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Social Equity in Public Administration: Fairness, Justice and Equity, tools for social change

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Abstract: In the field of public administration, the importance of social equity in distribution of public services delivery has shown development in recent years. This article explores and tests whether awareness of social equity in public sector exists in local public offices and among citizens, and the difference of perceptions between service providers and services receivers. Using data from a survey of Pakistani local public offices (n = 150) and citizens (n = 1200), we have generally found positive awareness of fairness, justice and social equity but the strength of the associations vary among different level of income groups. Awareness of fairness and justice and social equity differs significantly between public offices and citizens, and perception of social equity is strongest for local offices as compared to citizens in services delivery. The possibility of practical implications of the study and recommendations are discussed. The public sector organizations, which must be responsive to public perceptions, to know their citizens needs and adjustment of social equity, have an administrative concern. Local public organizations can benefit in issues of fairness, justice and in equity in services delivery while facilitating the two-way communication and giving priority to information between public offices and citizens. The important implication of this study is that there is a need of professional public administration that can understand and practice the concept of social equity.

Keywords: Social equity, fairness, justice, local public administration, public servants

1. Introduction
Over the years, finding ways to improve obligations awareness in public administrative practices have evolved into a dynamic process. The literature on the subject claims that the way forward is to get better understanding of issues related to social equity in public organizations. This is because social equity is positively related to public administration, which in turn affects each individual's equal and absolute rights in society (Mary & Sean, 2012). Previous studies have shown that social equity is historically rooted in late1960s in the sphere of new public administration (Kristen, 2011; Heather, 2011; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Wooldridge &Gooden, 2009). The legal tradition started emphasizing on equity in public administrative doctrines (Hood, 1991; Rosenbloom, 1983). The term 'social equity' was coined by Frederickson (1990) and referred as the third pillar in public administration. In the 21st century, social equity has cemented with broader meanings for tackling from operating to practicing issues in public

administration (Frederickson, 2010).With respect to this, social equity is a phrase that has taken on a broader meaning and considerable progress has been made in the past 20 years in social equity. Usually 'equity' and 'equality' are often interchangeably used but these two terms have difference. Equality is the idea to treat everyone equally, regardless of their race, class or gender, equity refers to providing each and everything to the people according to their needs and demands. In developing countries, people are oppressed because of their religion, class, race and ethnicity while large number of people are marginalized or excluded from public services delivery which leads to invisible discrimination (Terry & Usama, 2015). The widely accepted definition of social equity in the developing world is equal access to the opportunities, rights, resources and raising voice (World Bank, 2006).

This study aims to provide empirical picture on awareness of social equity in public services delivery at local public administration level in Pakistan. This is the first study of its kind in Pakistan. This study concentrates on this particular stream of research to maintain clear focus on awareness of social equity in services delivery. Within this scope, this research answers to two sets of key questions:

1. How awareness of fairness, justice and social equity are related to local public offices and citizens.
2. Whether these relationships are different for local public administration and citizens?

2. Literature Review

Social equity stands as normative moral ethic in public administrative integrity (Cooper, 2004; Riccucci, 2009; Rice, 2001). But individuals in public organizations may not only be oriented to equity in society; moral obligation of public administration may also demand procedural fairness, equity in services, fairness in process of services delivery and in choice for expression of views on policy analysis (Svara& Brunet, 2005; Johnson & Svara, 2015). The public administration is deeply concerned about delivery of services; however, question of social equity in services delivery will be central to future policy decisions and decision makers in public administration.

Due to the philosophical underpinnings of equity, we basically expect fairness, justice and equity in process, distribution, access, quality and suitable outcomes of public administration practices (Mary & Sean, 2012). This article focuses solely on awareness of social equity in public services delivery in public institutions. Until recently, social equity literature is primarily based on American research, but the concept has spread to the rest of the world in the last twenty years. This section outlines the framework:

> (1) For expecting awareness of positive relationships between, on the one hand, public services delivery and fairness & justice and, on the other hand, equity; and
>
> (2) For expecting awareness of these relationships to differ between respondents (local public administration and citizens).
>
> (While the section on research methodology describes the control variables included to account for other effects which potentially affect fairness, justice and equity.)

The basis of social equity is derived from modern political philosophical concepts provided by scholars. Theoretically, the works of Rawls (1971) and Rae (1981) and associates provide a path for understanding the complexity of the social equity. Based on John Rawl's theory of justice (1971), "each person has an equal right to the liberty and fair equality of opportunity". Frederickson (2010) is of the view that social equity should have the same standing as third pillar for public administration in the delivery of public services. This study seeks to apply

Frederickson's concept of social equity in public services delivery in order to provide some insight into the way different processes of public institutions affect the distribution of benefits in society.

2.1. Fairness and Justice

There is growing awareness of fairness in public administration as ethic and principle in public servants (Shafritz& Russell, 2005). In developing countries, discrimination occurs in public institutions in services systems and certain groups are denied access to services on the basis of socio-demographic background, geographical location (Terry & Usama, 2015; Edward et al., 2015). It should be obvious that large numbers of people are less well off because of unfairness and injustice in social dimensions of services delivery (Rosenbloom, 2005). More specifically, fairness can be defined as 'the belief that fairness requires treating all persons the same to promote equality and to overcome any difference in treatment to provide justice' (Johnson & Svara, 2015).Fair treatment to all, captures procedural justice in delivery of all public services such as water, sanitation, education, transport, health and social services etc (Andrews et al., 2014). Based on the above discussion, the first expectation is thus:

H1: Perception of fairness and Justice is positively associated with services delivery.

However, most of the studies investigate delivery of public services on fairness basis using perception of citizens. Thus, we do not know whether local public organizations (managers of local public services) are more likely mindful of fairness, justice and social equity in practices as compared to citizens (recipients of local public services).Social scientists have acknowledged that all persons have different visions of fairness and justice (Lee & Rosenbloom, 2005; Hatfield et al., 2008). Various scholars have found that perception of service providers and service users are important in applying fairness and justice in the delivery of public services (Alvez & Timney, 2008; Glaser et al. 2012; Wooldridge & Gooden, 2009). This leads to imply:

H2: The perception of positive relationship of fairness and justice in services delivery is stronger for local public offices as compared to citizens.

2.2. Social Equity

Social equity is considered potentially contradictory nature due to two approaches: on the one hand, treating people the same to promote fairness and justice and on the other hand, treating people differently to provide equity and justice (Johnson & Svara, 2015). In sphere of equity, to overcome social and economic inequalities, least advantaged group should be benefited (Rawl, 1971) and to equalize resources distribution, people may be treated differently. Some scholars are of the view that logic of equity carrying differentiation is critical to explain and this may hinder competition (Johnson & Svara, 2015; Rice, 2001; Denhardt, 2004). Our assumption is:

H3: Perception of social equity is positively associated with services delivery.

The association of social equity in services delivery may also differ between local offices and citizens. Pubic satisfaction shows public happiness if people are treated on the basis of equity and social equity involves the distribution of resources and benefits to those people with few

assets. This might be in the spheres of housing, education, food and health and basic benefits. For this study, we expect;

H4: The positive relationship of perception of social equity in public services delivery is stronger in public services receivers (citizens) as compared to public organizations (local public offices).

3. Methodology
3.1. Survey Design
In this study, to construct a meaningful survey instrument to measure citizens' and local offices' perception on awareness of social equity in local services, a strategic review was conducted of key literature on concept of equity and equality in public administration and in other services delivery. The construction of the survey instrument focused on the survey items and instruments used in the studies before explaining various types of equity contexts. The review of fundamental works produced a set of validated items to measure the key variables illustrious in Table 2.

A set of tailored items and questions for the country specific for Pakistan in local public administration was produced after a one-hour focus group discussion conducted with five public sector senior officials, as participants, using the "Delphi Method" (Rowe & Wright, 1999). The responses of the interaction and exchanges of views with the group resulted in country specific questionnaire that was hard to obtain through desk research.

3.2. Sampling and Distribution
Two samples are taken in this study; literate citizens and public local officials in twelve municipalities from six cities of Pakistan. The reason to select these municipalities is that these municipalities are independent units, attached with local government and trying to provide better services delivery. These municipalities, on average, include approximately 50% of public opinion in deciding needs of local community. Each municipality is having trend to be governed by locally elected representatives that set overall policies and targets. In this study, purposive sampling is used which presents the maximum variation of average people. With maximum-variation sampling, it has been tried to include all the extremes in the population that has given every unit of area an equal chance of being surveyed in each municipality.

A total of about 2000 citizens were contacted in twelve municipalities and 1298 questionnaires were received. After coding and transforming for screening the filled surveys, 98 responses out of 1298 were discarded because they were not properly filled and information was not complete. To measure the respondents' perception of fairness, justice and social equity several questions were used to produce scalable results. Data for this study has been used extensively to examine the opinion of local offices and citizens about fairness, justice and social equity practices in local public services delivery.

3.3.Type of items(questions) used
The first section consisting of standard question on dependent variable, 'overall perception about services delivery' is considered through a single item asking the respondents to indicate their general consensus on equal access of public services delivery on scale from 1 -7.It can be counted as a general measure of practices by analyzing on the basis of simple understanding. Further all concepts needed serious intellectual inquiry (Svara & Brunet, 2005).

The second section contains generic items to measure first independent variable fairness and justice; a number of questions are used, which are in line with the desired practices of services delivery (Frederickson, 1990; Svara & Brunet, 2005. The six items of fairness and justice

construct were included in this study as nodes around the awareness in procedure, access, quality and outcomes of public services delivery (Svara & Brunet, 2005). The extent to which perception of fairness and justice exists in services delivery is estimated by the respondents to indicate strongly disagrees and strongly agrees on the scale ranging from 1 to 7.In a similar vein, in the third section, the second independent variable, social equity is measured using four items reflecting the extent of awareness on strongly disagree and strongly agree to measure the construct. These items for independent and dependent variables are partly inspired by broad ranging core concepts of scholars Kristen (2011), Frederickson (2010), Svara & Brunet (2005) and item statements are interpreted by authors.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the respondent category (0 = citizens; 1 = local offices) to investigate the proposed hypotheses of difference between perceptions of local offices and citizens. Statistical measures and analyses were used such as confirmatory factor analysis, description of all items, correlation analysis and regression analysis. In terms of control variables, focus is on socio-demographic variables which potentially effect on perceptions. First, the respondents' gender is included in regression analysis. Second, the respondents' age is also controlled as it can be associated with awareness level. Third, education primarily affects perceptions of social issues and understanding. Finally, the analysis also includes the respondents' income level in terms of monthly income and income is therefore an important control variable to know the perception of fairness, justice and equity in services delivery which allows researcher to compare local offices' and citizens' perceptions.

4. Results
4.1.Respondent characteristics

Table 1: Demographic Variables in the Two Samples

	Citizens (N = 1,200)		Local Officials (N = 150)	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Female	420	35	24	16
Male	780	65	126	84
Age				
< 25 = years	24	2	2	1.3
25-35 years	180	15	53	35.2
36-45 years	480	40	68	45.3
46-60 years	360	30	27	18
>60 years	156	13	0	0
Education				
Secondary School	15	1.25	0	0
Higher Secondary School	150	12.5	3	2
Undergraduate	300	25	75	50
Graduate or Higher Education	735	61.25	72	48
Income Level				
< 60 USD per month	15	1.25	0	0
60 to 100 USD per month	201	16.75	0	0

100 to 200 USD per month	435	36.25	20	13.3
200 to 300 USD per month	300	25	49	32.7
300 to 400 USD per month	249	20.75	81	54

Note. "Literate citizens here stand for those who at least have secondary school certificate. Income level shows lower middle class salary level".

This section displays the key characteristics of the respondents. Over all (table 1), depicts the citizens' years of age and of local public administration personnel. The citizens' education level, income in both samples is indicated which shows both samples are from lower middle class.

4.2.Reliability and Convergent Validity
The model is tested for Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability and convergent validity of the latent constructs are confirmed and items have significant path loadings ($P<0.001$) with acceptable magnitude.

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct name/items	Loading	*t*-value	AVE	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha
Overall perception on practices			.77	.87	.66
Public services delivery are designed on equal access for all on equal needs.	.75	21.1			
Fairness and Justice			.55	.88	.83
Each individual is treated fairly in services delivery.	.75	16.8			
Public services are accessible to all on equal and fairness basis to provide justice.	.72	14.1			
There is fairness in consistency of services delivered to all groups of people.	.67	11.1			
To achieve equal level of results, special assistance is given on the basis of fair and justice to reduce disparities.	.77	20.6			
To maintain justice in Public services delivery, reasonable efforts are made to remove unfairness to services.	.75	18.9			

All individuals and groups are treated with same courtesy and respect on equal basis.	.77	20.3		
Equity			.68	.86	.76
Public services are not denied to any groups or persons with equal needs.	.63	10.5		
Public services are accessed on acceptable practice without discrimination.	.80	18.7		
To manage equity Differencesare eliminated in public services delivery.	.85	7.4		

4.3.Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

In table 3, mean, standard deviations and correlations are shown. Generally,both samples have correlations with perceptions in practices, fairness, justice and equity. There is significant association between fairness, justice and overall practices perception and between equity and with overall practices perception. Furthermore, we see that education seems to be highly associated with all variables except with gender, whereas gender and age are not positively associated with overall practices perception.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlations

	Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Overall perception on practices	5.40	1.19						
2	Fairness and Justice	5.49	1.20	.150***					
3	Equity	5.56	1.40	.160***	.173***				
4	Respondent Category	5.86	1.10	.080***	.154***	.057***			
5	Gender	3.36	1.94	.033	.119***	.214***	.061***		
6	Age	3.14	1.58	.017	.089***	.163***	.143***	-.004	
7	Education	3.43	1.38	.086***	.109***	.159***	.286***	-.022	.057***

$* p<0.05$; $** p<0.01$; $***p<0.001$. Respondent category (0 = Citizens; 1 = local officials)

4.4.Regression Analysis

A two-sample t test is carried out between respondents in citizens and local offices and differences are significant in perception of fairness and justice (t = 9.04, p = 0.001) and in perception of equity (t = 12.69, p = 0.001) between the two groups.

In table 4, Tobit regression analysis is done and it shows strong positive association of fairness, justice and equity with overall practices perception controlled for gender, age and education in model 1. This is also the same when respondent category is controlled in model 2. Two interaction terms (Local Offices✕ Fairness & Justice and Local Offices✕ Equity) are included in model 3 to test whether relationships between fairness, justice and equity in overall practices perception differ between citizens and local offices. It shows that the associations in perception of fairness and justice in overall practices perception differ significantly between local offices and citizens as expected in H2. The models without income level control variables thus indicate that fairness, justice and equity are positively associated with overall practices perception and that the associations in perception of fairness and justice in overall practices perception is stronger in local offices. Model 4 and 5 test the robustness of these findings by including a control for income levels to know whether fairness, justice and equity can be differently associated with overall practices perception for different income level groups. Including five income level groups in model 4 and controlling the different associations between fairness, justice/equity and overall practices perception in model 5, it is found that the association between fairness, justice and overall practices perception becomes weaker and insignificant and the association between equity and overall practices perception becomes stronger when income level groups are included in model 4. Model 5 indicates that the relationships between fairness, justice, equity and overall practices perception differ between different income level groups.

Table 4: Tobit Regressions of Social Equity (Unstandardized Regression Coefficients)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Gender	0.222*	(0.021)	0.229*	(0.017)	0.228*	(0.017)	0.0335	(0.856)	0.222	(0.511)
Age	0.0120**	(0.010)	0.0121**	(0.009)	0.0125**	(0.006)	0.0119*	(0.027)	0.0226**	(0.007)
Education	-0.0261	(0.482)	0.736***	(0.000)	-0.0215	(0.549)	-0.0230	(0.497)	-0.0221	(0.292)
Fairness & Justice	0.0276***	(0.000)	0.0223***	(0.000)	0.0278***	(0.000)	0.0107	(0.292)	0.0843*	(0.011)
Equity	0.0186***	(0.000)	0.0239***	(0.000)	0.0185***	(0.000)	0.0343***	(0.000)	-0.0401	(0.652)
Local Officials			0.0358***	(0.000)	0.0242***	(0.000)	0.0223***	(0.000)	0.0818	(0.943)
Local Officials ✕Fairness & Justice					0.0216***	(0.000)	0.0213***	(0.000)	0.0222	(0.511)
Local Officials ✕ Equity					0.0212***	(0.000)	0.0185***	(0.000)	0.0223	(0.292)
< 60 USD per month							-0.0243	(0.954)	-0.568	(0.827)
60 to 100 USD per month							-0.0425	(0.910)	-0.435	(0.851)
100 to 200 USD per month							-0.310	(0.484)	-0.663	(0.843)
200 to 300 USD per month							-0.295	(0.458)	-0.652	(0.807)
300 to 400 USD per month							-0.610	(0.276)	-0.0915	(0.785)
< 60 USD per month✕Fairness & Justice									-0.0880	(0.011)
60 to 100 USD per month✕Fairness & Justice									-0.0886	(0.008)

Table 4 Continued

	Model 1		*Model 2*		*Model 3*		*Model 4*		*Model 5*	
100 to 200 USD per month×Fairness& Justice									0.0175	(0.734)
200 to 300 USD per month×Fairness& Justice									0.0345	(0.164)
300 to 400 USD per month×Fairness& Justice									0.0327	(0.203)
< 60 USD per month×Equity									-0.0928	(0.080)
60 to 100 USD per month×Equity									-0.0787	(0.015)
100 to 200 USD per month×Equity									-0.0362	(0.344)
200 to 300 USD per month×Equity									-0.0681	(0.078)
300 to 400 USD per month×Equity									-0.0794	(0.069)
Constant	-2.657	(0.084)	-2.727	(0.081)	-2.467	(0.097)	2.286	(0.568)	2.284	(0.474)
Sigma	2.336***		2.334***		2.336***		2.269***		2.300***	
Observations	1,350		1,350		1,350		1,350		1,350	

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$. Due to the interaction terms, regarding regression diagnostics, multicollinearity has been detected in models 2 -5.
The two interaction terms (Local Officials ✕ Fairness & Justice and Local Officials ✕ Equity) addition in separate models does not change the size and significance of the effects.

4.5.Hypotheses Support

For the hypotheses, the results give partial support to H1 and H3. According to H1 that perception of fairness and justice is positively associated with overall practices perception sphere in local public services delivery and in table 4 (model 1-5) generally supports this but association in income level groups can vary and there seems to be no association, same can be examined for H3. Therefore, H1 and H3 are partially supported. Hypothesis 2 expected that positive relationship in perception of fairness and justice with overall practices perception is stronger for local public offices as compared to citizens and the data support this hypothesis. In contrast, we find that the association of equity with overall practices perception is significantly stronger for local offices as not expected in H4. So Hypothesis 4 is not confirmed for citizens and it is not supported.

5. Discussion and Implications

In this section, the findings of study are synthesized. From survey analysis, the conclusions are answered according to the questions. The research questions of the study are how much awareness of fairness, justice and social equity in practices of public services delivery exists in local public administration and citizens, and whether these perceptions are different between local offices and citizens in Pakistan. It is found that perception on awareness of fairness; justice and equity are to some extent associated in practices among public local offices. The association of fairness, justice and equity is stronger in local offices than in citizens' perception in terms of services delivery. This may be linked to the fact that public services delivery is not up to the mark based on unfairness treatment to public. The approach of local offices towards social equity in public services delivery apparently seems present in local offices as they are services providers but the real practice of diversity is lacking in stance of public institutions. Being a developing country, the perception of public regarding distribution and uneven delivery of public services indicates social exclusion and inefficient quality services and opportunities to public resulting in unproductive lives and deprivations in society.

The perception of citizens shows the inefficient distribution of services which is opposite to the customer oriented approach, is often associated with the New Public Management (NPM) doctrine. For democratic governance, citizen participation is linked with essential component of customer model (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003). To strengthen public administration, the interaction of citizens and administration on decisions in public services delivery is necessary (Callahan, 2007). Local public services organizations should be more transparent and responsive to citizens' demands in determining equity issues.

Broadly, this study contributes for practical implications through social change in society with inclusion of social equity values with fairness, justice and equality in local public organizations in its management of public services delivery (Frederickson, 2010). In line with the consideration of efficiency and economy, this research contributes that social equity is also important in public institutions serving the public directly (Svara & Brunet, 2005; Johnson & Svara, 2015).The study provides an attempt to show the perceptions of marginalized society and need to achieve social equity and justice in major social institutions (Rawl, 1971). Moreover, this research helps to put together fairness and equity in public services and importance of justice in local public administration in developing countries to eliminate social exclusion (Terry & Usama, 2015).

This research results direct to general implications for public sector but primarily for local public organizations providing services, where knowledge about social equity in diversified society is

still scarce specifically in developing countries. This study develops practical implications in services delivery and the public sector organizations, which must be responsive to public perceptions to know their citizens needs and adjustment of social equity as an administrative concern. Local public organizations can benefit in issues of fairness in equity in public services delivery while facilitating the two-way communication and giving priority to information between public managers and citizens. This is apparent from perceptions of citizens that distributive justice must be considered in policy fields related to public services such as health care, transportation, housing, education, municipal and other services.

One of the most imminent implications addresses that the managerial decision rules and services delivery rules in distribution of public services should be in such a way to eliminate poverty and injustice. Public organizations at local level can include municipal reforms and services tend to respond to public demands. The important implication of this study is that there is a need of professional public administration that can understand and practice social equity.

This study has a number of limitations. The generalizability reflects the difference of perceptions among different income level groups. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to more stable groups, or to one income level group. A second limitation has to do with the items of the constructs. The respondents may have different way out of perceptions of the construct. However, more than half of the items are based on the common concepts defined by social equity scholars. The study findings may lead to future research directions and further research may want to examine the underlying complexity of equity to overcome disparities in citizens. Future researchers may also want to examine the bigger sample to trace the differences of perceptions. Further research may examine whether variables relating to social equity further explain the differences in each public service separately.

6. Conclusion

In this study, the demonstrated perception of citizens and local offices shows that awareness of fairness, justice and social equity differs among different income level groups. These differences indicate the increasing inequality in Pakistan. Government and non-government institutions both have to promote social equity in developing countries. The increasing inequality is the main cause of poverty and to manage public services system is crucial element for the local public administration. There are several causes of inequality in public sector such as power imbalances among different public institutions in resources, policies, political powerlessness and geographical blocks. Some recommendations are made to incorporate social equity in public services delivery to bring social change. Equality in public services delivery should be the primary concern in local public organizations. To eliminate poverty and discrimination among different social classes, social equity will provide more range of creativity and diversified problem solving strategies (Bebbington, et al. 2008). Local public organizations personnel should be trained on diversity management focusing on social class differences and needs on the basis of social equity. There is an increasing trend of cultural environment of public organizations promoting fairness, justice and social equity in public services delivery. Local public administration has a solely role to serve the public and local public offices must be responsible to all citizens (Vigoda, 2002). Decentralized local public service offices can perform better in responding to citizens according to their needs and targeted actions can be taken for disadvantaged and deprived groups (UNESCO, 2008; WHO, 2008). The power imbalances among different local governments must be equal on the basis of citizens' needs. Infrastructure improvement and development programs should be implemented to strengthen the local public

organizations. Municipalities should examine the shortcomings and problems of distribution of public services on the basis of social equity and develop public service equity improvement in process of public service delivery and strategies. In order to have people satisfied with the public services received, it is necessary to ascertain that imbalances are managed in the municipality. Social equity is very important in public services system. This paper has analyzed the awareness of social equity in public services delivery among local public offices and citizens. The empirical data on perceptions of citizens and local offices indicate that social equity can contribute significantly to bring social change while promoting equal access, distribution and equity in public services.

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