Coping and State-Agent and Citizen-Agent Narratives: Proceeding the Street-Level Bureaucrats in the Implementation of Public Policies in the Brazilian Context

Coping e Narrativas Agente-Estatal e Agente-Cidadão: Atuação dos Burocratas de Nível de Rua na Implementação de Políticas Públicas no Contexto Brasileiro

Coping y Narrativas Agente-Estado y Agente-Ciudadano: Atuación de los Burócratas de Calle en la Implementación de Políticas Públicas en el Contexto Brasileño

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Abstract: *This work aims to identify the narratives used by street-level bureaucrats (SLBs), through the coping strategies used by them, in the brazilian context. It also seeks to determine which of these narratives are adopted by the bureaucrats: state-agent or citizen-agent. The research is grounded in the concepts of "coping" and "state-agent and citizen-agent narratives" found in the literature on public policy implementation, viewed through the lens of Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory. This is a qualitative study based on bibliographic research, which involves reviewing empirical works on the Brazilian context and theoretical literature from both national and international sources to support the discussion of the findings. The results indicate that, within the Brazilian context, there are relational and contextual aspects, as well as normative and institutional parameters, that influence the development of coping mechanisms by street-level bureaucrats, and these mechanisms determine which narrative the SLB will adopt. Propositions were formulated, and an analytical framework was established to guide the analysis and interpretation of coping behaviors and narratives in the public policy implementation process, as well as to identify relevant questions for future research. The study integrates the constructs of coping and state-agent/citizen-agent narratives, suggesting that these structures can interact and are fundamental to SLB behavior. It deepens the theoretical analysis of coping mechanisms and the state-agent/citizen-agent narratives adopted by SLBs, arguing that these two constructs can be studied through the lens of Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory.*

Keywords: *Coping; agent-state narrative; agent-citizen narrative*

Resumo: Este trabalho tem o objetivo de identificar as narrativas utilizadas por burocratas de nível de rua (BNRs), por meio das estratégias de enfrentamento utilizadas por eles, no contexto brasileiro. A pesquisa foi realizada a partir dos conceitos de "*coping*" e "narrativas agente-estatal e agente-cidadão" presentes na literatura, sobre a implementação de políticas públicas à luz da Teoria da Burocracia de Nível de Rua. É um trabalho de natureza qualitativa, a partir de pesquisa bibliográfica, em que se levantaram trabalhos empíricos sobre o contexto brasileiro e trabalhos teóricos da literatura nacional e internacional, para subsidiar a discussão dos resultados. Os resultados apontam que, no contexto brasileiro, existem aspectos relacionais e contextuais e parâmetros normativos e institucionais que influenciam na construção de mecanismos de *coping* pelos burocratas de nível de rua; e tais mecanismos definem qual narrativa o BNR

irá adotar. Formularam-se proposições, uma estrutura analítica para orientar a análise e a interpretação dos comportamentos de *coping* e das narrativas, no processo de implementação de políticas públicas, e questões relevantes para instigar estudos futuros. O trabalho abordou, de forma integrada, os construtos *coping* e narrativas agente-estatal/agente-cidadão, sugerindo que essas estruturas podem dialogar e que são subjacentes ao comportamento dos/as BNRs. O trabalho aprofunda a análise teórica acerca dos mecanismos de *coping* e das narrativas (agente-cidadão/agente-estatal) adotadas pelos BNRs, argumentando-se que esses dois construtos podem ser estudados à luz da Teoria da Burocracia de Nível de Rua.

Palavras-chave: *Coping*; narrativa gente-estatal; narrativa agente-cidadão

Resumen: *Este trabajo tiene como objetivo identificar las narrativas utilizadas por los Burócratas de Nivel de Calle (BLV,) através de las estrategias de afrontamiento utilizadas por ellos, en el contexto brasileño. También busca determinar cuál de estas narrativas es adoptada por los burócratas: agente-estatal o agente-ciudadano. La investigación se basa en los conceptos de "afrontamiento" y "narrativas agente-estatal y agente-ciudadano" presentes en la literatura sobre la implementación de políticas públicas, vistas a través de la teoría de la burocracia de nivel de calle. Se trata de un estudio cualitativo basado en la investigación bibliográfica, que implica revisar trabajos empíricos sobre el contexto brasileño y literatura teórica de fuentes nacionales e internacionales para apoyar la discusión de los resultados. Los resultados indican que, dentro del contexto brasileño, existen aspectos relacionales y contextuales, así como parámetros normativos e institucionales, que influyen en el desarrollo de mecanismos de afrontamiento por parte de los burócratas de nivel de calle, y estos mecanismos determinan qué narrativa adoptará el BNC. Se formularon proposiciones y se estableció un marco analítico para guiar el análisis e interpretación de los comportamientos de afrontamiento y las narrativas en el proceso de implementación de políticas públicas, así como para identificar cuestiones relevantes para investigaciones futuras. El estudio integra los constructos de afrontamiento y narrativas agente-estatal/agente-ciudadano, sugiriendo que estas estructuras pueden interactuar y son fundamentales para el comportamiento de los BNC. Profundiza en el análisis teórico de los mecanismos de afrontamiento y las narrativas (agente-ciudadano/agente-estatal) adoptadas por los BNC, argumentando que estos dos constructos pueden estudiarse a la luz de la teoría de la burocracia de nivel de calle.*

Palabras clave: *Coping; narrativa agente-estado; narrativa agente-ciudadano*

Introduction

Public policy implementers play an important role in modern societies. Although they are "considered low-level employees" (Lipsky, 2010, p.3), their practices and actions are, in fact, the implementation of services delivered to citizens by the State. For this reason, they come to be seen as individuals who go beyond mere executors of actions planned at central levels of government. They are seen, above all, as agents who adapt and modify processes, who build their own mechanisms for policy implementation, endowed with autonomy and discretion (Brodkin, 1997; Hill & Hupe, 2022; Lipsky, 1980; 2010) and who formulate the policies they execute (Arretche, 2001; Bronzo, Costa & Guimarães, 2022; Ferreira & Medeiros, 2016; Lotta et al., 2018). These policy executors, who implement actions and interact directly with society, are called, in this study, street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) or, even, frontline workers, policy implementers and executors (Lipsky, 2010).

In the context of public policy implementation, in addition to discussions surrounding autonomy and discretion - elements frequently studied by researchers in the field of public policy studies (Ferreira & Medeiros, 2016; Hill & Hupe, 2022; Lotta et al., 2018; Lipsky, 1980 – coping also stands out as a central theme for understanding specific aspects related to public policy implementation and the work of SLBs, as highlighted in Lipsky's classic work (1980). The author discusses, among other aspects, the mechanisms used by street-level bureaucrats to cope with stressful circumstances, in carrying out their work and serving citizens.

Coping can be understood as a set of actions, mechanisms, or strategies developed in the context of adverse and stressful situations, such as insufficient resources, excessive demands, ambiguous

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and/or conflicting information, and different types of pressures, in the workplace (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lipsky, 2010). Coping, during the provision of public services, is "defined as behavioral efforts that frontline workers employ when interacting with customers in order to master, tolerate, or reduce the external and internal demands and conflicts they face daily" (Tummer et al., 2015, p. 1100).

Studies on this topic have indicated that policymakers adapt to citizens' needs and use their discretion to adapt rules to meet the demands of the policy's target audience. Even when dealing with stress and a set of rules linked to public policies, frontline workers also appear to be motivated by personal beliefs and values, judging and evaluating the adherence of a given action to reality or to the expectations that beneficiaries have in relation to public policy (Tummers et al., 2015; Tummers, 2017; Dias & Maynard-Moody, 2007).

A similar discussion is undertaken by Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2003), who propose two narratives - "state-agent narrative" and "citizen-agent narrative" -, indicating that street-level bureaucrats can either use their discretion to act in accordance with the laws and set of rules (state-agent narrative) or proceed in accordance with the demands of individuals and circumstances (citizen-agent narrative).

Most discussions surrounding how street-level bureaucrats implement public policies focus on the application and interpretation of a set of norms that regulate implementation procedures, using an analytical lens focused on the state-agent narrative (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). The literature also highlights how the different dimensions of frontline workers' behaviors are articulated, their impact on the public policy implementation process, and the factors that influence such behaviors (Ferreira, Medeiros, & Crumpton, 2020; Ferreira & Medeiros, 2016; May & Winter, 2009). However, there appears to be little research that delves deeper into the citizen-agent narrative and focuses on understanding how and whether street-level bureaucrats interpret aspects referenced in citizens' personalities and moral character to make decisions (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Especially in the Brazilian context, it is observed that research even mentions tense situations that street-level bureaucrats face, especially regarding the empirical realities related to Covid-19 (Horta et al., 2021), violence and public security (Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto, 2021) and social vulnerability (Bronzo; Costa & Guimarães (2022). However, coping is debated in a diffuse manner, without this construct being a central element of discussion, either in theoretical studies or in empirical work. Furthermore, no research was identified in Brazil that proposed a dialogue between the state-agent and citizen-agent narratives and the construction of coping strategies. In addition to filling this gap, this study suggests that these theoretical perspectives can interact and they are underlying. Therefore, it seems appropriate to understand their articulation in the implementation process.

The idea was to deepen discussions about the coping mechanisms developed by street-level bureaucrats when implementing public policies or delivering public services, and which narrative they adopt (Hill & Hupe, 2022). In the study by Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2003), it is clear that street-level bureaucrats tend to plan and execute actions based on a citizen-agent narrative, rather than a state-agent narrative. It remains to be seen whether this result is also confirmed in research conducted in the Brazilian context, where there seems to be no studies along these lines.

Thus, this study poses the following research question: What are the coping strategies adopted by street-level bureaucrats? How do these strategies shape and influence public policy implementation processes in the Brazilian context? The aim is to identify the narratives used by SLBs, through their coping strategies, in the Brazilian context. The existence of multiple factors that explain the development of coping behavior is recognized, and the hypothesis is defended that street-level bureaucrats, in situations of tension and stress, more frequently construct coping strategies focused on a citizen-agent narrative, aiming at personal values and beliefs and at the character and dignity of

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the citizen.

By reviewing classic and contemporary studies from international and national literature on street-level bureaucracy, coping, and state-agent and citizen-agent narratives, this article is organized into four other sections, in addition to this introduction: 1) a brief contextualization and classifications of coping in the implementation of public policies are presented, as well as the debate on the state-agent and citizen-agent narratives; 2) the methodological aspects are discussed; 3) the main findings and advances in the literature on these concepts are highlighted, as well as how they are being studied in the Brazilian context, using a dialogue between classic and seminal texts and the empirical studies identified. From this, it was possible to unite the two perspectives – coping and state-agent and citizen-agent narratives – in a proposed theoretical structure; and 4) finally, the final considerations are woven, in which the main findings, contributions and limitations of this article are rescued, in addition to pointing out themes and questions that can be deepened and answered in future studies.

Coping and the Citizen-Agent and State-Agent Narratives in the Implementation of Public Policies

The concept of coping originates primarily from studies developed within the scope of psychoanalysis, through the work of Sigmund Freud, and psychology, based on the research by Richard Stanley Lazarus. They investigated everything from how people dealt with unpleasant feelings, building internal defense mechanisms, to how professionals managed situations of pressure, conflict, and stress in the workplace (Lazarus, 1966; Tummers et al., 2015).

In Lazarus's (1966) work, "*Psychological Stress and the Coping Process*", the author defined coping as the cognitive and behavioral efforts designed to manage existing demands and conflicts in each context. These efforts are responses to stressful situations that originate in environmental problems and/or the emotions of the agents involved. Coping mechanisms aim to control or mitigate these stressful situations or reduce cognitive dissonance (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Tetlock et al., 2000).

Inspired by the work of Lazarus (1966), Lipsky (1980) introduced the concept of coping in the context of public policy implementation, specifically when street-level bureaucrats interact directly with the beneficiaries of these actions. By highlighting coping behaviors such as routinization, process standardization, and work rationalization, Lipsky (1980) paved the way for researchers to focus their attention on how street-level bureaucrats deal with pressure. This is because, even if policymakers attempt to maintain public policies according to their original design, conceived at central government levels, the implementation phase presents complex arrangements of interactions, relationships, routine development, and behavior patterns specific to each location (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010; Thacher & Rein, 2004). Therefore, SLBs "regularly face stress when providing services to citizens" (Hill & Hupe, 2022; Tummers et al., 2015, p. 1099) and must deal with different demands and conflicting conditions in the implementation of public actions. This leads them to formulate responses to events of tension or conflict (Steenhuisen & van Eeten, 2013) or mechanisms to deal with the limitations that prevent them from carrying out their work (Lipsky, 1980; 2010).

Scarce resources (human, financial, material, technological), ambiguous norms and information, work overload and excessive demands from the target audience of public policies, and inadequate working conditions are some examples of what frontline workers face in the provision of public services (Hill & Hupe, 2022; Tummers et al., 2015; Tummers, 2017; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003). These adversities and limitations lead street-level bureaucrats to develop different ways or mechanisms to deal with stressful situations in the workplace (Lipsky, 1980).

When observing street-level bureaucrats' coping behaviors in interactions with citizens, Tummers et al. (2015) organize three groups for coping in public service delivery: (1) movement

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toward clients, (2) movement away from clients, and (3) distancing from clients. Regarding the movement toward clients, we observe situations in which street-level bureaucrats adapt to the needs of beneficiaries, aiming to meet their demands. They may prioritize beneficiaries, adjust or break rules, and use their own resources to assist citizens, for example, "a social worker giving a client (unemployed) part of their own money to buy food". Regarding the anti-client movement, SNBs, instead of adapting or breaking rules, strictly follow them "as a way to control clients, especially those who are particularly demanding or manipulative." Another manifestation of this coping approach is "aggression," used in response to offensive behavior from citizen-users. Finally, in the process of distancing clients, policy executors avoid contact or interaction with the beneficiary population, acting in a standardized and routinely manner, and rationing the provision of services. For example, a police officer or a health worker may report excessive demand or other impossibility of performing the service and ask beneficiaries to return contact on another day (Bekkers, Moody & Edwards 2011; Tummers et al., 2015, p. 1110).

In addition to the classifications presented by Tummers et al. (2015), the literature indicates other conceptual variations for coping mechanisms such as, for example, "legitimation, interpretation and shielding" (Bakkeli, 2023), active and passive coping (van Loon et al., 2018; van Loon & Jakobsen, 2017), which are detailed below.

Legitimation, interpretation and shielding. Legitimation is used when conflicts need to be addressed between SLB interventions and formal procedures and routines. As a coping strategy, shared understandings of problems and situations are constructed to achieve loyalty to the management model and work processes. After legitimation practices, these processes are considered appropriate for the context in which the SLBs operate (Bakkeli, 2023).

The second coping strategy, addressed in Bakkeli's study (2023), is interpretation, in which supervisors promote dialogues between managers and street-level bureaucrats in order to jointly interpret the rules, criteria and procedures, to establish common routines among agents. This behavior is part of the legitimization process, as it is necessary to build common understandings for a practice to be considered legitimate by the group. Interpretation can also be seen as a response to communication problems, ambiguity, and conflicting norms or information. Actual role expectations are therefore filtered or interpreted in specific ways by individual members of organizations (Bakkeli, 2023; Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010; Matland, 1995).

The third coping mechanism, shielding, involves "efforts to protect intervention, increase specialization, and preserve the organization's rules". This coping strategy defines the competencies and skills that street-level bureaucrats must possess to perform certain roles within the implementation of actions. The expected outcome of this mechanism is to avoid unnecessary tasks performed by actors unsuitable for them and to focus on those actions collectively classified as essential (Bakkeli, 2023, p. 631).

Passive coping and active coping. This classification is presented by van Loon et al. (2018) and van Loon & Jakobsen (2017). In the first case, passive coping, there is no intention to change the status quo, and public policy executors adopt more standardized and routinized procedures, which can be quite common in the daily lives of these actors, as highlighted by Lipsky (1980) and also by Tummers et al. (2015), when discussing the mechanism for distancing clients or users from policies.

In the second case, in active coping, the conduct of street-level bureaucrats is intended to change situations or address the central problems that gave rise to the demands, problems or conflicts. Activism is also observed by Hupe & van der Krogt (2013) who consider it to be a behavior used to confront the state of things, in order to reduce pressures or disagreements regarding understandings of norms.

Building support networks (networking), in which street-level bureaucrats seek to share objectives, efforts, and/or returns on an action taken, can be an assertive strategy for frontline workers

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who choose to act either actively or passively to change adverse situations. This is because networks act as a self-protection for groups and can be used both to legitimize practices and to garner support for carrying out activities or inaction (Hupe & van der Krogt, 2013).

Other coping strategies or mechanisms can be found in the literature in psychology, organizational behavior, sociology, and political science (Schwarzer & Taubert, 2002; Steenhuisen & van Eeten, 2015), but the purpose of this section was not to exhaust examples but rather to identify typologies or groups to classify coping mechanisms. These typologies constituted theoretical categories in this work and guided the empirical analyses of studies on the Brazilian context, as shown in section 4 of this article, which presents the discussion of the results.

The state-agent and citizen-agent narratives

In the book Cops, Teachers, Counselors: Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service, by Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2003), the authors tell different stories of how street-level bureaucrats navigate multiple workplace situations and make decisions. They do so from diverse contexts and professionals working in distinct areas such as social work, public safety, and education.

In one of the stories told by Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2003), they show that frontline workers take into account the character and identity of citizens when making decisions. By positively assessing the policy beneficiary's character, the frontline worker acts proactively. By characterizing the rules as barriers to helping that citizen of good character, the street-level bureaucrat circumvents the rules and finds ways to subvert the regulatory apparatus, taking risks to help the beneficiary, in a relationship based on trust and a people-centered approach.

Although the Weberian bureaucratic model, widely used in public sector organizations, is characterized, among other things, by impersonal, standardized behaviors, and a lack of emotional involvement on the part of its agents, it is not always possible to separate the willingness to act and interactions with users from policies. Often, the attitudes of street-level bureaucrats are defined by the attributes of the users to be served by public policies (Lipsky, 2010; 1980).

There seems to be a consensus in the literature that, as a rule, street-level bureaucrats seek to follow what is established in laws and other related norms (Matland, 1995). There are even variations among certain types of public service actors, with some being more prone to the dictates of the rules than others, such as police officers, who are part of highly hierarchical organizations. Also, although the actions of street-level bureaucrats are guided by a set of rules, they are not limited by them, given the high degree of discretion with which they operate. This leeway, the discretionary space for decision-making (Hill & Hupe, 2022; Lipsky, 1980), allows street-level bureaucrats to classify policy target audiences based, for example, on merit — what they consider desirable or what they deem more or less worthy of public services (Brodkin, 1997; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; 2003).

Based on this, Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2000; 2003) highlight the coexistence of these two fronts, which largely define the tensions at the local implementation level or the reasons why street-level bureaucrats act in certain ways. The first, the state-agent narrative, is predominant in the literature and media outlets. She describes a democratic state as a structure formed by predictable laws and processes that guide the actions of public officials toward equal treatment. This narrative concerns compliance with the law, in which street-level bureaucrats and citizens act according to the set of norms that regulate their actions and policy, with some adaptations to specific contexts within what Lipsky (1980) classifies as discretion and autonomy. Such adjustments are limited to legal frameworks and used to ensure equal treatment among the target audiences of public policies (Lipsky, 1980; 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). In this narrative, frontline workers choose to act exactly as established in bureaucratic rules and procedures (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; 2003).

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The citizen-agent narrative, on the other hand, refers to the concern with cultural and moral aspects and focuses on the actions of street-level bureaucrats who are guided more by a set of values and beliefs than by the letter of the law and regulations. This narrative highlights the complexity of street-level bureaucrats' practices and behaviors and is often evident in unstable environments with less structured sanction systems, where policy implementers can be seen helping policy beneficiaries; taking risks not foreseen in the regulations to improve the lives of policy beneficiaries; excluding or slandering the target audience; or even indicating which citizens are worthy and which are not, so as to be considered by public actions. From this perspective, public policy executors are based on personal commitments to the beneficiaries of the actions and are interested in making a difference in their lives (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; 2003).

The two types of narratives are not incompatible, coexisting in public administration and state structures, where their principles guide the opinions and behaviors of street-level bureaucrats regarding the beneficiaries of public policy. There are situations where these narratives do not converge, leading to conflicts and stressful situations between frontline workers and the legal framework, where local agents must decide between what is correct under the law and what is appropriate for their cultural and moral standards (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; 2003).

Through the narratives adopted, it is possible to describe the profiles, qualities, and characteristics of street-level bureaucrats in decision-making, since the literature recognizes that there are cases in which bureaucracies "consistently favor some clients over others, despite official policies intended to treat people equally" (Lipsky, 2010, p. 13). Understanding such attitudes may be a possible way to explain decision-making and certain coping behaviors to deal with tense situations in the workplace, especially those related to interactions between policy executors and beneficiaries, observing when SLBs adopt each of the state-agent and citizen-agent narratives.

Methodological Aspects

Among the many fields of research and theoretical approaches dedicated to understanding coping – for example, psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior – this work delimited the concept to the coping strategies (or mechanisms) during the provision of public services, as defined by Tummers et al. (2015), and considers the street-level bureaucrat as a central actor in the proposed debate. Therefore, and combined with the keywords used in the scientific article search engines, which are described below, this work falls within the field of public policy implementation.

Methodologically, this study was based on an analysis of articles published prior to March 2024, the date on which the survey was last conducted. We chose not to define the time horizon and to use all available scientific articles in the Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus databases, which index journals relevant to public administration and public policy. Searches were conducted using the following keyword combinations: 1) "street-level bureaucracy" and "coping"; 2) "frontline workers" and "coping"; 3) "street-level bureaucracy" and "coping"; and 4) "frontline workers" and "coping". The theoretical and empirical studies cited by Tummers et al. (2015) were also consulted, who carried out a broad research study on the topic.

A total of 207 articles were considered eligible. All abstracts were read, and in some cases, the methods and results section was required. The articles were classified as: i) general studies on public policy implementation (207); ii) theoretical and empirical articles on coping during the provision of public services and/or citizen-agent/state-agent narratives (134); iii) articles that constructed typologies/classifications for coping (04); and empirical articles on coping in the Brazilian context (12). Fifty-one of these studies were selected for full reading, including references relevant to the field (Hill & Hupe, 2022; Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Tummers et al., 2015). The selection criterion used was the focus of the studies on street-level bureaucrats, as it was of

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interest to investigate how coping has been investigated in the field of public administration and, specifically, in implementation studies that focused on public policy executors. This step allowed the construction of theoretical categories that characterized both the narratives and the different coping mechanisms developed by street-level bureaucrats. Table 1 presents the source of the theoretical categories, developed from relevant international studies, and references from studies carried out in Brazil that addressed, implicitly or explicitly, narratives and coping behaviors.

Table 1 - **Theoretical categories developed from international literature and references from empirical studies in Brazil, where they can be observed**

Theoretical categories extracted from international studies	Source of theoretical categories	References from studies in Brazil
Coping		
Legitimation and institutionalization of action/process/policy	Bakkeli (2023); Lipsky (2010)	Coelho et al. (2023); Santos & Schommer (2023); Bronzo; Costa & Guimarães (2022); Lotta & Marques (2019); Coslovsky (2011)
Procedure, beneficiary or rule shielding	Bakkeli (2023)	Coelho et al. (2023).
Interpretation, improvisation and adaptation of standards	Bakkeli (2023); Lipsky (2010); Loyens & Maesschalck (2010)	Coelho et al. (2023); Bronzo; Costa & Guimarães (2022); Gonzales, Lima-Silva & Pozzedon (2021); Lima-Silva et al. (2020); Lotta & Marques (2019); Lotta, Pires & Moller (2022).
Streamlining processes and strict compliance with standards	Lipsky (2010)	Coelho et al. (2023); Santos & Schommer (2023); Fernandez et al. (2021); Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021); Lotta & Marques (2019); Coslovsky (2011).
Support and relationship network	Hupe & van der Krogt, 2013; Lipsky (1980)	Bronzo; Costa & Guimarães (2022); Horta et al. (2021); Lotta & Marques (2019); Coslovsky (2011)
Movement towards users	Bekkers, Moody & Edwards 2011; Tummers et al. (2015)	Santos & Schommer (2023); Bronzo; Costa & Guimarães (2022); Gonzales, Lima-Silva & Pozzedon (2021); Lotta & Kirschbaum (2021); Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021); Lotta & Marques (2019); Coslovsky (2011)
Movement against users	Bekkers, Moody & Edwards 2011; Tummers et al. (2015)	Lotta & Kirschbaum (2021); Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021)
User distancing	Bekkers, Moody & Edwards 2011; Tummers et al. (2015)	Santos & Schommer (2023); Fernandez et al. (2021); Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021); Lotta & Marques (2019); Coslovsky (2011)
Active Coping	Van Loon & Jakobsen, (2017); Van Loon et al., 2018	Gonzales, Lima-Silva & Pozzedon (2021); Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021); Santos & Schommer (2023)
Passive Coping	Van Loon & Jakobsen, (2017)	Coelho et al. (2023); Santos & Schommer (2023); Lotta & Kirschbaum (2021); Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021).
Narratives		
State-agent narrative	Maynard-Mood & Musheno (2003)	Coelho et al. (2023); Lotta & Marques (2019); Coslovsky (2011)
Citizen-agent narrative	Brodkin (1997); Maynard-Mood & Musheno (2003)	Lotta & Kirschbaum (2021); Coslovsky (2011)

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In Table 1, it is important to emphasize that many studies classified as "theoretical and empirical articles on coping during public service provision and citizen-agent/state-agent narratives" do not necessarily use the terminology employed in this study. However, they highlight the situations of tension, conflict, and stress experienced by street-level bureaucrats, which fit the referential constructs of this study. Furthermore, they portray the different strategies for dealing with such situations and the roles played by SLBs in specific work situations, in which they sometimes adopt the citizen-agent narrative, sometimes the state-agent narrative.

Coping Strategies and State-Agent and Citizen-Agent Narratives: What Do Empirical Studies on the Brazilian Context Show?

To map evidence on coping and citizen-agent/state-agent narratives, in empirical studies on the Brazilian context, the theoretical categories presented in Table 1 of this work were used. When analyzing the set of articles surveyed, few studies focused on understanding coping in the Brazilian context were observed. Nevertheless, it was possible to observe an increase in the number of studies on the subject in recent years, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. (Alcadipani et al., 2020; Gofen & Lotta, 2021).

It was identified that the research that investigated the Brazilian context addressed, especially, public policies in the area of public health (Alcadipani et al., 2020; Fernandez, et al., 2021; Gofen & Lotta, 2021; Horta et al., 2021; Lima-Silva et al., 2020; Lotta & Marques, 2020; Gonzalez, Lima-Silva & Pozzebon, 2021); social assistance (Ferreira & Medeiros, 2016; Bronzo et al., 2022; Lotta et al.; 2023); public security (Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto, 2022); education (Lotta & Kirschbaum, 2021) and housing (Gonzalez, Lima-Silva & Pozzebon, 2021).

Unlike international studies that discuss coping in depth in empirical settings such as the Netherlands (Keulemans & Van de Walle, 2020; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Steenhuisen & van Eeten, 2013), Denmark (van Loon & Jakobsen, 2018), and the United States (Tummers & Rocco, 2015), due to their proposed objectives, most articles about the Brazilian context mention coping superficially, without delving deeper into identifying the coping mechanisms adopted by street-level bureaucrats or constructing typologies. This is a first finding of this article that highlights the need for research in Brazil that considers coping as a central element of analysis.

However, the empirical elements presented in studies on the national context bring relevant specificities and heterogeneities that have not yet been taken into consideration by international studies (Eiró & Lotta, 2023).

Although there were few articles that addressed the Brazilian context, it was possible to extract results that elucidate the discussion surrounding the theme proposed in this article, adding analytical elements to the debate posed by the international literature that addresses not only coping, but also the citizen-agent and state-agent narratives.

The research developed by Coslovsky (2011), for example – even though the author did not use, literally, the terminology "coping strategies" (Tummers et al., 2015) and the narratives proposed by Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2000; 2003) or similar – illustrate well how street-level bureaucrats use their discretion to make certain decisions, sometimes approaching, sometimes moving away or acting against users, as observed by Tummers et al. (2015).

When analyzing the Brazilian Public Prosecutor's Office (MP), Coslovsky (2011) investigated how prosecutors mobilize efforts to enforce labor and environmental regulations. The results indicate that, although organizations like the MP encourage the development of routinized and standardized processes, which could be classified here as the adoption of a state-agent narrative, a group of

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prosecutors with more reformist characteristics was observed, promoting what the author called "relational regulation," similar to what van Loon & Jakobsen (2017) point out when discussing the development of active coping mechanisms. In carrying out their actions, Public Prosecutor's Office agents used their discretion to propose innovative solutions tailored to the context of the problems, aiming to change the landscape regarding compliance with regulations linked to labor and environmental laws.

Although there is a group in the MP that reinforces more inflexible paths, from a state-agent perspective, tending to distance users from public policies, it was found that some agents established close relationships with users, in order to solve relevant problems with them (Coslovsky, 2011), signaling a movement towards users as a coping strategy to control tense situations, as seen by Tummers et al. (2015). With creative and relationship-reinforcing practices, street-level bureaucrats, together with users, built a "mostly parallel" organization that fosters and favors actions based on relationships with beneficiaries.

In view of what was observed by Coslovsky (2011), proposition I is put forward: relational parameters, in the Brazilian context, influence the coping mechanism and this defines which narrative (state agent or citizen agent) will be adopted by the frontline worker.

It is already known that relational parameters are decisive in bureaucrats' discretion, which shapes the practices and styles of public policy implementation (Ferreira, Medeiros & Crumpton, 2020; Lotta & Marques, 2019; Ferreira & Medeiros, 2016; May & Winter, 2009). What needs to be better understood is the extent to which relationships and the level of interaction with the beneficiary impact the coping strategies adopted in different circumstances of tension and conflict. Thus, proposition II is presented: the literature indicates that, in Brazil, stronger ties can make SLBs adopt, more frequently, a coping strategy of approaching the target audience and the citizen-agent narrative.

In addition to relational parameters, this discussion must also consider contextual factors that impact the implementation of public policies (Ferreira & Medeiros, 2016). Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021), who examined the strategies used by public policy executors to deal with violence in vulnerable contexts in the city of São Paulo, demonstrated that many public workers accept the tension of the workplace, adapt to it, and shape their conduct based on various stressful situations such as, for example, "drug use disorder, violence against women and children, drug trafficking, assaults, and other types of violence" (Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto, 2021, p. 7).

This makes it clear how working conditions and the context in which SLBs are exposed interfere with the development and execution of actions linked to public policies (Ferreira, Medeiros & Crumpton, 2020; Ferreira & Medeiros, 2016), causing frontline workers to adopt pragmatic survival strategies in the workplace, in the face of pressures from society, policy users and violence in vulnerable areas.

In Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021), it was found that SLBs constructed different responses to tension, stress and conflict, adopting both passive and active coping, as shown in Table 2.

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Table 2 - **Coping strategies (passive and active) adopted by street-level bureaucrats in the context of violence**

Passive Coping: without intention of changing the context	Active Coping: there is intention of changing the context
· Silencing and/or negotiation, resulting in movement towards the citizen-beneficiary · Withdrawal, resignation, resulting in distancing of the beneficiary-citizen Denial of the policy, resulting in distancing or action against the beneficiary-citizen · Interpretations of policies and adaptations of procedures, bureaucratic procedures or language, resulting in movement towards the beneficiary-citizen, away from or against the beneficiary-citizen · Exclusion of the beneficiary-citizen, resulting in removal or action against the beneficiary-citizen · Acceptance of failure/impossibility of generating change, resulting in movement towards the beneficiary-citizen.	·Construction of different initiatives and actions aimed at combating violence

Source: Adapted from Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021)

Table 2 summarizes the different strategies identified by Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021). Regarding passive coping, in which street-level bureaucrats have no intention of changing the context in which they operate, the authors agree with other findings in the literature, as described below:

a) remaining silent in the face of violence or negotiating with actors involved in crimes or extreme situations to enable the policy. In these cases, SLBs reach out to citizens, establishing a relationship of trust with beneficiaries and ignoring conditions beyond their control or the scope of the policy they implement. They can also engage in dialogue with organized crime to ensure the policy is implemented (Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto, 2021).

b) they give up, resign, and distance themselves from citizens, as they lack control, are unable, or do not know how to deal with the situation (Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto, 2021). This can also be observed in Santos & Schommer (2023), who analyzed the coproduction of public services in three Brazilian municipalities. The authors point out that, in addition to physical illness due to the conflicts and tensions experienced, discouragement and withdrawal can be observed. As a result, they adopt a passive coping strategy and distance themselves from the citizen-beneficiary.

c) deny the effectiveness of public policies. In education policy, for example, teachers point out that it is impossible to provide education in certain regions of extreme violence. Therefore, they choose to distance themselves from users by building barriers to reduce interactions with the target audience (Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto, 2021). By denying the effectiveness of policy, SLBs can either choose to distance themselves or to act against the target audience. As pointed out by Bronzo, Costa & Guimarães (2022, p. 13), "if the technician does not 'believe' in the set of values and intentions announced by the policy, their practice reflects this disbelief, which ultimately leads to demotivation and, in some cases, a lack of interest in carrying out the prescribed actions"

d) exclude difficult cases, denying the provision of public services for those specific situations in which violence manifests itself. This movement against users highlights the fact that these contexts can lead to the exclusion of individuals from public policies formulated by the State, since street-level bureaucrats are unable to implement actions in these circumstances (Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto, 2021; Lotta et al., 2022).

e) policy interpretations, improvisations, and adaptations of procedures, bureaucratic procedures, or language. Street-level bureaucrats use this strategy to adapt to the unpredictable dynamics of violence (Lotta, Lima-Silva, & Favaretto, 2021). Similarly, Bronzo, Costa, & Guimarães (2022), analyzing the implementation of the Comprehensive Family Protection and Care Service (PAIF) in Belo Horizonte, highlighted the relevance of the perceptions of those implementing public

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social work actions, highlighting the influence of translating regulations into concrete actions. It is believed that coping strategies will largely depend on how street-level bureaucrats interpret public policies. Their conduct may be shaped by a state-agent or citizen-agent narrative, but frontline workers act based on what they interpret and judge as appropriate for the reality in which they operate. In this case, presented by Bronzo, Costa, and Guimarães (2022), strategies for engaging with beneficiaries to facilitate the provision of social services are also highlighted, once again stressing the influence of the relational nature of public policy implementation and, in this specific case, policy interpretation. In the international context, this coping mechanism is also frequently observed and is exemplified here by the classic works of Lipsky (1980; 2010) and Hill & Hupe (2022).

f) Frontline workers accept failure and acknowledge the importance of their role, but are aware that, given the adverse circumstances, they will not be able to bring about change. Therefore, they reach out to beneficiaries and do everything within their power, while recognizing the limits of their actions (Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto, 2021). This is in line with Proposition I, which suggests the strong influence of relational aspects on the behaviors adopted, which define the narrative.

In the second case presented by Lotta, Lima-Silva & Favaretto (2021), active coping (Table 2), when the behavior of street-level bureaucrats is intentional about promoting change, solving problems, or reducing pressure, the authors observed that frontline workers use situations of vulnerability faced by citizens to develop various initiatives aimed at combating violence. In this scenario, even if the policy is not focused on combating violence, it is possible to observe situations created by street-level bureaucrats to "fight the enemy", suggesting a proactive reaction by public agents, who aim to change the context in which they operate, something similar to what Coslovsky (2011) observed.

It is believed that active coping may also be associated with relational aspects. An example of this can be seen in González, Lima-Silva, and Pozzebon (2021), where the authors highlight the importance of proximity and discretion in the implementation of public housing policies for low-income families in Brazil. The results showed that the relationship between street-level bureaucrats and beneficiaries in the delivery of public housing positively influenced the implementation of housing policies, highlighting the importance of the participation of beneficiaries and local agents in the process. The study uses the *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (My House, My Life) Program as an example, which is planned at the federal level and implemented at the local level. Thus, engaging with users has helped meet local demands and contributed to policy adjustments. In this study's analysis, it is impossible to infer whether the state-agent or citizen-agent narrative was used, but the results show that the citizen-centered approach, active coping, and the interpretation of norms were strategies used to mitigate or circumvent obstacles and innovate policy instruments.

In addition to the relational aspects outlined in Proposition I, beneficiary attributes and contextual aspects stand out as variables that directly influence frontline workers' coping behaviors. In the work by Eiró & Lotta (2024), the authors draw attention to how SLBs in developing countries deal with tensions caused by high levels of social inequality and argue that, in contexts of high inequality and social vulnerability, SLBs tend to experience conflicts and tensions caused, for example, by the incompatibility between the policy's availability (or the volume of resources allocated to it) and the high demand from users.

Eiró & Lotta (2024) do not focus the discussion on how SLBs are developing coping strategies in the face of social inequalities, but they do consider this variable as an influencer on the process of implementing public policies. They also did not develop typification for coping strategies, but they did highlight the tensions that policy executors must deal with, given the context of social inequalities in which they live. This is important to emphasize because Brazil has a high level of social inequality, which certainly impacts how public policies are implemented (Arretche, 2001).

This discussion inspired the proposition that in contexts of tension caused by great social

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inequality and excess demand from beneficiary-citizens, as is the case in Brazil, the street-level bureaucrat tends to formulate a coping strategy in the movement towards users, with a predominance of the citizen-agent narrative (Proposition III). This is because, faced with high demand and limited resource availability, frontline workers must prioritize the target population to be covered by a public policy. There is evidence that SLBs engage with users to make judgments about their worthiness, good or bad character, and appropriate or inappropriateness (Brodkin, 1997). Thus, it is believed that normative parameters influence the development of coping behaviors, and these define which narrative will prevail in the actions of Brazilian street-level bureaucrats (Proposition IV).

It is well known that street-level bureaucrats make judgments about the "worthiness" of a given target audience (Brodkin, 1997), and there are situations in which the implementing public agent uses their own resources, adapts norms, or creates procedures not provided for in formal bureaucratic guidelines to help citizens. Thus, from the perspective of the citizen-agent narrative, street-level bureaucrats can shape their discretionary behavior based on the different contexts and attributes of beneficiaries or how they perceive them, taking into account the citizen's character and identity (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). It is also argued that there may be conflicts of values, indicating that the strategies to be developed by SLBs present complexities that go beyond what is anticipated by the bureaucratic structures of public organizations. Public policies and their actions often undergo judgments about what is appropriate for specific contexts and realities ("casuistry"), something that is difficult to incorporate into instrumentalist and rationalized structures (Thacher & Rein, 2004, p. 464).

An important aspect to be mentioned, and related to Propositions III and IV, is that although the intention of support, help or assistance to beneficiaries by street-level bureaucrats is present in the debate, the literature signals the risks of this type of citizen-agent behavior. To illustrate, we take the example of police officers assigned to patrol certain neighborhoods at night. When encountering a group of young people, officers adopting a stance based on the officer-citizen narrative may exhibit different behaviors, depending on the neighborhood: simply looking at the young people; conducting more intense checks; or, at times, displaying aggressive and truculent behavior (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

A recent study carried out in São Paulo found that street-level bureaucrats categorize public policy beneficiaries, with moral, cultural, and contextual standards influencing teachers' decision-making (Lotta & Kirschbaum, 2021). The data from this study inferred that frontline workers adopted coping behaviors of distancing themselves from the beneficiary when faced with very adverse situations, such as students from dysfunctional families or cases related to drug use. In doing so, with a bias toward the citizen-agent narrative, they made judgments about the deservingness of the public policy's target audience. These findings reinforce the arguments in favor of Proposition IV.

Knowing that normative parameters influence how street-level bureaucrats categorize beneficiary-citizens, they can also impact the interpretation of public policy and assess whether it is appropriate for the context in which they operate; whether or not they believe in the policy's ability to promote change; and their own capacity, as public agents, to adapt the actions provided for in the norm or solve problems in the face of adversity.

In the case of the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) studied by Coslovsky (2011), street-level bureaucrats are sensitive to social causes and the conditions of their target audiences. They interpret the public policies they work with as instruments capable of crafting solutions to social problems or creating means of preventing them. Therefore, they deemed it appropriate to adopt a coping mechanism that would involve engaging with the target audience, actively working to solve problems.

It turns out that the different interpretations that street-level bureaucrats make of the same policy can produce different results for citizens, as already noted. But it's important to clarify that the reality, the daily lives of frontline workers, is more complex than what is anticipated by laws and regulations.

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This leads them to develop practices not established by the set of formal norms prepared by public organizations. SNBs deal with social issues that are beyond their control and responsibility (Hill & Hupe, 2022; May & Winter, 2009; Lipsky, 1980; 2010).

Although the actions of street-level bureaucrats are guided by rules, they are not limited to them, given the high degree of discretion with which they operate (Lipsky, 2010) and can, therefore, construct coping behaviors influenced by all these aspects highlighted so far, since the factors observed at the street level overlap with the political and managerial factors of the formal design of street-level bureaucrats' implementation actions (May & Winter, 2009).

Thus, implementers develop coping strategies, shape actions and policies within or outside the space of discretion, and this can either mean that policies can be better adapted at the local level of implementation, or distance themselves from what was thought at the time of formulation, and there may be a prevalence of certain preferences of implementers (Lipsky, 1980; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Hupe & Hill, 2007; May & Winter, 2007).

Certainly, institutional parameters, such as accountability, laws/rules, management models, the nature of organizations (more or less hierarchical) and the level of discretion, influence coping behaviors and the implementation of public policies (Ferreira & Medeiros, 2016).

Coelho et al.'s (2023) study showed that, in environments with high levels of control and little discretion and autonomy, SLBs operated with a state-agent narrative bias, implementing public policies with a strong focus on performance and mobilizing efforts to adopt a top-down management model. In this situation, frontline workers adopted passive coping and shaped their coping behaviors based primarily on the set of norms governing public policies (state-agent narrative).

Conversely, when few oversight, instruments were observed, the SLBs used what the authors called "negative discretion" when interpreting and adapting standards. Negative discretion because, in this case, they did so with the intention of avoiding adopting certain processes and routines, deeming them inappropriate for the context in which they operated. Thus, they adopted a mechanism to shield already institutionalized practices (Bakkeli, 2023) and made the implementation of new procedures unfeasible (Coelho et al., 2023).

Given the above, it is possible to affirm that implementers develop coping strategies, shape actions and policies within or outside the space of discretion and this can either mean that policies can be better adapted to the local level of implementation, or distance themselves from what was thought at the time of formulation, with certain preferences of implementers possibly prevailing (Lipsky, 1980; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; May & Winter, 2009).

The aim here is to demonstrate that there are variables that influence coping behaviors, developed to deal with different situations. To a large extent, these behaviors define the narrative adopted by frontline workers. Based on this assertion, it was possible to outline a framework that seeks to synthesize the propositions, concepts, and constructs presented in this article. The analytical structure reported in Figure 1 aims to respond to the suggested propositions, seeking to integrate the analytical lenses "state-agent and citizen-agent narratives" and "coping behaviors", and still needs to be empirically tested.

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Figure 1
Model for analyzing street-level bureaucrats' coping behaviors and narratives
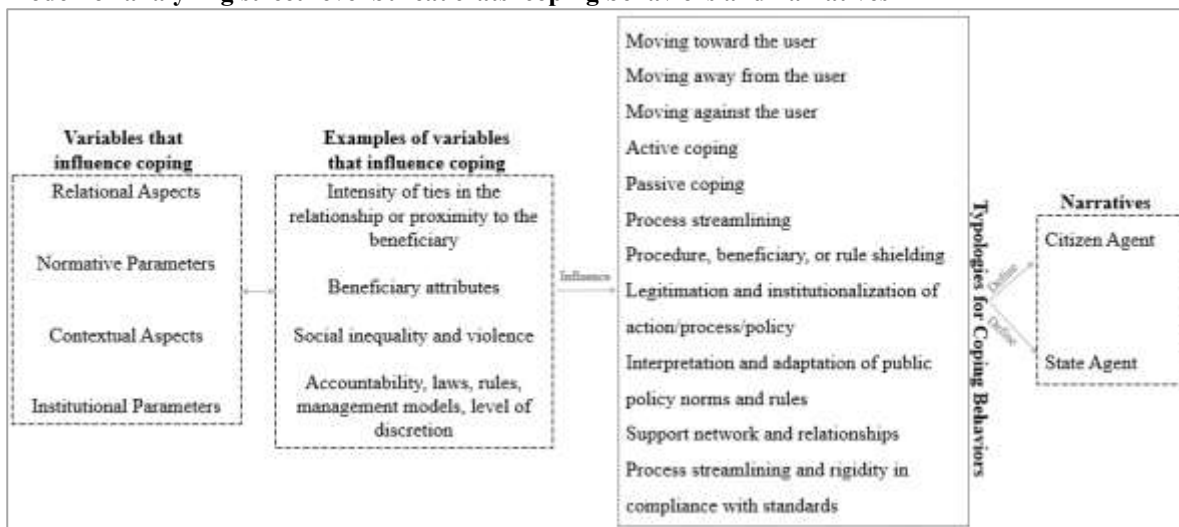
Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024.

Final Considerations

The bibliographic research conducted allowed us to organize the debate around the coping mechanisms developed by street-level bureaucrats in the provision of public services in the Brazilian context. Furthermore, we proposed a dialogue between coping and citizen-agent/state-agent narratives, perspectives that can be complementary.

The discussion between the empirical findings of studies conducted in Brazil and the international literature allowed for innovations from both a theoretical, methodological, and empirical perspective. On a theoretical level, the first and main contribution of this article is to propose a dialogue between the constructs "coping" and "citizen-agent/state-agent narratives", integrating them into a single theoretical framework of Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory.

The second theoretical contribution lies in the emphasis placed on the involvement of street-level bureaucrats with beneficiaries and the moral and cultural aspects that can permeate decision-making, within the scope of building coping mechanisms in the implementation of public policies, since, in general, studies that use the Theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy in national studies have given little attention to these aspects.

The third contribution is to highlight that, in Brazil, public policy implementers are influenced by relational and contextual aspects, as well as normative and institutional parameters that directly impact coping strategies. Furthermore, everything indicates that frontline workers frequently channel these coping behaviors into a citizen-agent perspective. This finding was already observed by Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2003), who demonstrated that street-level bureaucrats tend to plan and execute actions based on a citizen-agent narrative rather than a state-agent narrative. It remained to be seen whether this result would be confirmed in research carried out in the Brazilian context, which was demonstrated in the analyses of empirical studies.

The existence of the citizen-agent narrative directly impacts the prevailing state-agent narrative, as this is guided by the principle of impartiality and is grounded in laws, norms, and procedures. In Brazil, moral and cultural aspects of street-level bureaucrats have been observed in the management of state structures and the implementation of public policies. The challenge in this study was to provide evidence regarding the patterns in the construction of coping strategies that emerge in an environment in which both the legal framework and belief systems are relevant and interfere in the

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daily lives of policy executors.

The fourth theoretical contribution is to bring a more detailed and careful look at coping mechanisms to the field of public administration, highlighting typologies that may be useful in future studies. The focus was on addressing gaps in the field of public policy, where there is interest in the reasons behind policy implementation and the relationships between citizens and policymakers.

Finally, an analytical structure was proposed which, even though it still needs to be empirically tested, sought to organize the propositions suggested in this article, the coping typologies identified in the literature, the variables that influence coping mechanisms and the narrative adopted by the SNB at the time of executing the actions.

It is believed that this structure may be useful in future empirical studies, as it can be used for comparative analyses between different realities, public policies and profiles of frontline workers regarding their personal characteristics, level of involvement with the public policy theme and with the beneficiaries (intensity of relationships with citizens), as well as work routines, types of tension experienced, type of agent training, ideology, nature of work (social assistance, education, public safety, environment, etc.), among others.

From the point of view of empirical contribution, we sought to emphasize implementation contexts in Brazil that can generate tensions and stress for policy executors, and that certainly influence coping behaviors. This addressed aspects such as social inequalities, violence and social vulnerability that permeate the realities of developing countries such as Brazil and which are present in research carried out in the national context.

It is worth noting that this study found advances in research on coping in Brazil. However, in addition to not identifying national studies that prioritized investigations of coping behaviors in the bibliographic survey, the advances are still shy and recent. Most of them regard publications made after the COVID-19 pandemic, an event that highlighted the importance of frontline professionals. Therefore, we believe there is significant room for further exploration regarding coping behaviors.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that this article has some limitations that may be inspiration for future research:

• The focus was on coping strategies during the provision of public services, as it was of interest to investigate how the construct has been researched, specifically, in the field of public administration and public policies, especially in discussions surrounding the implementation of policies and the actions of street-level bureaucrats. However, in doing so, studies in other areas, such as psychology and sociology, were not explored in depth. For this reason, possibly, other views on the same phenomenon were not examined.

• It is possible that there are other typologies or classifications for coping that the survey carried out for this article was unable to capture.

• It was not feasible to carry out a bibliographic survey of empirical studies on the citizen-agent/state-agent narratives in research carried out in the Brazilian context, in order to verify how this topic has been researched and observed in Brazil. However, there may not be relevant studies on this topic.

Some questions are also highlighted that could eventually become an agenda for future studies: What coping mechanisms are adopted in selecting beneficiaries of public policies? In this process, what leads the implementer to adopt one narrative or another? How does the policy's target audience influence selection (citizen attributes, rapport with the policy implementer, citizen motivation with the policy's objectives and criteria)? How (and if) do the implementers' personal backgrounds (personality, self-efficacy, rule-following, individual characteristics of age, gender, or political-ideological positioning) influence coping behaviors and define the adopted narrative?

Finally, this work suggests that the implementation of public policies in the Brazilian reality

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requires further studies through empirical research that delves deeper into the role of frontline workers, signaling or mapping the different situations of tension at the local level of implementation, the coping strategies used by these frontline professionals, and the behavior that defines whether the public agent will be shaped by one narrative or another: state-agent and citizen-agent. This is because structures, levels of autonomy, discretion, and contexts influence policy executors' decision-making regarding compliance with rules. It was also possible to observe that SNBs behave differently, both from the citizen-agent and state-agent's perspectives, suggesting the need to investigate these different realities in the Brazilian context. It is believed that research on these topics, conducted with policy executors can not only contribute to theoretical advances, to be achieved through national studies and the field of public policies, but also contribute to the identification of possible solutions to the problems experienced by street-level bureaucrats. The discussions undertaken may be useful in the debate on the relevance of these agents in the implementation and their capacity to execute actions and achieve objectives, even in the face of tensions.

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