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Non-take-up by "non-proposition": Discussion on an under-documented research perspective

Abstract

Non-take-up, describing the situation in which an eligible person does not benefit from one or more rights to which he or she is entitled, is a topic of growing interest in most European welfare states. A large volume of literature now documents the phenomenon well. Statistical studies agree that non-take-up is a widespread problem across countries with very different welfare state systems. Studies on non-take-up also identified, very early on, the main determinants of the phenomenon and developed theoretical models of non-take-up. Most of this literature is based on a traditional economic perspective or a behavioural economic perspective. This paper contributes to the debate on the determinants of the phenomenon, by focusing on a specific type of non-take-up, which is under-researched. This is the situation of "non-proposition", in which the provider does not propose a benefit to the potential claimant. This paper is based on a study conducted in France on a benefit intended for people with disabilities. We show that analysing these situations raises issues that are different from other determinants of non-take-up. These situations enable us to examine the practices of the social service professionals, their values and their professional skills. Non-take-up by "non-proposition" carries potential risks, when it lengthens the time it takes to access rights or when it renders social needs invisible. However, the professionals may have "good reasons" for not proposing assistance and/or benefits.

Keywords: non-take-up, disability policies, street-level bureaucrats

1. Introduction

The issue of non-take-up of public services and social benefits has become a growing concern in recent years, not only within many European countries but also outside Europe. In his report, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights calls for recognition of this phenomenon by the international community, urging "all States to make non-take-up an urgent priority" (De Schutter, 2022). According to the Rapporteur, non-take-up reflects a lack of application of the right to social security as recognised in international law. At the European level, the Council recommendation on adequate minimum income, adopted in January 2023, includes concerns about non-take-up, by recommending that Member States encourage or facilitate the full take-up of minimum income (for example, by reducing the administrative burden or reaching out to excluded persons).

Non-take-up has been put on the public agenda by a broad range of stakeholders for very different reasons, which shows how "plastic and polysemous" this concept is (Rode, 2009). Non-take-up is recognised in official reports and studies as a serious policy problem (Dubois & Ludwinek, 2015) because, for example, it re-

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duces the potential of social protection to achieve its goal of cutting poverty and providing a minimum income. It also raises equity and social justice issues, by generating inequities between the claiming and the non-claiming households (van Oorschot, 1991), and budgetary issues, with higher long-term costs. In addition, among other things, it has an impact on the level of trust in public institutions and has implications for social citizenship (Lucas, Bonvin & Hümbelin, 2021).

A large volume of literature now documents the phenomenon well, especially in the field of poverty and minimum income (and less in other public policy areas such as disability or family policies). The quantitative estimation of non-take-up raises substantial statistical challenges, most of which are common to the main methodologies employed (difficulties related to data sources, measurement errors, eligibility estimation, etc.). Despite these difficulties, several recent statistical studies have confirmed that non-take-up is a widespread problem across countries with very different welfare systems (Hernanz et al., 2004, Ko & Moffitt, 2022). If we take a look at five European countries and equivalent social benefits (such as the RSA in France or the ALG-II in Germany), non-take-up rates above 30 % are frequent (Marc et al., 2022). Academic literature also offers an overview of the main determinants of non-take-up, including information and procedural costs, administrative errors and, among other reasons, fear of stigma.

This article aims to contribute to the debate on the determinants of non-take-up, by broadening the perspective to include reasons other than those linked to individuals. It examines the potential role of social service professionals, and their practices, in producing situations of non-take-up. In so doing, I intend to analyse and demonstrate the relevance of a form of non-take-up that appears to be little documented in the literature on the subject: non-take-up by "non-proposition". This refers to a situation in which the provider does not propose a benefit to a potential claimant (Warin, 2016). This discussion on the concept of non-proposition is based on a case study carried out in France on access to benefits for people with mental disabilities. This example was chosen because it illustrates several of the main reasons for non-proposition, which I will describe below and then add to. Thus, this article addresses the following questions: What role do professionals play in explaining non-take-up? To what extent do they set up mechanisms for "screening" the public? What reasons do they give for these practices?

The paper is structured as follows. First, I briefly review the theoretical models that explain non-take-up, in order to show that non-proposition is rarely mentioned in them and to suggest explanations for this. Secondly, I describe the method and data of the case study. The results section then presents the reasons for non-take-up by non-proposition, concerning benefits targeted at people with mental disabilities. The discussion section extends these results to introduce additional reasons, based on other studies. Finally, the concluding remarks open up questions for future research and prospects for policy-making.

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2. Non-proposition, a reason rarely included in explanatory models of non-take-up

2.1 Explanations for non-take-up focus mainly on the client level

Non-take-up has been studied for more than fifty years in countries such as England, and has gradually been the subject of an abundant literature that has identified several determinants of the phenomenon. Historically, two theoretical models to explain non-take-up have been developed. The first one is the client-focused model developed by S. Kerr in the 1980s (Kerr, 1982), who was specifically interested in the decision-making process and the "thresholds" to be crossed at each stage of the application decision. The second theoretical model was developed by W. van Oorschot, who has worked on the subject since the 1990s (van Oorschot, 1991) and whose findings served as the basis for the first research projects into non-take-up in countries such as France. His model introduces the notion of "trigger events" and broadens the analysis of causes by looking at social arrangements, and the content and modalities of the offer. In doing so, W. van Oorschot has introduced explanatory factors that can be produced at the level of the institutions responsible for implementing social benefits, thus going beyond the individual approach. He distinguishes three levels of analysis, which form the basis of recent systemic approaches to non-take-up (Van Mechelen & Janssens, 2017): the client level, the administration level and the policy design level.

Despite the existence of these two models, N. Van Mechelen and J. Janssens observed that "most existing literature considers the issue of non-take-up from either a traditional economic perspective or a behavioural economic perspective" (Van Mechelen & Janssens, 2017). Indeed, many studies are based on these perspectives, by analysing the reasons for non-take-up using a rational cost-benefit analysis. Non-take-up is then explained in terms of individuals' exposure to three types of costs during the process of applying for social benefits (information costs, process costs, psychological costs like stigma).

Without attempting to give a complete overview of the literature on non-take-up (see recently Lucas, Bonvin & Hümbelin, 2021; Daigneault, 2023), it is worth mentioning that among the different levels of analysis of non-take-up (macro, meso and micro levels), the micro level has been particularly invested in by research. It therefore focuses mainly on individuals (also called clients).

In doing so, the causes related to professional practices, the role of professionals in generating non-take-up situations are rarely considered in the literature dedicated to the phenomenon. This contrasts with the abundant literature on street-level bureaucracy (SLB) and professional discretion, inspired mainly by Lipsky's sociological theories (Lipsky, 1980). The link with these works is nonetheless relevant to complete our understanding of the determinants of non-take-up, particularly since the notion of discretionary power makes it possible to "analyse how administrative

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agents make arrangements in the field with law enforcement regulations – including when they occupy subordinate positions – and thus contribute to defining the concrete content of public policies" (Weil, 2015).

There are few studies dealing directly with non-take-up that examine the role of SLB. Among these are the works of L. Lima and C. Trombert on "non-take-up by eviction", conceptualised on the basis of an analysis of French youth policies (Lima & Trombert, 2013), or that of L. Bourgois, on policies for slum dwellers in France (Bourgois, 2020). These studies will be developed further in the article. There are also a few references to discretionary power in Belgian (Bouckaert & Schokkaert, 2011; Noël, 2017) and Finnish studies. In the latter country, the subject of discretionary power has emerged as an issue of access to social benefits in the context of a vast welfare state reform, made in 2017. While the primary aim of this reform was not to reduce non-take-up, it was expected that the clarification of the system, dematerialisation of administrative procedures and their simplification would have an effect on this matter. The key measure of centralising the management of social assistance, transferred from the municipalities to the government agency KELA (Social Insurance Institution of Finland), was intended to strengthen the equality of treatment and thus move towards the principle of universality. The eligibility criteria are now the same and stigmatisation should be reduced by online procedures. Above all, the discretionary power initially observed in municipalities should no longer be possible, as it led to disparities in the processing of applications (Parliament of Finland, 2014, quoted in Saikkonen & Ylikännö, 2020). The effects of the 2017 reform have been discussed in the latest published work on non-take-up in Finland and Sweden (Tervola et al., 2021). The researchers observed a slight decrease in non-take-up, estimating that 32 % of those eligible for social assistance do not apply for it in Finland, compared with 54 % in Sweden. They analyse this decline as a consequence of the implementation of the 2017 reform. They hypothesise (without demonstrating it) that the centralisation of the processing of social assistance applications, previously carried out at local level, has reduced the discretionary power of agents and homogenised eligibility criteria.

2.2 Considering the role of professionals in non-take-up: the concept of "non-proposition" as a tool for analysis

These few studies suggest that we need to take into account the practices of professionals and the interactions between social service providers and eligible people, in order to gain a deeper understanding of non-take-up. They invite us to focus on the staff in direct contact with the public, in all their diversity (reception staff, social workers..., working in social services, associations, etc.).

To discuss the role of professionals, I mobilise the analytical typology of non-take-up developed by Warin in 2010 and modified in 2016. His typology initially distinguished three types of non-take-up, around lack of awareness, the decision not

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to claim and non-receipt. The typology has evolved, based on research by Warin and the Observatory of non-take-up of rights and services (Odenore) in fields such as health, housing, youth policies or social benefits. The latest version of the typology includes a fourth type of non-take-up: "non-proposition".

Table 1: The typology of non-take-up by Odenore

Type	Definition
Lack of awareness	in which the potential claimant is unaware of the benefits available or of his entitlement to claim
Decision not to claim	in which the potential claimant is aware of his eligibility but decides not to claim
Non-receipt	in which the claimant is aware of his entitlement and decides to claim but does not obtain his entitlement
Non-proposition	in which the provider does not propose a benefit to the potential claimant

Source: Warin, 2016

The aim of broadening the typology is to show that non-take-up can be explained at different levels: the content of the offer, professional or institutional practices, individual or collective intentions, representations and norms, and finally, economic, social and cognitive resources. Warin proposes these levels, which introduce "recipients, service providers and other social policy stakeholders as actors in a reflexive relationship to the offer when non-take-up is intentional for one or more of these actors" (Warin, 2020).

Thus, Warin's typology is interested in situations of non-take-up generated independently, even if the person is sometimes not aware of it, which is most often the case with non-proposition. It thus distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary forms of non-take-up.

2.3 Why is non-proposition an under-researched reason for non-take-up? Some explanatory hypotheses

This type of non-take-up by non-proposition has recently been incorporated into a theoretical model for the analysis of non-take-up, but remains under researched. I propose three non-exhaustive hypotheses to explain this blind spot.

The first explanation relates to the production of knowledge on non-take-up. The three main methods for quantifying non-take-up are based on: data from a specific, one-off survey focusing on non-take-up; data on income and living conditions taken from a survey of the general public; and data from administrative database matches (Marc et al. 2022). However, as Lucas, Bonvin and Hümbelin (2021) point out, the reasons for non-take-up are often captured indirectly, using variables such as proxies (for example, presuming administrative difficulties when the person

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has a low level of education). Interviewing people directly, and professionals, is not common. When this is the case, as in specific quantitative (even qualitative) surveys, it is difficult to grasp non-proposition from people's point of view. It goes unnoticed, primarily by them, but also by professionals. To add to this invisibility, we can hypothesise that non-proposition is more prevalent for social benefits other than income benefits, which are often regulated by national regulations and may be less subject to discretionary power. According to this hypothesis, non-proposition would therefore be more common for benefits, social assistance or services that are less widely studied in the literature on non-take-up.

The second hypothesis is also related to the production of knowledge. Among the various existing explanatory models, rational choice theory is predominant (Van Mechelen & Janssens, 2017), analysing non-take-up as the effect of a rational decision by persons who weigh the costs and advantages of claiming a social benefit. This perspective plays an important role in framing the phenomenon in a convergent manner, if we consider, for example, the studies on non-take-up of social benefits in five European countries (Marc et al., 2022). Thus, the conditions for producing knowledge on non-take-up, as well as the general approach based on the rational cost-benefit analysis, could explain why non-proposition is rarely addressed.

The last hypothesis relates to the word "non-proposition" and to what it conveys as a social representation. Addressing non-proposition can be perceived as a criticism of the professionalism of social policy stakeholders and a questioning of their direct responsibility in non-take-up situations. In other words, non-take-up by non-proposition is perhaps the least consensual form of non-take-up. Some forms of resistance to the concept of non-take-up on the part of social workers have already been identified (Warin, 2014), when they do not support the idea of making non-take-up a priority or when they doubt the capacity of institutions to provide the means to reduce this phenomenon. Here, resistance to non-proposition is of a different type. Non-proposition can go against the representations that professionals have of their role and their practices. It is also often reinterpreted as contradicting strong values and "professional ethics", such as the principle of equal treatment of people and the unconditional treatment of social welfare queries and applications. Addressing these situations can then be understood as an external criticism (by researchers) of practices that would be considered professional misconduct.

However, it is neither a question of carrying out this type of criticism, nor of disconnecting the analysis of non-proposition from the context in which these professionals work. As L. Bourgois summarises it, this framework of analysis "does not in any way mean an absence of the role of institutions and procedures, as the discretionary power of staff is also part of an administrative, bureaucratic and procedural system" (Bourgois, 2020). Indeed, street-level organisations can set limits on the discretionary power of officials responsible for implementing social policies,

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through various means such as the division of labour and the use of computer tools (Dussuet, Ledoux & Sonnet, 2022).

3. Field survey

3.1 Research context

The empirical component of this article draws on the case of a French disability benefit, called Disability Compensation Benefit – or *Prestation de compensation du handicap* (PCH) in French. This benefit was created in 2006, following the adoption of one of the major laws in the field of disability (the 2005 law on "Equal Rights and Opportunities, Participation and Citizenship of people with disabilities").

PCH is a financial allowance aimed to reimburse certain disability-related expenses. It is intended for people with physical or mental disabilities who need assistance in their everyday life. It is personalised and adapted to the specific needs of the beneficiary. It includes five forms of assistance: human aid, technical aid, home improvement, transportation aid, specific or exceptional assistance, and animal care. This may include, for example, getting help with daily activities, the installation of a ramp to enable a wheelchair to get into a car, etc. For human assistance, PCH is used to cover the cost of a third party (such as an employee or a home assistance service provider) or to compensate a family caregiver (a family member who is not employed to provide this assistance).

Conditions of eligibility for PCH are based on the claimant's loss of autonomy, age, resources and place of residence. For the first one, applicants must be in one of the following situations in order to be eligible:

- have "absolute difficulty" in carrying out one important daily activity. A national list sets out the activities concerned, which include mobility, personal care, communication and general tasks (for example, personal hygiene, orientation in space and time, etc.). Five levels of difficulty are then identified for each activity. The level of difficulty is determined by reference to how the activity would be performed by a person of the same age with no health problems. A difficulty is qualified as "absolute" when the activity cannot be performed at all by the person without assistance, including stimulation. That is to say that no component of the activity can be performed at all. These difficulties must be permanent or of a foreseeable duration of at least one year.
- have "severe difficulty" in carrying out two important daily activities from the same list. The difficulty is qualified as "severe" if the activity is performed with difficulty and in a way that is impaired compared with how the activity should be performed.

PCH is a non-means-tested benefit. However, resources are taken into account to determine the rate at which disability compensation expenses are covered. Lastly,

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PCH is intended for people living at home, in a social or medico-social establishment, or hospitalised in a health care institution.

PCH applications can be submitted online or by post. The application must contain a number of documents, including a medical certificate less than a year old, completed and signed by a doctor. Requests are then processed by a local administration: the Departmental House for the Disabled (*Maison départementale des personnes handicapées* or MDPH), which are information and support centres for people with disabilities, present in each French department. The decision whether or not to grant the PCH is then taken by a Commission (the Commission for the Rights and Autonomy of Disabled Persons), which has four months to process the application.

As of 31 December 2020, 347,100 people are entitled to PCH (DREES, 2023). The number of people covered is rising steadily (+4 % per year). Of the five types of expenditure covered, human assistance is the main one (accounting for 94 % of PCH funding). With regards to age, the majority of beneficiaries of PCH are between 20 and 60.

3.2 Methods and data collection

The data were collected during a study commissioned by the National Solidarity Agency for Autonomy *(Caisse nationale de solidarité pour l'autonomie* – CNSA), which manages the long-term care branch of the French social security system. Access to PCH for people with mental disabilities is a subject of concern for the CNSA. The definition of the need for compensation and the implementation of compensation are particularly difficult in the case of mental disability. This is a long-standing observation that is certainly not specific to mental disability. However, the problem is compounded in this case due to the often invisible nature of the impairments, which may lead to certain consequences not being taken into account (such as difficulties in taking charge of one's health, using public transport, planning and organising daily tasks, etc., which may require human assistance *via* PCH). Thus, the CNSA is particularly concerned about the persistent difficulty in assessing the needs to be taken into account in the case of mental disabilities and the possible consequences in terms of non-take-up.

The main objective of this study was to analyse the reasons for non-take-up of PCH for adults with mental disabilities (Warin, Chauveaud & Rode, 2018), based on the Odenore typology. I will focus here specifically on the results of the study concerning non-proposition.

A field survey was carried out between October 2016 and December 2017. The material was collected in two MDPHs chosen on the basis of the following main criteria: the density of the supply of services and establishments for people with mental disabilities; the existence of an information system for categorising disabili-

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ties within the MDPHs; the organisation and operation of multidisciplinary teams; and the institutional network between MDPHs, associations and professionals working in the field of mental disability. The choice of two MDPHs enabled us to show how the network in a given area facilitated the detection of situations requiring assistance and better referral of people to the MDPH by partners. It proved less relevant for the analysis of non-proposition, as there was no clear difference between the MDPHs on this matter.

Three sources of data were used for each of the survey sites.

The first consisted in conducting individual and group interviews with professionals from different MDPH services: reception staff, professionals in charge of processing applications or of relations with partners, department heads, etc. Twenty-two interviews were conducted, with two objectives: understanding the activities of the various services and their involvement in the "production chain" of claims processing, from welcoming people at the reception desk and receiving applications to the elaboration of proposals; and identifying when and how difficulties arise in this production chain in the assessment of the needs of claimants, and in particular of adults with mental disabilities.

Other interviews were conducted with MDPH partners. All of them work in the field of mental disability, either as volunteers or professionals: vocational rehabilitation centres, establishments dedicated to the employment of people with disabilities, local family associations, hospital psychiatric services, home care services, etc. These 22 interviews were necessary to understand the relationship between the stakeholders and MDPHs, and to gather their knowledge and views on PCH, as well as on the processing of applications submitted by adults with mental disabilities. However, no interviews were conducted with the people concerned, the main objective of the study being to analyse the role of professional practices and the processing of requests.

The second method was based on the observation of the work of multidisciplinary teams dealing with the applications from people with mental disorders or other disabilities. It was essential to examine the diversity of claimant situations in order to identify any differences in practices and specificities in the provision of mental disability compensation. The aim of these 9 observation sessions was to identify the difficulties encountered by multidisciplinary teams in assessing needs. The observation work was therefore organised in such a way as to identify differences in practices in the examination of claims, whether for PCH or other benefits, depending on the claimant's disability, whether mental, motor or sensory in origin. The average duration of the observation sessions was two hours.

Finally, the study had a quantitative component, in particular with the analysis of data provided by MDPHs. These data made it possible to quantify the number of people requesting compensation for a mental disability and the number of those

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benefiting from PCH for the first time. In both MDPHs, very few PCH applications were submitted by people with mental disabilities (8.5 % of PCH applications in MDPH 1 and 13.8 % in MDPH 2). The rate of PCH applications granted, after examination of the claims, was close to the national average for both MDPHs (respectively, 32 % and 47 % of PCH applications for people with a mental disability are granted).

4. Results

This section presents the reasons for non-take-up by non-proposition identified in this study of PCH for adults with mental disabilities. Four main types of explanation emerged.

4.1 The handling of adults with mental disabilities at reception desks: between lack of experience, embarrassment and fear

The first results concerning the non-proposition of PCH come from interviews with MDPH reception staff. MDPHs offer a physical reception desk (as well as online and by telephone) in each French department, intended for people with disabilities, their relatives and the professionals who support them. In both MDPHs, the reception is open every day (full or half-day, depending on the sites). The reception staff's mission is to welcome and inform people and their families, facilitate administrative procedures, respond to queries on the progress of applications, liaise with MDPH professionals or refer people to MDPH partners. The staff can also help to formulate people's needs, which makes their role important.

The interviews with the reception staff revealed that the impairment of adults with a mental disability is sometimes difficult to assess. As they are not necessarily trained to detect such disabilities, the reception staff may simply perceive certain signs of it. These presumptions are generally not mentioned in the applications filled in by reception staff, unless the impairments seem obvious. But even in this case, they may nevertheless refrain from indicating to the potential claimants that they may have a disability entitling them to compensation.

This is the case when professionals state that they do not know why they should inform adults with a mental disability about PCH, unlike people with motor or sensory disabilities. Interactions are therefore very different depending on the type of disability. For example, a front desk agent felt neither prepared to discuss the question of compensation for a mental disability with a potential claimant. He cautiously said that he "*didn't think of asking the question of the rights he may be entitled to, unlike he would with someone with a motor disability*".

This attitude is shared by the reception staff of the two MDPHs in the survey. I have observed that these professionals have a particular sensitivity to certain types of disability, which lead them to work in this field. One front desk agent expressed

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this clearly when she explained that she chose this job in order to work with people who are deaf and hard of hearing, as her mother was deaf, and she was therefore fluent in sign language. She was thus "*on familiar ground*" when interacting with these people. But concerning mental disabilities, she confided that it is "*a public that we do not know well, for whom conventional reception desk methods do not always work, and for whom we cannot develop conventional techniques the way we do for deaf people*". However, like many others, this professional pointed to the increase in the number of cases of people with mental disabilities and the lack of training to support them appropriately.

In addition, other testimonies mentioned apprehension, if not fear, of handling people with mental health problems. A number of aggressive behaviours towards reception staff and incidents of violence were reported during the interviews. They increase the feeling of embarrassment: "*The reality is that, when someone with a mental disability arrives at the reception desk, we want them to leave. We don't know how to handle it*". As a result, during a group interview, the reception staff admitted that they tended to provide a "*minimal*" service to people with, or suspected of having, mental disabilities. It can be hypothesised that this differentiated treatment may discourage people from coming to the MDPHs if they feel badly treated or inadequately informed, and may generate a form of non-take-up by non-proposition.

4.2 Non-take-up by non-proposition: the impact of the cost of information for professionals

Among the professionals involved in the multidisciplinary teams that assess applications, the explanations for non-proposition are similar to those observed among reception staff. Each MDPH must set up a multidisciplinary team, composed of health professionals (doctors, information officers, etc.), social workers and specialists in educational or professional inclusion. The role of the multidisciplinary team is to assess the situation of the person with disabilities, identify their needs and draw up proposals for assistance. The team's proposals are compiled in a document (known as a "personalised compensation plan") and are submitted to a special commission (*Commission des droits et de l'autonomie des personnes handicapées*), which makes the final decision.

The group interviews at the two MDPHs show that the professionals on the multidisciplinary team do not necessarily think of PCH for this public. In their statements, the difference is very clear when compared with the treatment given to people with physical disabilities, for whom PCH is regarded as one of the possible answers to their difficulties: "*My local partners view things in the same way. When they meet someone with a physical disability, they think of PCH, but they don't when it comes to someone with a mental disability. It is less obvious to us to associate mental disability and PCH*". According to this observation, PCH is not integrated into the "tool kit" of professional expertise concerning adults with mental disabilities.

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Non-proposition therefore provides a different perspective on the cost of information, which is often mentioned in the literature as a reason for non-take-up. The growing body of work on administrative burden also investigates the learning costs potential beneficiaries face when researching about social assistance programmes themselves, establishing whether they are eligible, understanding what benefits are provided and how to claim them (Herd & Moynihan, 2018). This emphasises the issue of information and knowledge when the burden is placed on the claimants, and not on the supply side.

However, the cost of information can also affect professionals, depending on several factors (complexity of the benefit, its evolution, initial and refresher training, etc.). Believing that adults with mental disabilities are not eligible for PCH is a clear example of this. This determinant of non-take-up can be observed in many fields of social policies, for instance in the context of complex benefits that combine different methods of assistance and are intended to respond to situations that are difficult to objectify, as in the case of fuel poverty (Rode, El Fahli & Revil, 2021).

4.3 The role of professional discretionary power

This impact of the cost of information refers to a "passive" form of non-take-up by non-proposition. Other elements point to an "active" form of non-take-up by non-proposition. This perspective can be observed in the discretionary power of professionals to inform potential claimants of the availability of a social benefit and to decide on its allocation. This is particularly relevant for PCH, which is conditional on the justification of needs, given the difficulty of assessing and justifying needs against the eligibility criteria. The discretionary power of the professionals in multidisciplinary teams can be observed in the selection of applications and assessment of claims without any interaction with the claimants. This last point was emphasised by G. Perrier in her analysis of the work of professionals examining applications in MDPHs, and of the place given to users in the administrative processing of claims (Perrier, 2013). She concluded that, despite the injunction that users should be at the centre of the process, the place given to them is highly limited and depends in particular on organisational approaches and on the way MDPHs manage staff and the pressure of demand. In our study, non-take-up by non-proposition is the result of interactions between professionals, within these teams. They may request additional supporting documents to prove the need for compensation, in which case professionals play a role in increasing the administrative burden (Moynihan, Herd & Harvey, 2015). They may not consider it necessary or appropriate to grant PCH benefits, despite the fact that an application was submitted and the applicant is potentially eligible, or they may prefer to propose other services not requested in the application. The team's increased role should be considered in the context of the development of "expertise on others", with the aim of evaluating the relevance of claims for social assistance. Thus, "the allocation of benefits and services in the field of social welfare is increasingly moving away from a universalist, automatic model

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towards complex negotiation processes within social magistracies, whose mission is to determine (and deny) social entitlements through the examination of individual cases" (Lima, 2013).

To understand these decisions, it is important to note that PCH is only one of the possibilities that address the needs of adults with mental disabilities. There are also, in particular, the *Services d'Accompagnement à la Vie Sociale* (SAVS – Services to accompany social life), which, by intervening at home, can meet the needs for supervision and support. In this case, the professionals can propose SAVS benefits or the human aid component of PCH, or both. However, instances were reported during the observation sessions where professionals from multidisciplinary teams refrained from proposing PCH although all the criteria could be met, because PCH did not appear to them to be adapted to the individual's situation. The proposal of SAVS benefits alone generates a non-take-up of PCH by non-proposition. Moreover, believing from the outset that a particular type of benefit is a better response is based on flawed reasoning. The correct approach is to assess the situation in order to take a snapshot of it, identify the needs and then draw up proposals while looking for the benefits the person may be entitled to.

4.4 Rationing the take-up of PCH

Furthermore, the observation sessions showed how the professionals in multidisciplinary teams participate in regulating access to PCH. They have room for manoeuvre, in practice, since they can prescribe PCH in cases where the person has not explicitly requested it in his or her application, as is the case in certain territories. However, the professionals at one of the MDPHs observed explained that they did not prescribe PCH if there was no initial request from the person. Some explained this by the fact that people are expected to be proactive in their applications, while others gave very different reasons, linked in particular to the challenge of containing PCH-related expenditure and avoiding appeals for overprescription. Hence, professionals integrate budgetary considerations into their practices, which become one of the elements on which they base their decision as to whether or not to propose financial assistance.

These elements confirm the fundamental importance of the institutional and financial context for understanding the practices of professionals, who work in an institution with limited resources, but facing high demand. In this sense, they adapt to the public service gap (Hupe & Buffat, 2014), for instance by rationing the take-up of PCH or "moving away from clients" (Tummers et al., 2015).

Other data confirm the existence of these frontline workers' coping strategies. The practices of reception staff illustrate the work involved in regulating the high number of applications made to MDPHs. When interviewed, these professionals stated that economic precariousness is the first reason that leads adults with mental disabilities to apply for social assistance, which leads them to attempt a procedure

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at random with little chance of being accepted. Adults may turn to the MDPH as a "social services helpdesk" among others, to obtain financial aid. That is why the reception staff of the two MDPHs reported that they play a screening role so as not to overload the services responsible for examining the applications. In these situations, as described by the reception staff, they will redirect adults with mental disabilities to social services (so that they can apply for financial aid provided, for example, by municipalities in France), and not to the MDPH services. The reception agents thus choose not to systematically inform potential claimants about PCH, in order to regulate the number of applications. In so doing, they contribute to establishing a boundary between disability and social policies (Baudot, 2016).

5. Discussion

5.1 A classification of reasons for non-proposition

The focus on non-take-up by non-proposition in the context of PCH for adults with mental disabilities shows several factors. They are linked to social interactions at the reception desk, to the representation that professionals have of the target public or, among other things, to professionals' role in regulating supply in a context of constrained resources (budget, personnel, etc.). This section aims to integrate these results into a general analysis of non-take-up by non-proposition. Indeed, there are few studies which look further than the problematic of disability to explain this type of non-take-up. The synthesis proposed by Vial about public youth services is useful in this respect (Vial, 2022). According to him, non-proposition refers "mainly to postures, practices, values and professional skills, as well as to the institutional norms and restrictions that regulate the take-up of the offer". The table below summarises the main explanations he provides. Many of these issues are similar to those raised in the PCH case study, such as the lack of information and training, or among others, the principle of non-proactivity.

Table 2: The main explanations for non-take-up by non-proposition

Lack of information	Professionals are not aware of all the benefits and services to which individuals are entitled.
Lack of training	Professionals do not master all the procedures and administrative steps.
Lack of networks	Professionals do not have the right contacts in their networks (institutions; professionals; associations; etc.).
Lack of time	Professionals lack the time to find out about the social services on offer, to learn how to carry out administrative procedures, and to expand their networks of partners. They lack the time to inform and support individuals in their administrative procedures.

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Lack of budget or places available	Professionals anticipate budget shortfalls or lack of available places. They prefer to avoid time-consuming procedures they believe are destined to fail.
Individual protection	Professionals seek to avoid setting individuals up for failure. They fear the consequences this could have in terms of self-esteem and trust.
Principle of non-proactivity	Professionals are not proactive in their information practices. They provide information in response to a request. They believe that individuals must learn to seek information independently. They consider that formulating a request is the sign of a real need and motivation.
Efficiency approach	Professionals aim to avoid people dropping out of programmes and to maximise the number of "positive" exits at the end of programmes (fixed-term contracts over six months; training leading to qualifications; etc.).
Judging on merit	Professionals feel that individuals are not sufficiently involved in the process. They withhold certain information, delay or reject certain applications, and fail to support certain applications before the allocation commissions.

Source: Vial, 2022

This list does not include all the reasons for non-proposition. In particular, it overlooks discriminatory practices based on origin, gender, social class, health status or, as I observed about PCH, disability. These practices lead professionals to fail to inform potential applicants of the services for which they are eligible (Leduc, 2008) or to provide incomplete information (Jilke et al., 2018). In addition to providing information, frontline workers may also introduce discriminatory attitudes, such as informal and intentional administrative burdens aimed at limiting access to public services (Masood & Nisar, 2021). Prejudice (mostly implicit) plays a key role in explaining the unequal treatment of different population groups and the existence of "bureaucratic discrimination" (Assouline et al., 2022). For example, studies have shown that social workers' prejudices towards certain groups can lead to secondary non-take-up of social benefits (Mallet, 2021), with prejudices differing in nature depending on the social context (prejudice due to classism, against immigrants or for ethno-racial reasons).

The concept of cream-skimming (Lipsky) provides another reason for non-take-up by non-proposition. It describes what drives street-level bureaucrats to select (or "skim off the top") the clients most likely to meet bureaucratic success criteria, in order to restrict one's caseload. A large body of literature documents these practices, analysing the importance of perceived structural prejudice in selecting the

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less attractive clients or those who generate positive activity indicators (Koning & Heinrich, 2013). An interactional approach completes these analyses by showing the role of clients' administrative literacy during interactions between street-level bureaucrats and clients (Döring & Jilke, 2022).

5.2 Non-proposition: a reason for non-take-up that may make sense to professionals

The literature adds the notion that non-take-up by non-proposition may be legitimate from the point of view of professionals. This also emerges from interviews with MDPH professionals, who base their reasoning on the principle that each person's situation presents one or more needs, to which one or more responses are possible. In the case of certain PCH applications, professionals on the multidisciplinary teams consider it preferable to propose solutions other than PCH.

In this sense, the analysis of the "good reasons" for non-take-up, proposed by Damon in relation to the homeless (Damon, 2012) or of "reasoned non-take-up" (Leresche, 2019), can also be applied to professionals. As a continuation of this idea, J. Levy invites us to consider non-take-up by non-proposition as a professional skill. Professionals adapt, for example, their responses to the situations, the needs and to the means available (Levy, 2016).

We find several studies exploring this notion in the field of youth in France. This is the case of the sociologists L. Lima and C. Trombert, who studied the problem of non-take-up by non-proposition. They were interested in youth integration policies and, more specifically, in the financial aid dedicated to this group (the *Fonds d'aide aux jeunes* – Youth assistance fund (FAJ)) (Lima & Trombert, 2013). The FAJ aims to promote the social or professional integration of young people in need of occasional or regular support with matters of housing, health, transportation, etc. The authors sought to analyse non-take-up in its "unvoluntary" form, by looking at the implementation of aid schemes by professionals. They observed that a significant number of queries made by young people were not translated into applications for financial aid. They explain this by the fact that some youth welfare professionals employ practices that lead to denigration, dissuasion and postponement of applications. The authors go into the details of such practices, showing a threefold testing of young people: "social assistance is conditioned by forms of testing of the person and his or her project". In particular, this involves a testing of needs (it is common practice not to examine the first application of a young person who is not known to the service), of merit (offering financial aid as a reward for effort and personal work) and of the project (allowing the project to mature in order to minimise the risks of dropout or failure). They conclude that there are organisational and professional factors in non-take-up, which they describe as "non-take-up by eviction". These factors also have the effect of maintaining and feeding into other forms of non-take-up, for example when young people give up on their application because

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of delays in obtaining information and of the doubts and objections expressed by the professionals during appointments. However, from the professionals' point of view, these forms of non-proposition are not problematic. They can be legitimised if they participate in "a form of education in social citizenship [of young people], that is, socialisation in the 'good' and 'bad' uses of public aid" (Vial, 2018).

Other studies in the field of housing and accommodation enable us to understand how non-proposition can be a legitimate practice from the point of view of some professionals. Based on the observation that emergency accommodation providers rarely offer the *Droit au logement opposable* (Enforceable right to housing (DALO)) to their clients, D. Laumet points out, for example, the posture of professional kindness/benevolence that may lead to non-proposition (Laumet, 2013). The DALO law enables people who are poorly housed or deprived of housing to 'enforce' their right to decent accommodation and to be prioritised by the State. However, people may be seen as unable to live in independent accommodation on their own. Moreover, professionals tend to justify non-proposition when they believe that potential claimants need to be listened to and "recognised", and not to be involved in complicated procedures that risk "exposing" them to rejection. In this sense, professionals take into account the lack of available accommodation or housing and anticipate a negative response, which would be "costly" for the applicants. Non-proposition would thus aim to protect people from such rejections and their consequences, particularly for those perceived as highly vulnerable.

6. Conclusion

This paper illustrates the diversity of reasons for non-take-up due to non-proposition, using the case of PCH and reporting on studies that have addressed this matter. It encourages us to take the concept of non-take-up by non-proposition seriously and raises several issues. These practices may contribute to maintaining an unfair inequality between people who are deemed eligible for social assistance and those who are not, even if they are in similar socioeconomic conditions. Non-proposition can lead to temporary non-take-up by delaying access to social assistance, or to permanent non-take-up, if people find themselves ineligible after learning about what they were entitled to too late. In the field of social policies, these practices contradict the dominant rationale for action and normative statements that seek to "do with" and not "in place of" people, and aim to make them autonomous and responsible. Non-proposition leads to social needs becoming invisible, since the situations that give rise to the queries about social assistance or services are not recorded in the information systems.

We can conclude this paper with a few contributions of non-take-up by non-proposition for research on this phenomenon, as well as for practice aimed at reducing it.

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6.1 Implications for future research

The main point is to assert that non-proposition completes the theoretical models that list the determinants of non-take-up. It encourages a multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of non-take-up. It enables us to discuss social science research on administrative burdens or on street-level bureaucrats, on which there is a very large body of research, but which is surprisingly seldom used in the literature on non-take-up. Non-proposition enables us to go beyond an analysis of non-take-up that focuses on one side on potential clients, and on the other side on administrative functioning. It also provides an opportunity to focus on the role of "third-party actors", i.e., "actors outside the citizen-state interaction that provide help to citizens or otherwise influence interactions" (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022). It makes it possible to move away from an "image of an obstruction between government service users and government services", in other words, a two-party narrative (Tiggelaar & George, 2023). The role of third-party actors is growing and generating numerous tensions (Rode, 2024). This perspective is all the more significant at a time when social policies are becoming increasingly territorialised in some countries, raising the number of professionals involved in implementing social policies on a local scale, and diversifying their profiles. This is also true in a context of increasing policy activation, which is shifting professionals' expectations towards more control over the behaviour of potential claimants. However, to be fair, while the article has focused on the impact of professionals on non-proposition, future research could also take into account the role they have in reducing experiences of administrative burden (Bell & Smith, 2022) and more generally in the take-up of social benefits. Indeed, qualitative research has shown that meeting a "good" professional, with whom trust is established, in a relationship that is perceived as being of high quality (Lucas et al., 2019), is one of the "triggers" in the process of re-applying for social assistance (Vial, 2020).

Secondly, non-proposition can be a contribution to the systemic and relational approach to non-take-up called for by Lucas, Bonvin and Hümbelin (2021). Regarding professionals, non-proposition calls into question their practices, postures and values, and the professional contexts in which they act. Non-proposition points out the institutional constraints that regulate the use of the social offer and the real availability of the social offer. It also urges us to observe non-take-up at the moment of interaction at the reception desk, modifying in the process the representation that we may have of the people concerned (the notion of non-take-up often leads us to consider them as "invisible" at social welfare helpdesks). It also prompts us to observe it in the various commissions and in the "social magistrature" committees (Astier, 2000), which are developing to adjust the allocation of social assistance to individual situations, based on collective work. In light of these transformations, the analysis of professional discretionary power is not only to be questioned from the point of view of individual professional practices, but also from that of "the collective exercise of discretionary power" (Weill, 2015).

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Thirdly, non-proposition allows us to discuss the critical approach enabled by non-take-up. To develop this approach, studies have focused on the reasons why potential claimants voluntarily choose not to apply for benefits, thereby questioning the legitimacy and relevance of the social assistance on offer (Warin, 2018; Lucas & Warin, 2022). Non-proposition can complement this work, particularly when it relates to voluntary behaviour on the part of professionals and to "good reasons" for not informing potential claimants of the existence of social assistance. It can therefore introduce a critique of the hegemonic nature of the positivity of social rights, this time from the point of view of professionals rather than individuals (Tabin & Leresche, 2019).

6.2 Implications for practice

Non-take-up through non-proposition can shed light on the measures implemented to reduce the phenomenon in several countries. It can play a part in the evaluation of these measures. Indeed, it is expected that actions put in place to reduce non-take-up and to identify "what works" are tested and evaluated (Daigneault, 2023). Non-proposition helps to understand why a measure may not achieve the expected results, for example, because of a lack of funding for a programme, a misunderstanding of its aims, a feeling that the programme is not adapted to the target population, or a conflict of norms.

Finally, the analysis of non-proposition can be valuable in tackling non-take-up in a different and less obvious way than improving the availability of information for citizens on social rights, simplifying social benefits or automating access. In a way, it invites us to move away from "technical" solutions to consider what has to do with professional practices, the contexts in which professionals operate and interactions at the reception desk. We agree with L. Noël when she sees in non-proposition "an opportunity to engage in an in-depth (self-) reflexive work, on the part of all social security services and institutions, as a source of improvement of practices and as the basis for a policy to combat non-take-up of social rights" (Noël, 2017). At a time when the participation of people experiencing poverty in the design, implementation and monitoring social policy schemes has been identified as an important lever for action (De Schutter, 2022), involving professionals, in all their diversity, in debates on non-take-up and in discussions on ways to reduce the phenomenon also appear to us to be a relevant avenue.

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