

Chapter 3

Measuring Need-Based Justice —Empirically and Formally

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Abstract The formal part of this chapter is concerned with measures of need-based justice. According to the measures we propose, a distribution is unjust (i) the more it deviates from absolute need satisfaction and equal degrees of need satisfaction, (ii) the more the given undersupply could have been mitigated by transfers, or (iii) the more resources are used for oversupply instead of need satisfaction. These measures are compared, i.e., as to the satisfaction of need-oriented relatives of axioms prominent in poverty measurement; and we have a critical eye on the proposals of Jasso and Miller. The empirical part reports on three vignette studies conducted to find out how people evaluate the justice of given distributions and how they distribute goods when aiming at justice. The main goal was to measure the significance ascribed to need. This significance was compared with the significance ascribed to effort or equality; and it was shown that a need's influence decreases when the corresponding person is accountable for having a higher amount of it. In the third study, we found out that needs that are not directed at bare survival, such as the need for participation in social life, are attributed lower degrees of importance. The chapter concludes with some implications of our research for a theory of need-based justice.

3.1 Introduction

Nullmeier (2020, p. 193) has suggested that a “theory of need-based justice should be based on the promotion of both normative and empirical research”. In this chapter, the formal part (Sections 3.2.1–3.2.3) introduces measures of need-based justice.

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