

**Original Article**

Shaping the Disposition of Street-Level Bureaucrats in the Implementation of Social Welfare Policy

Mayuri Kularathne

Abstract

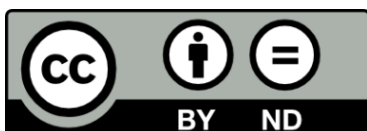
The disposition of Street-Level Bureaucrats (SLBs) is an influential factor in achieving policy goals, as it drastically fosters a closer link with the behavioural and humanistic aspects of the implementers. In view of, implementing social welfare policies, disposition becomes crucial since it is tied to some matters which are situational and hard to measure. Consequently, employing the discretion power of SLBs in making decisions often varies, driven largely by the personal and professional motivations that shape their disposition. As per the literature, several studies have addressed the impact of the disposition on policy implementation. Nevertheless, a limited effort has been made to study the formation of the disposition. Hence, this study focused on studying how their disposition is being constructed and under which circumstances it occurs. The data collection of this qualitative study involved 45 semi-structured interviews and 10 in-depth interviews, that were analysed thematically and presented descriptively. The findings of the study revealed that the disposition of SLBs is profoundly influenced by both humanistic and institutional concerns across diverse contexts. Notably, the attitudes of citizens towards engaging actively in the accomplishment of the goals of social welfare policy become crucial in shaping the disposition of SLBs. There is a mismatch between the role that the SLBs are trained to fulfill and the benefits that citizens expect from the government under social welfare. This inconsistency significantly affects the formation of disposition of SLBs while leading to often contradicting policy outcomes. Knowledge of this disparity between citizen active participation and achieving social welfare policy goals provides valuable insight for policymakers and implementers to design social welfare policies.

Keywords: Discretion, Disposition, Policy Implementation, Social Welfare Policy of Sri Lanka, Street-Level Bureaucrats

Department of Public Policy, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka

mayurindi@hss.ruh.ac.lk

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0552-9437>



This article is published under the Creative Commons CC-BY-ND License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>). This license permits to use, distribute, and reproduce the contents of the publication for commercial and non-commercial purposes, provided that the original work is properly cited and is not changed anyway.



INTRODUCTION

The concept of Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) has been extensively examined from various perspectives, with particular emphasis on the critical role of SLBs in implementing public policies. As scholarly works define, the concept of street-level bureaucracy is regarded as the mechanism of policy actors who are bringing the governmental unique image to the citizens (Lipsky, 1980; Winter, 2003; Aggar & Damgaard, 2018). In light of this, it is uncloudy that SLBs¹ have a significantly dynamic role to play in the diverse fields at the grassroots level of government to bring about policy decisions into real.

There is a twofold implication of SLBs that was highlighted by Mitchel Lipsky in his seminal work (Lipsky, 1980). He suggests on the one hand that we should understand the term of SLB as “equating it with the public services with which citizens typically interact” (Lipsky, 1980, p. xvii). On the other hand, SLBs carry out their roles under specific conditions. SLBs interact with citizens as part of their job and have the discretion to exercise authority (Lipsky, 1980). However, due to some contextual limitations in the working structure and uncertain citizens’ demands, they cannot always perform their duties in line with the ideal

conception of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980). This is often questioned in many discourses as the ambiguous role of SLBs creates confusion about the intended policy goals.

The contextual decision-making of SLBs to take swift actions reflects their bifunctional responsibilities in terms of ‘state-agent²’ and ‘citizen-agent³’ roles in policy implementation (Gassner & Goffen, 2018, Hupe & Hill, 2007; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). This fundamental duality in policy implementation, presents a significant challenge, as these two are often conflicting in the institutional requirements on one hand and the demands of citizens on the other. These must be balanced simultaneously.

Despite the inherent contradictions in SLBs’ dual roles, a strong disposition may enable them to effectively address both citizen and state demands. Even so, it is essential to consider whether SLBs consistently possess the resilience necessary to exercise discretionary power in policy implementation, particularly given the contextual challenges that often arise.

The ‘discretion’ of SLBs is a crucial factor in policy implementation (Hupe, 2014; Jilke and Tummers, 2018; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021; Camillo, 2022). Lipsky (1980) rightly points out

¹ SLBs- Street-level bureaucrats

² As a ‘state agent’, the SLB acts to execute the governmental policies, ensuring compliance with legal, procedural, and organizational frameworks (Gassner & Goffen, 2018, p. 551).

³ As a ‘citizen agent’, the SLB serves the citizens to meet their interests, needs, and welfare (Gassner & Goffen, 2018, p. 551).



Original Article

that SLBs must be very strategic regarding diversified issues encountered while working with the citizens at the ground level. The discretionary actions of SLBs are intrinsically intermixed with their disposition which is blended with their mindset and performances. Disposition is a vital aspect of the implementation process as it is bound tightly to the personal qualities and professional mindsets of bureaucrats who are influential in reaching the intended policy goals (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). In the field of public administration, discretion and disposition are hence recognized as distinct yet interconnected concepts that influence the behaviours of SLBs. SLBs' disposition can be a significant factor in terms of the immeasurable, sensible concerns that spring up with citizens' diverse needs such as social welfare.

Social welfare is defined diversely by scholars in terms of its nature and the involvement of society. As Stanislav (2020) describes, "the concept of social welfare is limited to the standard of

living of the society, outlined by the welfare or social protection services provided by the state" (p. 101). As per the evidence of the legacy of social welfare policy in Sri Lanka, the welfare state's role dates back to the pre-independence period (1931-1947)⁴ representing three pillars such as education, health, and social services⁵ (Jayasuriya, 1996). In relation to social welfare, since 1989, the JANASAVIYA⁶ has been implemented as a poverty reduction programme. In 1995, the JANASAVIYA programme was replaced by SAMURDHI⁷ which was also introduced to alleviate poverty in the country. The DIVINEGUMA⁸ was another community-level development programme that led to the progress of the national and regional level network for the economic development of the country (Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2013). The ASWESUMA welfare benefits programme was thereafter implemented as a successor to the SAMURDHI programme. President Anura Kumara Disanayake's policy manifesto introduces the 'PRAJASHAKTHI'⁹ Poverty alleviation

⁴ The period of Donaghmore 1931 to Soulbury 1947 constitutions

⁵ These three pillars are related to the three major social documents and acts. *Education Act of 1945* (Kannangara Report, 1943 as cited in Jayasuriya, 1996), the establishment of the *Department of Social Services in 1948* (Jennings Report, 1943 as cited in Jayasooriya, 1996), and *the Health Act of 1953* (Cumpston Report, 1950 as cited in Jayasuriya, 1996).

⁶ President R Premadasa initiated this programme to alleviate poverty

⁷ This programme was introduced by the President Chandrika Bandaranaike during 1995

⁸ Department of Divineguma established amalgamating Samurdhi Authority (Act, No. 30 of 1995), Southern Development Authority (Act, No. 18 of 1996), Udarata Development Authority (Act, No. 26 of 2005)

⁹ This programme is proposed to be introduced by the NPP policy manifesto with the purpose of exclusive issues reported through previous



Original Article

programme for low-income owners (Jathika Jana Balawegaya (NPP Sri Lanka), 2024, p. 39). The social welfare programmes of Sri Lanka have a considerable linkage between their initiation and the changes in the political regime. Through the recent welfare programmes of SAMURDHI, ASWESUMA and PRAJASHAKTHI the policymakers thoroughly considered selecting beneficiaries as many issues were reported regarding the selection process (Right to Life Human Rights Centre, 2023).

The inability to effectively reach the deserving beneficiaries and malfunctions in the utilization of welfare facilities by the citizens were the notable issues that were pertinent to the policy implementation in Sri Lanka. Undoubtedly, then SLBs face considerable issues regarding their discretionary actions. This may also significantly impact the shaping of the disposition of policy implementers. Many studies concluded that disposition is a crucial factor that can deteriorate policy outcomes. In consequence, it is noteworthy to have an academic focus on how the disposition of SLBs is being shaped and in what conditions.

On that account, this study mainly aimed to explore the shaping of the disposition of SLBs in the implementation of social welfare policy in Sri Lanka, which was widely

considered an under-studied area that needs to fill the knowledge gap. Accordingly, this study's findings provide valuable insights for guiding and informing the policymakers regarding the effectiveness of SLB's disposition which has been highly influential in reaching the goals of social welfare policy.

This research provides an analysis of the impact of the disposition of SLBs in implementing the social welfare policy and appropriate methods for training SLBs to implement the goals of social welfare policy. The findings of the study also come up with implications for policy formulation, reforms, institutional changes, and further studies in implementing public policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Street-Level Bureaucrats

Michael Lipsky (1980) defined SLBs as public service employees who directly interact with the public and have substantial discretion in executing their work (p. 3). These bureaucrats often operate in areas such as law enforcement, social work, teaching, and public health services, where they significantly impact service delivery and policy outcomes. Lipsky's (1980) study on SLBs explains they are the major recipients of public expenditures

welfare programmes to enforce the low-income earners.



Original Article

while representing a significant role in multiple levels of government.

There are some characteristics according to Lipsky (1980) highlights such as 'discretion.' Discretion refers to the idea that the SLBs have considerable autonomy in decision-making as they often must interpret general policy guidelines and apply them to individual cases (Lipsky, 1980, p.13). 'Face-to-face Interaction with Citizens' determines the direct interface between the government and the public (Lipsky, 1980, p. 4) and they always face resource constraints such as time, personnel, and funding (Lipsky, 1980, p. 29). Moreover, Lipsky says that they have a 'high workload and ambiguity'; they always have a high workload and face ambiguities when implementing policy goals (Lipsky, 1980, p. 33).

In his seminal work,¹⁰ Lipsky had written that workers who interact directly with citizens have greater authority in frequent day-to-day decision-making. Further, Lipsky points out that bureaucrats must balance citizen needs with organizational requirements, often rationalizing benefits or simplifying complex issues to fulfill their obligations. The autonomy they exercise in these roles directly affects the policy outcomes, which may deviate from the intentions of policymakers. Therefore, Lipski

defined SLBs as the "necessary link between government and the needy" (Michigan Law Review, 1981, p. 811).

Max Weber (1947) emphasizes three main characteristics that anticipated effective governance through bureaucracy; personnel stability, organization, and procedure. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) in their study state the role of discretion and ethics in their decisions. They found that SLBs base their decisions on moral judgments rather than strict adherence to rules.

Evans (2011) says "The professional status of social workers influences both the nature of their discretion and the way in which this is managed" (p. 368). Tummers (2014) in their study show bureaucrats who feel disconnected from the policy goals may resist or modify policy in their implementation. Brodtkin (2012) argues that SLBs' decisions, combined with institutional and social factors, could reduce or increase inequality.

Fundamentally, the nature of SLBs' role is comprised of discretion power where they must intellectually apply the rules and regulations to implement policies.

Public Policy Implementation

There are two main approaches in the literature on policy implementation: top-down and bottom-up. A new

¹⁰ Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services (1981)



Original Article

approach began to study which had been called synthesizing during the 1980s - 1990s. This new model which is called the hybrid model (Knill & Tosun, 2020, p. 130) brought both the macro world of policymakers and the micro world of policy implementers together (Hill & Hupe, 2002). Mubarak *et al.* (2020) in their study¹¹ mentioned Marilee S Grindle, and Mazmanian and Sabatier's (1983) Theories in the Policy Analysis Triangle Framework' the main aspects of Edward, Grindle, and Mazmanian's policy implementation models had mapped into a triangle providing a framework for more comprehensive policy implementation studies.

Developing a conceptual framework for the parlance of policy implementation Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) emphasize that there are six variables¹² that are pertinent in achieving the policy goals¹³. They highlighted the idea of the need for feasible policy goals and their interaction with effective processes of implementation that align with willingness and ability to carry it out.

According to Pressman and Wildavsky (1984), policy implementation is "a process of interaction between the setting of goals and the actions geared to achieving them" (p. xxiii). They

argue that the complexity of policy implementation often lies in the discrepancy between the goals set by the decision-makers and the actions required at the operational level. This challenge could be caused by bureaucratic obstacles, conflicting priorities and unforeseen circumstances.

In Hill and Hupe's (2002) explanation, policy implementation is "the stage in the policy process where policy intentions are translated into action" (p. 6). They emphasize the idea of the importance of the formal structural view and informal behaviours effective considering the achievement of the policy goals. When the policy goals are carried out into action these important concerns are effective and play a vital role (Hill and Hupe, 2002).

Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) implied that "policy implementation encompasses the stage of policymaking that involves the translation of governmental decisions into operational programmes and activities to achieve specific objectives" (p. 20). They explain that policy implementation is influenced by legal, political, and organizational factors.

As Birkland (2019) points out, policy implementation is "the process by

¹¹ titled 'Policy Implementation Analysis: Exploration of George Edward III

¹² Policy standards and objectives, policy resources, Interorganizational communication and enforcement activities, the characteristics of implementing agencies, economic social and

political conditions and the disposition of implementers (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975, p. 463)

¹³ "Policy Implementation Process: A Conceptual Framework," Donald S. Van Meter and Carl E. Van Horn (1975)



Original Article

which policies adopted by the government are executed by administrative agencies to achieve policy goals" (p. 283). He implies that the achievement of policy goals depends on clear goals, sufficient resources, and cooperation among different actors.

The process of policy implementation has undergone diverse scholarly knowledge in terms of actors involved, factors that affect the process and the way of carrying out decisions into actions throughout decades.

Social Welfare Policy Implementation in the Context of Sri Lanka

According to a survey conducted by the Right to Life Human Rights Centre¹⁴ (2023) The ASWESUMA programme had received 3,744,494 applications from over 340 Divisional Secretariats. Besides, a considerable number of appeals have been received to verify the accuracy of selection beneficiaries and to be placed in a higher beneficiary category¹⁵ (Right to Life Human Rights Centre, 2023, p.3). Further, it suggests, improving community engagement and fostering trust among different community groups for the better implementation of social welfare policy in Sri Lanka.

¹⁴ Report – 'The Effectiveness of ASWESUMA Welfare Benefit Scheme Preliminary Findings and Ongoing Assessments' (November 2023)

¹⁵ Several appeals (1,028,885) and objections (134,540) filed after the identification of

Silva (2021) explains in her study that "negative attitudes to the target group, lacking motivation, lacking knowledge about the policy and its goals, and their mishandling of resources" are factors that affect the role of SLBs in the implementation of the labour migration policy in Sri Lanka (pp. 137-164).

Disposition of Policy Implementers

The disposition of policy implementers consists of the intention of the implementers to carry out the policy into action. Disposition (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Edwards III, 1980) and discretion (Hupe, 2014; Jilke and Tummers, 2018; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021) of implementers are discussed in the literature to emphasize their importance in policy implementation (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Edwards III, 1980).

Dispositions of policy implementers are the attitudes, values, motivations, and behaviours of those responsible for policy implementation that significantly affect the success of policy implementation. These implementers,

1,792,265 eligible families raise concerns about the accuracy of beneficiary selection (Available at: <https://wbb.gov.lk/si/home>). In addition, there were appeals from 84,374 families to be placed under a higher benefit category (Right to Life Human Rights Centre, 2023, P. 03).



Original Article

often referred to as “street officials¹⁶” (Lipsky, 1980), play an important role in policy interpretation and implementation, and their approach to policy could facilitate or hinder effective implementation.

In their work, Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) describe the implementer's mindset as “the implementer's orientation to understanding and principles” (pp. 472-474). They suggested that the acceptance, understanding and support of implementers are essential for successful policy decisions (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). If implementers do not agree or are indifferent to the policy, it may change or delay its implementation, which may lead to inefficiency or failure.

The intensity of policy response by implementers is affecting successful policy implementation. If they have a negative reaction against a certain policy, it is not easy to implement that policy through them, let alone by another institution. Accordingly, Van Horn and Van Meter point out that the readiness of policy implementers is an extremely powerful factor for policy implementation.

As stated by Winter (2003), policy implementers' attitudes are influenced by many factors, including personal

values, beliefs, and professional norms. Policy implementers are more likely to implement processes with a positive attitude and confidence that they perceive as relevant to their personal or organizational goals (Winter, 2003). On the other hand, people with negative attitudes might show resistance as it may reduce the effectiveness of the policy.

Maynard-Moody and Musheno's (2000) findings in their study¹⁷ highlight that SLBs exercise often their discretion power based on the disposition they have towards the citizen by favouring empathy and fairness over the rigid rules and regulations that come under the government concerns. That shows how important the personal values that consist of the disposition of policy implementers are in terms of the discretion of SLBs.

Further, Brodtkin's (2012) in her study¹⁸ emphasizes the importance of understanding the internal motivation that she regards as the disposition, in determining how they apply rules in practice.

Keulemans and Van de Walle's (2019) study¹⁹ reveals that “different mechanisms underlie the work group's impact on the individual SLB in this specific attitude” (pp. 334-362). Further,

¹⁶ Lipsky (1980) regards them in this particular term to reflect their workload at the edge of the policy implementation stage.

¹⁷ ‘State Agent or Citizen Agent: Two Narratives of Discretion’

¹⁸ ‘Reflections on Street-Level Bureaucracy: Past, Present, and Future’

¹⁹ Street-Level Bureaucrats’ Attitude toward Clients: A Study of Work Group Influence in the Dutch and Belgian Tax Administration



Original Article

they are of the view that work groups have minimal influence on an individual's attitude toward clients.

Keulemans and Van de Walle (2020) in their study "Understanding SLBs" attitude towards clients: Towards a measurement instrument highlight that "SLBs' attitude towards clients consists of four different components: a cognitive attitude component, a positive affective attitude component, a negative affective attitude component and a behavioural attitude component" (pp. 84-113). Similarly, they have employed "Breckler's psychological multicomponent model of attitude in developing a scale to measure SLBs' general attitude towards their clients" (Keulemans & Van de Walle, 2020, pp. 84-113).

The literature mentions the above-discussed disposition of policy implementers in terms of policy implementation, but limited attention is given to investigating the formation of the disposition of SLBs in the implementation of social welfare policy in the context of Sri Lanka. Consequently, this study mainly focused on exploring this matter.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was undertaken within the framework of the interpretivism research philosophy²⁰. This interpretive

research aimed to create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts related to the disposition of SLBs. The case study was adopted as the research strategy while the methodological choice was 'mono-method qualitative' which is pertinent in studying the social welfare policy implementation in line with the disposition of SLB.

This study investigated how the disposition of SLBs is being formed to achieve the goals of social welfare policy. To bring interpretative ideas with the disposition of SLBs in the implementation of social welfare policy, the researcher employed technical strategies to meet the focus of the study objectives. Before designing the main research, the researcher planned a pilot study.²¹ In the pilot study, it was revealed that some of the respondents were reluctant to reveal their experiences which were essential in analyzing the data. Having understood this, the researcher planned an open-ended survey to collect data from the respondents. Open-ended surveys to collect qualitative data were pertinent as the researcher wanted to know about their personal opinions and experiences which are related to shaping the disposition of SLB in the social welfare policy implementation.

²⁰ The interpretive philosophical stance is related to interpreting the gathered data and making sense of it (Saunders *et al.*, 2019, p.148)

²¹ Five semi-structured interviews were conducted in the pilot study before carrying out the main research.



Original Article

In this mono-method (Qualitative) research qualitative data such as opinions, experiences, and observations of SLBs were collected. In the data collection through semi-structured interviews and open-ended surveys, the researcher focused on collecting data on the following areas; Role and Responsibilities, Attitudes and Perceptions, Discretion and Decision-Making, Challenges and Obstacles, Adaptive Strategies, Policy Effectiveness and Recommendations Training and Support. The questionnaire was divided into seven sections, containing a total of 20 questions. The respondents were given two to three weeks to complete it, considering their existing workload.

While focusing on the implementation of social welfare policy the researcher mainly adhered to investigating the beneficiaries who are expecting government aid for the citizen empowerment programmes which would help to see the citizens' active participation in the enrolment of the welfare policy activities.

The data collection consisted of diverse tools such as semi-structured interviews (Physical & over the

phone)²², in-depth interviews, and open-ended surveys. There were forty-five semi-structured interviews and ten in-depth interviews in addition to open-ended surveys.²³ conducted for the same respondents²⁴ to collect data constructively.

This was conducted at the Matara, Kotapola, and Akuressa Divisional Secretariat Offices in the Matara district. These areas were selected purposely based on the representing core and peripheral areas of the Matara district in implementing social welfare policy. In addition, these areas were identified as the divisional secretariats where more beneficiaries are reported.²⁵.

The study employed purposive sampling as the sampling technique. The sample population consists of three types of respondents such as front-line workers.^{26,27} who work in the selected Divisional Secretariat Offices and Grama Niladari Divisions in the Matara district. Five Grama Niladari Officers, and five subject experts²⁸ Therefore, the sample of the study was considered to be fifty-five in total.

²² Before starting the telephone interviews, the researcher explained to the respondents the purpose and the scope of the study.

²³ Forty-five respondents participated in the open-ended survey.

²⁴ Same respondents; the researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews.

²⁵ ASWESUMA Beneficiaries-Akuressa 5139, Kotapola- 6070, Matara- 5113 (Data gleaned

through District Secretariat Office, Matara, Pilot study)

²⁶ (Street-level bureaucrats - Samurdhi Officers, Economic Development Officers, Entrepreneurial Development Officers)

²⁷ Forty-five SLBs

²⁸ In-depth interviews were conducted with both Gramaniladari and subject experts to get their insights.



Original Article

The data had been presented descriptively. The qualitative data of the study was analysed using the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis helps the researcher to identify important themes related to the specific topic and research question being explored (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). This study focuses on experiential and exploratory data, making a thematic analysis that would be a suitable choice for analysis²⁹.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study examined how the disposition of SLBs is shaped in policy implementation and how it affects the effectiveness of the goals of social welfare policy. Three types of perspectives were revealed that had been affected in shaping the disposition of SLBs. The shaping of the disposition which always influences discretion was affected by several factors. These factors, both internal and external have been analysed thematically in this context.

Citizens' Dependency Mindset

The majority of the Grama Niladari officers, economic development officers, and also the welfare (related matters) in-charge officers had informed several times of citizens' attitudinal concerns.

Most of the citizens expect continuous financial support from the government and they expect it to be one part of the income generation of their families. These kinds of highly influential matters were ubiquitous among the citizens' mindset as SLBs revealed. As they mentioned, citizens expect to be cared for by the government for their financial needs.

"We are not permanent job holders; hence we are eligible for 'Aswesuma' welfare and other welfare aids. The government needs to take care of the citizens. That is what they promise at the election period...."

(Economic Development Officer, Interview 02 (Citizens' idea)

Such feelings of being cared for by the government and their mindset of being expressed steadily to government officers reflect how strongly the citizens expect to get financial assistance as taking it as their right which was not been treated properly by the SLBs. This stance was demonstrated by a young man who was at age 38 expecting a permanent job. After sharing this experience, the SLB highlighted that, in situations like these, officers often feel disheartened about the future of the country.

Citizens' dependency mentality is highly influential in not only the implementation of social welfare

²⁹ Data source triangulation was employed to integrate various data for analysis, enhancing reliability and reducing bias.



Original Article

policy but also the shaping of the disposition of SLBs. As many SLBs face numerous issues in this field it appears that policy receivers' attitudinal issues which arise due to the lack of knowledge of government welfare programmes are hard to manage. The public officials who are directly working with the citizens are also discouraged due to citizens' unwillingness to get their advisory support.

"Some people in the village are eligible for aid from the government however, we can assume this will last for *chronic welfare dependency*³⁰ one day as prolonged reliance always leads to motivation in seeking support from another party. They will never try to utilize the aid they receive from the government to enhance the economic status of the family. They usually take it as what they must receive throughout life. Hence this will not be a welfare support it will be a kind of adoption. We need to plan a proper monitoring mechanism for these citizens."

(A Village Headman, In-depth Interview 05)

The interviewees' perceptions revealed that citizens' attitudes are being affected directly to shape the disposition of SLBs. In this type of situation, officers get discouraged from performing their duty as the support

they expect from the welfare benefits receiving side is not at par with the expected level. This significantly impacts their disposition, as they must perform their duties without a clear aim of achieving the more complex, overarching goals. Although this has a considerable effect on their discretionary power, SLBs generally adhere to their assigned tasks.

Many interviewees in this study mentioned in their expressions that citizens' support, their active engagement, and their dependency mentality have a significant impact on shaping the disposition of SLBs.

"Dependency mentality is a syndrome that is highly symptomatic in our part of the world. We are also directly and indirectly supporting this to be growth not to be flattered away."

(Subject Expertise, In-depth interview 02)

As per the expert ideas, the dependency of citizen mentality has caused many cases of society that fundamentally have negative impacts.

"I have many experiences related to this matter. Usually, I talk to people regarding the possibility of being placed in the welfare support scheme and vice versa when they are not selected, I explain to them the reasons, and if we are caught not

³⁰. Chronic welfare dependency (Maclean, 1977) means to this study is a pattern of relying on

third-party welfare support as a habit despite having the capacity to be self-sufficient.



Original Article

selecting beneficiaries according to the given criteria, we get punished. I got blamed by a middle-aged man (age around 45), he said, Politicians always rob the public money, you do nothing to stop that, but when you give "SOCHCHAMAK"^{31,32} to us, you check everything..."

(Samurdhi Officer, Semi-structured Interview 04)

Another respondent shared his experience regarding the selection of eligible beneficiaries for welfare support. From his interview, it became evident that some citizens expect government assistance even when they do not meet the eligibility criteria. This expectation may stem from a belief that, while politicians might misuse public funds through development projects, SLBs strictly enforce eligibility criteria for citizen needs. Although this statement reflects a range of perspectives, it also reveals a lack of public awareness about welfare policy requirements. Such situations directly influence the disposition of SLBs, who must address these expectations while implementing policy tasks. Further, this implies that due to the economic hardship that spread throughout the society every citizen expects government support despite the criteria of selecting the beneficiaries for the welfare. This can be analysed as a situation where SLBs face complexities

in exploring the authentic data on the one hand. On the other hand, due to citizens' dependency mentality, SLBs feel the detrimental future of the community engagement and the development of the country.

This could be analysed in a way of behavioural adaptation where the SLBs adjust their discretion based on the experiences and behaviour of the citizens.

The Professional Mindset of SLBs

One of the Grama Niladari from the respondents revealed their experiences regarding the instant decision that they had to take situationally. He explained that they are not allowed to consider such factors but must accomplish the assigned work. They have no platform for revealing their experiences to consider in future decision-making.

"In our society, there is a common belief that Sri Lankan public officials are lackadaisical, entering public service primarily for its privileges. As a result, they are blamed always for policy failures and the country's slow development. However, the reality is quite different. While most public officials strive to serve diligently, the commitment from citizens towards development is relatively low. What people need most is adequate financial support for their living."

indirectly, often implying hidden meanings without explicitly stating what is intended.

³¹ "A little amount of money"

³² This term is used in the colloquial category of Sinhala folk language to convey something



Original Article

(A Social Welfare Officer, Semi-Structures Interview 10)

Through these findings, it could be analysed that, citizens generally have a belief in the socially constructed perception of the lackadaisical nature of public officials and vice versa. They just work to distribute the welfare instead of assisting, coordinating, and monitoring them to enhance their life condition for self-sufficiency. This could be discussed in terms of the 'Golem effect'³³ (Babad *et al.*, 1982) where the SLBs feel disheartened in terms of citizen's reactions to the governability of the government while implementing the social welfare policies.

Taking these factors into consideration, it is evident that the disposition of SLBs is crucial in policy implementation. In a situation where the social policies are in the implementation stage the SLBs' disposition has been influenced by diverse factors.

The following demonstration on citizen engagement and its effect on shaping the disposition of SLB reflected the importance of the policy receivers' support in the achievement of policy goals at the end.

"We are honestly bound to accomplish the given workload. However, we are always concerned about not only just fulfilling the given tasks but also considering the citizens'

demands. I am talking about my recent experiences.... Honestly.... We cannot do this alone ... we need citizens' support indeed. Without their support, we cannot carry out or fulfill our tasks...Empowering citizens economically is not a mere response of the government. The citizens' active involvement for this purpose is essential"

(Economic Development Officer, Semi-structured interview 27)

Another respondent who got disheartened in terms of people's reactions showed how their disposition got shaped and how he had utilized his discretion power on that.

"When I face that type of situation, I decide that I must help people who really need our assistance for their development. For those who do not need our assistance except the financial aid...we just could accomplish the given workload without considering the outcome of the policy. That is not what I mean by serving the public. That is more than that"

(Respondent, An Economic Development Officer, Semi-structured interview 31)

Behavioral insights refer to the systematic application of findings from the behavioural sciences; such as psychology, cognitive science, and

³³ Golem Effect- is a psychological phenomenon in which means where low expectations of

authoritative bodies affect negatively individuals' performance and skills.



Original Article

behavioural economics which pave the way to understanding and influencing human behaviour in the context of public policy and decision-making. These insights help design policy and interventions. They account for cognitive biases, social influences, and decision-making processes that often deviate from rationality. The situation some SLBs had faced during the implementation of social welfare policy revealed that their disposition is shaped by diverse factors not basically by the influence of self-concerns but also by some externalities such as policy receivers (citizens).

The 'behavioural insights' have been extensively researched across disciplines like psychology, economics, and public policy implementation. Gigerenzer and Goldstein (1996) critically examined the use of behavioural insights, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of human rationality. In these findings, it could be realized that the behavioural insights of SLBs affect shaping the decisions that must be taken instantly in terms of working with citizens in implementing the decisions. It is also affected by the nature of citizens' reactions in these particular areas.

The results of the study show that SLBs have multiple roles to play in implementing social welfare policy. As Lipsky (1980) highlights the disposition of SLBs is one of the main characteristics of SLBs which has a higher influence in implementing policies.

Nonetheless, it should not be a one-way service since the citizens also have a significant role in receiving the service from the SLBs. Most importantly, whilst the SLBs are involved in service providing in terms of achieving the policy goals while treating both the citizen and government institutional needs, the SLB cannot alone accomplish that as a citizen also needs to be engaged in the government policy works in a more aware and convincing manner to assist the SLBs to reach the goals where both parties could be satisfied. That is where the SLBs' disposition is shaped strongly to be aligned with consciously the goals of social welfare policy.

Further, the SLBs' preparedness for implementing the policies is also investigated.

"We are typically trained to implement programmes for citizens. In my view, although the training programmes may not be sufficiently comprehensive, they adequately cover the essential tasks necessary for effective policy implementation."

(Open-ended Survey R 02,
Development Officer)

Training bureaucrats could place a collective goal achievement and educate them regarding the policy goals and activities. The disposition of SLBs aligns with inherent attitudes, professional mindset, values and also behavioural tendencies that could be changed or enhanced through training.



Original Article

As a result of that, these factors also affected in shaping the disposition of SLBs.

“Occasionally, my fellow team leaders and I discuss issues that arise from our field, and we receive valuable feedback from our peers to help mitigate these matters.”

(Open-ended survey R 10, Economic Development Officer)

As per the abovementioned demonstrations, it is revealed that institutional formal and informal arrangements can also have a significant impact in shaping the disposition of SLBs in the implementation of social welfare policy.

Apart from the impact of institution-based factors, the disposition could be affected by the internal mindset of the SLBs occasionally.

“Sometimes we feel tired of convincing the citizens regarding the process that needs to be done.”

(A Social Welfare Officer, Semi-Structures Interview 10)

Another respondent’s expression of their career and their work experience.

“I am sometimes exhausted with this career as well. I got this job not only just to secure a position in the public sector but I wanted to do something for my country. But now I feel it is not a simple task hence I feel down.”

(A Social Welfare Officer, Semi-Structures Interview 22)

Further, Brodtkin (2012) in her study of ‘Reflections on Street-Level Bureaucracy: Past, Present, and Future’ emphasizes the importance of understanding the internal motivation that she regards as the disposition, in determining how they apply rules in practice (pp. 940-949).

On that account, apart from the institutional formal and informal matters that have a significant influence in shaping the disposition of bureaucrats’ experiences that they gain through working in the field as a professional also affect shaping the disposition which directly has an impact on the implementation of social welfare policy.

Citizens’ Role in Policy Implementation

The governability of the government is crucial where all the aspects of the governing process meet achieving the policy goals.

“As a government agent we have responsibilities even we are accountable for accomplishing the policy goals not just for completing the given tasks but with the intention of taking care of the citizens’ needs which will definitely affect human development and vice versa, the state. Hence, I believe the citizens also have a critical role in accomplishing the policy goals, However, it is hard to see their commitment to active



Original Article

participation in the policy outcomes except by raising their voices to get financial assistance as the welfare facilities from the government.”

(Government Agent, In-depth Interview 02)

In some cases, citizens’ support for implementing policies or in other words, carrying out policy decisions into actions was very low.

It is evident that despite the discretion power of the SLBs that entertain in some specific cases, there should be certain influential factors that essentially come forward that would assist significantly in achieving the policy goals.

“Proper mechanism for monitoring the citizens’ responsibilities in terms of following the guidance given by the government is inevitable. However, what I believe is that instead of monitoring the system, citizens’ intention in moving forward is essential.

(Village Headman, In-depth Interview 12)

The ideas given by many respondents align with citizen involvement proving that active citizen participation not only in getting the welfare service but also the knowledge and their courage in utilizing them for their development is essential in terms of shaping the disposition which would lead to the discretion of SLBs.

SLBs who are engaged in social welfare policy implementation often operate

under ambiguous rules and regulations, which means they must use discretion when managing limited resources or deciding who qualifies for which type of services. That being the case, discretion could result in varied service outcomes while their professional judgments are being affected to shape the disposition of policy implementers.

While policy decisions are widely influenced by the bureaucrats’ judgments, it is important to know the way of shaping them in order to have the policy outcome successful where the citizens’ active involvement can play a vital role in fulfilling the both citizens’ needs and the government’s needs. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) in their study on ‘State Agent or Citizen Agent: Two Narratives of Discretion’ state that some bureaucrats often prioritize the citizens’ interests over rigid policy enforcement, drawing from their disposition to act empathetically towards citizens.

Significant aspects of Citizens’ lives are greatly affected by the discretion of SLBs that are shaped through their policy implementation (de Boer, 2021; Davidovitz and Cohen, 2021; Lipsky, 1980; Lavee and Strier, 2019). Thus, it is clear that SLBs entertain discretion based on the disposition that is built up in terms of the citizen interaction and their reactions to SLB guidelines.

The results of this study show that SLBs have a significant impact on the effectiveness of social welfare policy implementation concerning the



Original Article

disposition made through diverse contexts. Their approaches, discretions, and external pressures to which they are exposed play a significant role in helping or hindering the achievement of policy objectives.

This research identifies several barriers faced by SLBs, including limited resources. In addition, when it was connected to the social welfare policy the SLBs have faced specific issues such as some humanistic complexities which could not be seen as issues. However, the nature of some situations such as making decisions to minimize the barriers and giving reasons for the institutional and regulatory concerns have to be looked into.

Excessive workload coupled with unclear policy guidelines and conflicting expectations of citizens and policymakers' constraints often affected the building of the disposition of SLBs and the ability to implement policies as planned. Factors such as inefficiency that cause delays or, on the other hand, open communication should be matched with adequate training of senior staff support and policy goals that set a positive mindset and increase commitment to service and performance of SLBs.

The study's main purpose was to explore the shaping of the disposition of SLBs when implementing social welfare policies. The objective focuses on identifying internal and external influences on SLBs' disposition. Among the most influential concerns citizens' active participation, the

citizens' role in social welfare policy implementation, institutional concerns in terms of training, and peers' involvement in supporting policy goals were the main factors influencing the shaping of the disposition of policy implementers.

This helps us understand why some policies are more effectively implemented by SLBs while others are less effective. Furthermore, the research focused on assessing if and how attitudes, perceptions, and SLBs management mechanisms influence policymaking success where human interaction is key and could directly affect work efficiency in policy implementation through the SLB role which is pertinent in carrying government decisions into action.

The study also highlights the dual nature of street-level officials' discretion. While providing flexibility in responding to complex situations, it could also lead to inconsistent implementation of policies when personal beliefs or institutional pressures come into play. Therefore, for the successful implementation of social welfare policies, SLBs must be supported by clear policy objectives, adequate resource allocation, a flexible work environment, and most importantly citizens that promote cooperation and accountability in the policy goals achievements.



Original Article

During the 1970s³⁴ The scholarly field of public administrative reforms has rightly entered a domain that explains the value of civic engagement in governance. Ostrom (1996) states the idea of co-production that highlights the citizen's role in fulfilling public services. The effort of co-production flawlessly aligns with social welfare since it helps citizens to become empowered through government assistance. In that view, the recipients need to be at the core of producing the service which enables them to be more interactive with public service. Co-production is regarded as a partnership between citizens and public service providers that is essential to minimize the issues (Pestoff, 2020), particularly in social welfare. With this perspective, it is apparent that co-production can be employed in shaping the disposition of SLBs. Hence, further research needs to be conducted to identify and make the citizens aware of how the citizens can be engaged in public service to achieve the policy goals.

In light of the study's results, the formation of the disposition is influenced by divergent factors that originate from the SLBs' behavioural insights and the beneficiaries' reactions in terms of implementing social welfare policy in the context of Sri Lanka. According to Lipsky's (1980) explanation, SLBs often experience systematic resource constraints.

However, this study highlights, that service receivers' active engagement and localized government structures are strongly impactful in shaping the disposition of SLBs which is on the other hand significant in their discretion.

On that account, it can be argued that the theory of SLB needs a contextual adaptation compatible with non-western policy contexts.

CONCLUSION

The disposition of SLBs is a significant factor that is highly influential in policy implementation. The stage of policy implementation mutually shapes linkages with humanistic and institutional concerns specifically when the policy areas lie with sensible and unquantifiable concerns such as social welfare. In such conditions, SLBs encounter issues that significantly shape their disposition by deteriorating the focus of policy goals.

The results of the study show that the attitudes of citizens towards engaging actively with the accomplishment of goals of social welfare policy become crucial in shaping the disposition of SLBs. The beneficiaries of social welfare are not competent enough to utilize government assistance. Instead of empowering citizens, they have become aid seekers to survive. This

³⁴ This idea is widely discussed in public administration under new Public Governance reformations.



Original Article

reflects a disconnection between the SLBs' role and the citizens' intention regarding social welfare.

The essential role of citizens that need to play in the governing process is fundamental to building up a quality governance. The absence of policy receivers' commitment to achieving policy goals deteriorates the policy goals. Hence the co-production needs to function properly amalgamating both the administration and the general public to accomplish policy goals in non-western policy environments.

Policymakers must consider the constraints faced by SLBs and foster positive factors that could shape their behaviour to ensure that policies are effectively translated into feasible outcomes. Under these circumstances, developing training programmes to enhance the capacity for discretion and allocating additional funds to manage the operational constraints faced by SLBs are significant for effective public service delivery.

Particularly, a mechanism for improving community engagement in shaping the disposition of SLBs in implementing social welfare is regarded as the effective method of with greater understanding and proper management of both receptive and resistive factors which significantly shape the disposition of SLBs and could lead the government tasks to where they need to be at the end.

References

- Aggar, A., & Damgaard, B. (2018). Interactive policy processes: A challenge for street-level bureaucrats. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*, 22(3), 89-108. <https://doi.org/10.2001-7413>
- Babad, E. Y., Inbar, J., & Rosenthal, R. (1982). Pygmalion, Galatea, and the Golem: Investigations of biased and unbiased teachers. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 74(4), 459-474. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.74.4.459>
- Birkland, T. A. (2019). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policy making* (5th ed ed.). Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In P. M. H. Cooper (Ed.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology* (Vol. 12, pp. 57-71). American Psychological Association.
- Brodkin, E. Z. (2012). Reflections on street-level bureaucracy: Past, present, and future. *Public Administration Review*, 72(6), 940-949. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02657.x>
- Camillo, C. A. (2022). Street-level bureaucracy. In A. Farazmand (Ed.), *Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66252-3_654
- Cresswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE.
- Davidovitz, M., & Cohen, N. (2021). Politicians' involvement in street-level policy implementation: Implications for social equity. *Public Policy and Administration*, 38(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/09520767211024033>
- de Boer, N. (2021). The (un)intended effects of street-level bureaucrats' enforcement style: Do citizens shame or obey bureaucrats? *Public Policy and Administration*, 36(04), 452-475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076720905005>



Original Article

- Edwards III, G. C. (1980). *Implementing public policy*. Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Evans, T. (2011). Professionals, managers and discretion: Critiquing street-level bureaucracy. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 41(2), 368–386. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcq074>
- Gassner, D., & Gofen, A. (2018). Street-level management: A clientele-agent perspective on implementation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(4), 551–568. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muy051>
- Hill, M., & Hupe, P. (2002). *Implementing public policy: Governance in theory and in practice*. SAGE.
- Hupe, P & Hill, M. (2007). Street-level bureaucracy and public accountability. *Public Administration*, 85(2), 279-299. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2007.00650.x>
- Hupe, P. (2014). What happens on the ground: Persistent issues in implementation research. *Public Policy and Administration*. 29(2), 164–182.
- Jathika Jana Balawegaya (NPP Sri Lanka). (2024). *NPP Presidential Election Manifesto - 2024*. Jathika Jana Balawegaya. <https://www.akd.lk/policy/>
- Jayasuriya, L. (1996). *The Sri Lankan Welfare State: Retrospect and Prospects*. Edith Cowan University.
- Jilke, S., & Tummers, L. (2018). Which clients are deserving of help? A theoretical model and experimental test. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(2), 226–238.
- Kettl, D. F. (2008). Public bureaucracies. In C. K. Tosun (Ed.), *Public policy: A new introduction* (2nd ed.). Red Globe Press.
- Keulemans, S. & Van de Walle, S. . (2019). Street-Level bureaucrats' attitude toward clients: A study of work group influence in the Dutch and Belgian tax administration. *Public Performance and Management Review*, 334-362.
- Keulemans, S., & Van de Walle, S. (2020). Understanding street-level bureaucrats' attitude towards clients: Towards a measurement instrument. *Public Policy and Administration*, 35(1), 84-113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076718789749>
- Lavee, E., & Strier, R. (2019). Transferring emotional capital as coerced discretion: Street-level bureaucrats reconciling structural deficiencies. *Public Administration*, 97(4), 910–925. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12598>
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Maclean, E. M. (1977). Learning theory and chronic welfare dependency: A hypothesis of etiological and contingency relationships. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 8(3), 255-259. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7916\(77\)90063-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7916(77)90063-5)
- Maynard-Moody, S., & Musheno, M. (2003). *Cops, teachers, counselors: Stories from the front lines of public service*. University of Michigan Press.
- Mazmanian, D. A., & Sabatier, P. A. (1983). *Implementation and public policy*. University Press of America.
- Michigan Law Review. (1981). Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services. <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol179/iss4/23>
- Mubarok, S., Zauhar, S., Setyowati, E., & Suryadi. (2020). Policy implementation analysis: Exploration of George Edward III, Marilee S Grindle, and Mazmanian and Sabatier theories in the policy analysis triangle framework. *Journal of Public Administration Studies*, 05(1), 33-38.
- Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. (2013). *Divineguma Act, No. 1 of 2013*. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/srl204045.pdf>
- Pestoff, V. (2020). *Co-Production and Public Service Management*. Routledge.
- Pressman, J. L., & Wildavsky, A. B. (1984). *Implementation: How great expectations in*

**Original Article**

- Washington are dashed in Oakland: Or, why it's amazing that federal programs work at all (2nd ed.). University of California Press.
- Right to Life Human Rights Centre. (2023). The effectiveness of Aswesuma welfare benefit scheme: Preliminary findings and ongoing assessments. Right to Life Human Rights Centre.
- Sapru, R. K. (2011). *Public policy: Art and craft of policy analysis*. PHI Learning Private Limited.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students* (8th ed.). Pearson Professional Limited.
- Silva, D. (2021). An analysis of the role of street-level bureaucrats in implementing the national labor migration policy in Sri Lanka. In I. D. Jamil (Ed.), *Policy Response, Local Service Delivery, and Governance in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka* (pp. 137-164). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66018-5_6
- Stanislav, P. (2020). Social welfare: A synthetic analysis from the perspective of the main schools of economic thought. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 6(1), 101–115.
- Tummers, L., & Bekkers, V. J. J. M. (2014). Policy implementation, street-level bureaucracy, and the importance of discretion. *Public Management Review*, 16(4), 527–547. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2289338>
- Van Meter, D. S., & Van Horn, C. E. (1975). The policy implementation process: A conceptual framework. *Administration & Society*, 06(4), 445-488.
- Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Oxford University Press.
- Winter, S. C. (2003). Implementation perspectives: Status and reconsideration. In B. G. Pierre (Ed.), *Handbook of public administration*. SAGE.