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DESERVINGNESS IN SOCIAL POLICY. THE CONCEPT, CRITERIA AND (UN)DESERVING GROUPS*

DOI: 10.15611/pn.2021.2.09

JEL Classification: A14, I38

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Quote as: Przybylska, J. (2021). Deservingness in social policy. The concept, criteria and (un)deserving groups. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 65(2).

Abstract: The main purpose of this article is presentation of the concept of deservingness, which means dividing people into those who deserve to be supported and those who do not. In the paper, the deservingness models are analysed – the CARIN framework, the deservingness heuristic model and the RICE principles. The CARIN framework consists of five criteria – Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity and Need, the RICE model of four criteria – Reciprocity, Identity, Control and Effort, and the deservingness heuristic model is based on the inherent ability to distinguish between ‘cheaters’ and ‘reciprocators’ in creating common good in society. The deservingness of particular groups and the influence of individual characteristics on its perception are also presented.

Keywords: deservingness, deservingness criteria, (un)deserving groups, CARIN framework, RICE model.

1. Introduction

The subject of consideration is the concept of deservingness in the context of social policy, which means dividing people into those who deserve to be supported and those who do not. However, it should be mentioned that this concept is also present in psychology, social psychology and political science, and is connected with terms such as morality, social justice and used in reference to people’s rights and obligations. Furthermore, the awareness of varying perception of deservingness of different groups

* The research was funded by Narodowe Centrum Nauki grant number: 2018/31/B/HS5/01707.

by society may influence planning state budget in the area of the social benefits because of the willingness to maintain social legitimacy of government actions.

Empirical studies have shown that people making judgements apply specific criteria which were presented as models (Knotz, Gandenberger, Bonoli, & Fossati, 2020; van Oorschot & Roosma, 2017). The CARIN framework consists of five deservingness criteria – Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity and Need, and the RICE model of four criteria – Reciprocity, Identity, Control and Effort. The deservingness of a person or group depends on how they score in regard to these criteria.

This article comprises four sections – an explanation of the deservingness concept, a presentation of its criteria, short descriptions of target groups in the context of perceiving deservingness, and an indication of the individual characteristics of the respondents which can influence the judgements on deservingness made by them.

2. The concept of deservingness concept in light of welfare

Feather (2003, p. 368), in analysing the term of deservingness from psychological viewpoint, depicted deservingness as "judgements that relate to outcomes that are earned or achieved as a product of a person's actions, where these actions are either directly observed or indirectly inferred from information about a person's qualities". In short, one can present it as the person-action-outcome triad. In a situation, where positive/negative outcome is the result of a person's positively/negatively evaluated action, it is perceived as deserved (Feather & Dawson, 1998). This relation is based on Heider's cognitive balance theory, where it is assumed that people strive for the maintenance of internal consistency in their objectives, attitudes and ideas.

Regarding social welfare policy, the concept of deservingness means making a judgement whether a person deserves help or not, in other words, is (un)worthy of being supported.

Deservingness is considered as a pivotal component in the process of explaining public support for social welfare. The welfare-deservingness model presented by Laenen (2020a) indicates that the perception of deservingness of different target groups is influenced by the sociodemographic and ideological characteristics of people making judgements, and is connected with current socio-cultural, cultural-political and institutional-policy contexts. Deservingness opinions play the role of a mediator between individuals' characteristics and their support for welfare institutions. According to van Oorschot and Roosma (2017), the social legitimacy of differently targeted social benefit is shaped by three approaches – the institutional characteristics of social benefits, the public images of the target groups and the perception of their deservingness, where the latter seems to be the key factor. Furthermore, research by Slothuus (2007) suggests that framing deservingness can be used as tool to win support for some retrenchment. It is easier to cut budget expenditure when citizens see a particular group as undeserving.

For the first time, a distinction between deserving and undeserving poor was mentioned in the British Poor Law of 1834 and the Dutch *Armenwet* of 1854, where the aged, the sick, children and the infirm (in short the “impotent poor”) were considered as those deserving support, whereas unemployed, idle paupers capable of work were seen as undeserving (van Oorschot, 1998, 2000). This pattern was confirmed by Coughlin (1980), who conducted international comparative studies on welfare state support towards different groups of recipients, the result of which was the development of the “universal dimension of support”. According to this concept, public opinion is most in favour of relief for the old, followed by (in order) by the disabled and the sick, poor families with children, the unemployed and people on social assistance (the lowest level of solidarity). The same results were achieved by van Oorschot (2006, 2008), who additionally introduced to the analysis immigrants as a group, last in the ranking order.

Nevertheless, research by Laenen and Meuleman (2017) shows that the concept of a universal ranking order of deservingness, which transcends geographical, temporal and social-structural differences, is not as universal as was initially assumed. This discrepancy can be the result of some methodological issues, such as focusing almost solely on the Western context, using aggregate measurements such as averages, the omission of the holistic perspective and the existing heterogeneity within the presented generically needy groups.

3. Deservingness criteria

Cook, in her 1979 study (as cited in van Oorschot, 2000), presented four criteria of deservingness, namely: level of need, locus of responsibility, gratefulness and pleasantness. The first criterion – level of need – states that people are more inclined to support these needy who have a greater level of need. The second aspect – locus of responsibility – means that support is greater when the reason for being in a difficult situation is beyond the person’s or household’s control. The third dimension – gratefulness – is related to the kind of response to the offered help, where the higher the gratefulness, the higher the potential support. The fourth criterion – pleasantness – refers to the relation between the ‘giver’ of help and the needy person. The inclination to help is stronger in situations when the poor person is “one of us”.

The criteria of deservingness were also presented by De Swaan (1988) in his historical study, in which he described three criteria: disability, proximity and docility. The first criterion – disability – is related to the incapacity to make a living through one’s own efforts. This is in line with the assumption that the deserving are perceived as those needy people who have no control over their difficult situation. In turn, the undeserving are those poor people who could improve their situation if they tried hard enough. The second criterion – proximity – refers to the social area of accountability and the ingroup-outgroup relation. With regard to this criterion, the deserving are needy people who belong to this area, and the responsibility of society

is excepted outside of this boundaries. The area of responsibility does not have only a spatial dimension, it can be also defined by place of residence, kinship relation or overall by an indication of a certain identity group. The last criterion – docility – pertains to the degree of activity or passivity in the poor person's behaviour in the context of the redistribution process. Needy people, who are decent and embarrassed, trying to hide their misery and asking for nothing are perceived as deserving.

Will (1993) examined the public perception of poor families. The overall conclusion from this study is that the American public generally found the poor families are deserving of help, but the level of support depended on extraneous situational and dispositional conditions. Thus, the respondents in the process of determining the size of support, paid attention to the factors and conditions faced by the poor families. Important factors were family composition, physical condition and employment status. The respondents emphasized the issue of immediate control over the situation – lack of control determined greater support.

Currently, one can identify two main approaches applied to explain the perception of deservingness in societies – the CARIN framework (van Oorschot, 1998, 2000; van Oorschot & Roosma, 2017) and the deservingness heuristic model (DH) by Petersen (2012).

On the basis of past research, van Oorschot (1998, 2000) devised a framework consisting of five deservingness criteria, known as the CARIN criteria (van Oorschot & Roosma 2017). The name is an acronym from the first letters of its components (individual criteria) – Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity and Need. According to this approach, the perception of deservingness of different target groups depends on their scoring on the deservingness criteria. The first criterion – control – is focused on people's control over their neediness, or the level of their responsibility for their difficulties. A person who is seen as personally responsible for neediness is perceived as less deserving. The second criterion – attitude – refers to behavioural aspects. People in need who conform to our standards of behaviour and who are likeable, grateful, docile and compliant, usually seem to be more deserving in the respondents' eyes. The next criterion – reciprocity – is related to issues of contribution to society, not only in the past but also in the form of future potential. Poor people who have earned support before, or it is plausible that they will be able to do so in the future, are seen as more deserving. Moreover, reciprocity is a relevant part of the "moral economy" concept (Mau, 2004), and is also analysed in reference to willingness to do something in return. The criterion of identity can be expressed in a few dimensions such as place of residence, kinship relations or identity groups. Those poor people who are 'closer' to us in some scale are perceived as being more deserving of support. The last criterion – need – is applied to determine the level of need, where the greater need is related to the perception of more deservingness.

The CARIN framework was empirically verified (Kootstra, 2017; Meuleman, Roosma, & Abts, 2020; van Oorschot, 2000). According to the study by van Oorschot (2000), the most significant are control, identity and reciprocity, which indicates that

people, when making decisions about offering their support, want to know the answers to three pivotal questions: „Why are you needy? Are you one of us? What have you done, or, what can you do for us?“. The importance of the attribution of responsibility was also highlighted by Appelbaum (2001). However, more recent studies show that we are not able to indicate universal rank order relating to prominence of the deservingness criteria (Heuer & Zimmermann, 2020; Kootstra, 2017; Lepianka, 2017) because their application depends first of all on the analysed group.

Furthermore, the results of qualitative research (Laenen, Rossetti, & van Oorschot, 2019) have shown that it is possible to distinguish some context-related criteria apart from the CARIN framework. There are three alternative normative criteria indicated in the above-mentioned study – equality/universalism, cost awareness and social investment. These principles are referred to as characteristics of the welfare system or society in general. The existence of an additional criterion, ‘social investment’, was also confirmed by Gielens, Roosma and Achteberg (2019). Nielsen, Frederiksen and Larsen (2020) pointed out two alternative moral logics applied during the deservingness evaluation process – universalism and rejection.

The second very important deservingness approach is based on psychological structures and refers to the heuristic. According to the concept in Petersen (2012), the deservingness heuristic model, the perception of deservingness is rooted in evolutionary psychology and strictly related to the course of human evolution. People initially living in ancestral small-scale social groups had to develop some mechanisms that made it possible for them to distinguish between ‘cheaters’ and ‘reciprocators’ in an exchange situation on the basis of the level of their effort. Moreover, this evolutionarily determined phenomenon exists in the context of large-scale welfare judgements and decision-rules. Nowadays people are also inclined to classify welfare claimants into two separate categories: lazy or unlucky. In line with the above assumption, this propensity occurs across cultures, ideologies and institutions, operates automatically using little effort, and this process is not learnt during the life but rather is inborn (Aarøe & Petersen, 2014; Petersen, 2012; Petersen, Slothuus, Stubager, & Togeby, 2011). However, Hansen (2019) indicated that the deservingness heuristic is more conditional than was previously assumed, and humanitarianism influences welfare opinions.

On the grounds of criticism relating to the CARIN framework and the deservingness heuristic model, the latest deservingness model called RICE, was created (Knotz et al. 2020). This model consists of four deservingness criteria – Reciprocity, Identity, Control and Effort, and was developed on the basis of factorial survey results. In this framework, unlike in van Oorschot (2000) concept, the reciprocity criterion is understood in a narrow sense and refers only to past actions and contributions, whereas effort criterion which does not exist in the CARIN model, presents the future-oriented actions of the welfare target groups. The attitude and need criteria were excluded from the framework due to its strict relation and overlapping with reciprocity and control principles. The meaning of identity and control criteria stays the same as in the CARIN model.

4. Deservingness of different groups

4.1. Older people and disabled

Older people, according to a number of studies, are perceived as the most deserving. They score high on almost all CARIN criteria (van Oorschot, 2000). The process of getting older is beyond their control. They are seen as rather undemanding, grateful and not rebellious. This group is considered as having earned their right to support thorough their substantial contribution to society in the past (active work, paying taxes, bringing up children). Moreover, older people are treated as ‘one of us’ because of our family connections and the perspective of belonging to this category in the future. The position of the elderly only in the context of need criterion might not be determined as privileged, however they also have higher health-related needs. Additionally, research by Koster (2018) showed that the social esteem for older people achieves high values.

Disabled people are also seen as a very deserving group. They take second position in the groups’ deservingness ranking (van Oorschot, 2008). Nevertheless, empirical studies indicated that in many cases they are evaluated as highly deserving as elderly people. This is based on the same issues as in reference to the older people.

4.2. The deservingness of families with children

The deservingness of families does not seem to be so easy to determine because it can be difficult to unambiguously indicate who is the subject of evaluation: the parents, the children or both (Laenen, 2020b). This determination plays a pivotal role since it allows to distinguish the criteria which probably were applied by the respondents. Children are treated as innocent and void of the ability to create their own situation, thus they are perceived as deserving to be supported (control criterion). Even when their difficult situation is caused by the inappropriate behaviour of their parents, society often finds that help should be granted anyhow (see Will, 1993).

The outcomes of empirical studies suggest that society is more generous and less conditional towards claimants who have children (Roosma & Jeene, 2017). Notwithstanding this, poor families might also face stigmatization, especially in the USA, where there exists the very popular term of ‘welfare queens’, which describes women whose livelihood comes solely from welfare programs. In those cases, the public attention concentrates on the parents not on their children.

4.3. The deservingness of the unemployed

Unemployment is often seen as a result of lack of a sufficient effort to find employment (Furaker & Blomsterberg, 2003), which explains the relatively low deservingness towards this group, especially in the context of the control criterion. Regarding the unemployed, criteria of control, reciprocity and identity seem to be the most important aspects. The currently increasing pressure on activation (job-seeking, job-training,

voluntary work) and conditionality of support have made the criteria of reciprocity and control very relevant (Carriero & Filandri, 2019).

However, the perception of deservingness of the unemployed is also influenced by other factors such as attribution of responsibility to individual or market determinants, and direct or indirect experience of unemployment. In times of high unemployment, people are more inclined to support this group (Blekesaune, 2007; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Buss, Ebbinghaus, & Naumann, 2017; Jeene, van Oorschot, & Uunk, 2014), because this difficult situation is deemed as being beyond their immediate control. Their own experience of unemployment, expectation of future unemployment and having unemployed (presently or previously) family members or close friends means that people are more lenient towards this group (Furaker & Blomsterberg, 2003), which is based on identity criterion.

4.4. The deservingness of immigrants

Immigrants are considered as the least deserving to be supported (van Oorschot, 2006, 2008). The empirical research by Reeskens and van der Meer (2019) confirmed the existing phenomena of ‘welfare chauvinism’, ‘immigrant penalty’ and the inevitable ‘deservingness gap’, which depict the importance of identity criterion in reference to immigrants. This means that society favours in-group members in the process of welfare redistribution. Immigrants are punished more severely for the same inappropriate behaviour or unfavourable characteristics than the native residents. Furthermore, the difference between the deservingness of native citizens and immigrants, evaluated under the same circumstances, is termed as a ‘deservingness gap’ and indicates the application of double standards by the respondents. On the other hand, study by Kootstra (2016) demonstrated that the ‘deservingness gap’ is possible to overcome but only by favourable attributes, what emphasizes the relevance of the control and attitude criteria.

Qualitative research by Nielsen et al. (2020), did not affirm the key meaning of the identity criterion and highlighted the importance of the control criterion and the issue of reciprocity (understood in the monetary, functional and behavioural context). The analysis conducted by Coninck and Matthijs (2020) in the context of settlement deservingness showed the leading role of the attitude criterion. Moreover, some researchers also pointed that automatically considering immigrants as a needy group does not seem to be proper practice, and it is substantial to distinguish the types of immigrants like refugees, asylum seekers or economic immigrants.

5. The individual determinants of deservingness perception

It should be mentioned that not only the characteristics and behaviour of beneficiaries are relevant during the process of making judgements, but also the individual characteristics of the respondents play their role. There are individual differences in

the socio-structural position and cultural factors like gender, age, level of education, work status, income, personal experience as a welfare recipient, religious denomination/church attendance, political stance, work ethic, beliefs and ideas (see Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Furaker & Blomsterberg, 2003; Jeene, van Oorschot, & Uunk, 2013; Meuleman et al., 2020), which might have an influence on the emphasis on the deservingness criteria and the inclination to support other people.

A large part of these differences is explained by reference to the concept of resource competition (Jeene et al., 2013), self-interest theory (Kangas, 1997; Mau, 2004) and cognitive consistency theory (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003). According to the resource competition approach, people with a higher risk of being in need tend to stress more deservingness criteria to make access to benefit more difficult for others, and increase their own chance of getting support in a situation of resource scarcity. On the other hand, in regard to the self-interest hypothesis, people in a disadvantageous socioeconomic situation are more inclined to support welfare benefits because of their willingness to assure easier admission to them. In turn, the cognitive consistency theory assumes that people strive to keep attitudes internally coherent, also in reference to welfare solutions. Moreover, research has shown that the public people from the political right are less lenient toward welfare recipients (Jeene et al., 2013; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003).

6. Conclusion

The concept of deservingness is utilizable from the point of view of the organisation of social policy solutions, especially in the context of their social legitimacy. On the basis of specific deservingness criteria, it is possible to evaluate the deservingness of different groups but it should be emphasized that the importance of concrete criteria is not universal and depends on the target group. The same criterion may function in favour of some specific group and be disadvantageous in the context of another one (identity criterion in reference to older people versus immigrants). Additionally, some criteria can be omitted during the evaluation process. It is important to carry out the analysis at the most detailed level, distinguishing subgroups within the concrete group.

The deservingness models (especially the CARIN framework) are not free from weaknesses, mainly in reference to the application of the deservingness criteria. The major drawbacks pose different operationalisation of criteria, a partial overlapping of their meanings, dependencies between criteria and the existence of hybrid criteria. Furthermore, the different understanding and application of criteria by the respondents depending on their individual characteristics and specific socioeconomic conditions are also significant and should be stressed.

The qualitative methods seem to be crucial in the process of the improvement and development of the deservingness concept. These methods give the opportunity to distinguish new criteria/logics (also group-specific) and understand some

mechanisms, because they are not based only on the predefined statements created by their authors as in the case of quantitative research. Therefore, they stimulate the respondents to express their specific thoughts and opinions. The analysis of the methodological limitations of research on deservingness also in reference to quantitative and qualitative methods should be the subject of future studies.

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ZASŁUGIWALNOŚĆ W KONTEKŚCIE POLITYKI SPOŁECZNEJ. POJĘCIE, KRYTERIA I (NIE)ZASŁUGUJĄCE GRUPY

Streszczenie: Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie pojęcia zasługiwalności, które w kontekście polityki społecznej oznacza dzielenie ludzi na tych, którzy zasługują na wsparcie, i tych, którzy nie są go godni. W opracowaniu dokonano analizy modeli zasługiwalności – modelu CARIN, heurystycznego modelu zasługiwalności oraz modelu RICE. Model CARIN składa się z pięciu kryteriów zasługiwalności – kontroli, postawy, wzajemności, tożsamości i potrzeby, model RICE z czterech kryteriów – wzajemności, tożsamości, kontroli i wysiłku, natomiast heurystyczny model zasługiwalności bazuje na wrodzonej zdolności do określania wkładu innych w kształtowanie dobra wspólnego. W artykule zaprezentowano również zasługiwalność w kontekście różnych grup beneficjentów oraz określono wpływ cech indywidualnych na postrzeganie zasługiwalności.

Słowa kluczowe: zasługiwalność, kryteria zasługiwalności, (nie)zasługujące grupy, model CARIN, model RICE.