job centre (VDAB) (ref. = no)						-10.77***	*-3.97*
57	**Ideology**								
58		Party of the chair of the board (ref = nationalist right-wing party, N-VA)	Centrist Christian Democratic party (CD&V)					-5.61	*-1.65*

#					Model1 Coef		Model2 Coef		Model3 Coef	
59				Centre-right liberal party (Open VLD)					-14.73***	*-3.19*
60				Centre-left socialist party (Sp.a)					-11.15**	*-3.12*
61				Other					-5.03	*-1.14*
62		**Organisational characteristics**								
63			Mean age case managers						0.53*	*2.12*
64			% case managers with children						-0.16*	*-2.42*
65			Specialisation in the organisation (ref = most cm's 1 task)	Most cm's two tasks					-6.26*	*-2.25*
66				Most cm's three or four tasks					-12.41**	*-2.57*
67				No clear specialisation pattern in the agency					-6.0	*-1.69*
68	N	Municipalities		89		89		89		
69		Case managers		582		582		582		
70		Vignettes		4785		4785		4785		

Table 2.

The effect of case manager and agency/municipality characteristics on the likelihood (1 to 7) of being sanctioned when refusing a job offer that is not in line with the client's qualifications, percentages

					Model1		Model2		Model3	
2					**Coef**	**% of total**	**Coef**	**compared to M1**	**Coef**	**compared to M1**
3		**Variances**								
4		Level 3 = municipality			42.72**	*6.08%*	45.76*	*-7.12%*	0	-100%
5		Level 2 = case manager			373.03***	*53.05%*	348.53***	*-6.57%*	316.35***	*-15.19%*
6		Level 1 = client			297.44***	*42.3%*	269.4***	*-9.43%*	269.33***	*-9.45%*
7		Total			703.19	*100%*	663.69	*-5.62%*	585.68	*-16.71%*
8					**Coef**	***z-score***	**Coef**	***z-score***	**Coef**	***z-score***
9		**Intercept**			63.62***	*31.69*	66.86***	*22.55*	47.21***	*6.33*
10		**Level 1 = client characteristics**								
11		**Aggravating characteristics**								
12			Not motivated to work (ref = wants to work)				0.36	*0.58*	0.34	*0.56*
13			One time late for an appointment (ref = diligent)				-1.04	*-1.68*	-1.03	*-1.67*
14			Several times late for an appointment (ref = diligent)				0.48	*0.79*	0.49	*0.79*
15			Negative work experience (ref = no work experience)				0.25	*0.4*	0.27	*0.43*
16			Positive work experience (ref = no work experience)				0.77	*1.23*	0.8	*1.28*
17			One negative activation experience (ref = no activ exp.)				-0.13	*-0.22*	-0.12	*-0.19*
18			Several negative activation exp (ref = no activ exp.)				-0.58	*-0.94*	-0.55	*-0.9*
19			2nd work refusal (ref = 1st)				5.56*	*2.34*	5.43*	*2.37*
20			3rd work refusal (ref = 1st)				14.98***	*6.36*	15.7***	*6.91*
21		**Mitigating characteristics**								
22			One healthy child of 2 years (ref = no children)				-2.53***	*-4.1*	-2.55***	*-4.15*
23			One sick child of 2 years (ref = no children)				-6.79***	*-10.85*	-6.84***	*-10.95*
24			Unstable housing (ref = stable housing)				-0.24	*-0.4*	-0.29	*-0.47*
25			Homeless (ref = stable housing)				-2.0***	*-3.23*	-2.1***	*-3.38*
26			Depressed (ref = no mental problems)				-4.0***	*-3.87*	-3.98***	*-3.85*
27			Mental health problems (ref = no mental problems)				-5.29***	*-4.98*	-5.29***	*-4.99*
28			Beginning addiction (ref = no addiction)				-0.04	*-0.07*	-0.03	*-0.05*
29			Severe addiction (ref = no addiction)				-6.34***	*-4.98*	-6.4***	*-10.21*

#	N	Characteristic	Sub						
30		Lost a child (ref = no special life exp mentioned)				-2.28*	-2.15	-2.26*	-2.14
31		Violent & abusive upbringing (ref = no special life exp)				-0.9	-0.86	-0.9	-0.87
32		**Interaction between aggravating and mitigating characteristics**							
33		2nd work refusal * lost a child				3.06*	2.01	2.94*	1.93
34		2nd work refusal * violent upbringing				0.94	0.61	0.97	0.63
35		3rd work refusal * lost a child				-1.66	-1.08	-1.83	-1.2
36		3rd work refusal * violent upbringing				-2.48	-1.65	-2.59	-1.73
37		2nd work refusal * depression				3.58*	2.36	3.53*	2.34
38		2nd work refusal * mental health problems				1.93	1.28	1.93	1.28
39		3rd work refusal * depression				0.35	0.23	0.35	0.23
40		3rd work refusal * mental health problems				2.83	1.87	2.74	1.82
41		**Level 2 = Case manager level**							
46		**Job characteristics**							
47		Involvement board with activation						1.48***	3.41
48		Specialisation (ref = 1 task of intake, treatment, activation or management	2 tasks					4.19*	2.24
49			3 or 4 tasks					-0.01	-0.01
50		**Ideology**							
51		*WS Strictness*						11.09***	4.99
52		*WS Over-use*						5.92**	2.94
		Perceived strictness of the agency						4.63**	3.0
53		**Level 3 = Municipalities**							
54		**Socio-demographic characteristics**							
56		Availability of a job centre (VDAB) (ref. = no)						-8.02***	-4.04
57		**Ideology**							
58		Party of the chair of the board (ref = nationalist right-wing party, N-VA)	Centrist Christian Democratic party (CD&V)					-3.83	-1.8
59			Centre-right liberal party (Open VLD)					-7.58*	-2.28
60			Centre-left socialist party (Sp.a)					-10.14**	-4.48
61			Other					-6.44	-1.83
62		**Organisational characteristics**							
63		Mean seniority case managers						0.51*	2.5
68	N	Municipalities		89		89		89	
69		Case managers		582		582		582	
70		Vignettes		4785		4785		4785	