What Different Kinds of Evidence Reveal about Social Justice

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Social justice remains a goal for many people and organizations that strive to improve society and to ensure a secure and happy life for any person regardless of their background. Also, social justice is both an important and controversial political issue, which is a direct cause of the adoption of many laws and initiatives. Numerous conflicts emerge because of the perceived lack of social justice or conflicting visions of this concept. Simultaneously, in most cases, social justice improves the overall quality of life. The positive impact of social justice in communities is enormous: it protects basic human rights as well as improves the economic and social status of individuals.

First of all, social justice mainly seeks to provide all individuals with equal opportunities to thrive in society. This concept strongly relates to various social institutions, including education, law enforcement, the justice system, the labor market, and others (Kavuri & Shao, 2017, p. 2). Ideally, no human being should feel disadvantaged because of their race, social status, income, gender, religion, residence, political views, or any other characteristic. Consequently, social justice should improve human lives in different ways.

One of the most noticeable benefits is the equal protection of fundamental human rights, as well as equal access to justice. No factors, including the lack of education or litigation costs, should prevent anyone from enjoying their rights or even protecting them in court if circumstances require it. Hence, social justice guarantees that people will not face an increased risk of imprisonment, discrimination, poverty, or social isolation due to their backgrounds; moreover, the rule of law is compulsory (Kavuri & Shao, 2017, p. 2). In practice, such a benefit

presupposes that any person will be able to feel confident and secure when interacting with the police, judiciary sector, municipal councils, or other government agencies. The same condition should apply if a given individual happens to have a legal dispute with a person or institution that has significantly more money or influence. In a truly just society, such differences should affect neither the outcome of the proceedings nor the standing of people involved.

Such equality also should have substantial economic implications for people, including improved financial or job security, as well as an opportunity to choose their preferred lifestyle. Indeed, one might have nominally declared rights but struggle to exercise them because of poverty, unemployment, and subsequent marginalization. Genuine social justice addresses this problem by ensuring that people can benefit from various social services, labor legislation, and standards that protect their rights, affordable education, and other measures. For example, Kavuri & Shao (2017) note that the ability to fund education boosts economic performance (p. 4). In such a way, any person, regardless of their income or social status, gets an opportunity to find a skilled, well-paid job, which helps to escape poverty or a poor balance between work and personal life. Such benefits also should help people to accumulate more savings and create a more prosperous society in general (Kavuri & Shao, 2017, p. 5). These benefits of social justice should boost people's economic independence and bargaining power, which could deprive abusive employers of opportunities to exploit workers, especially those who have unskilled jobs.

Another positive outcome of social justice is adequate access to information. In a just society, people should have enough opportunities to learn about noteworthy social problems, challenges of their communities, or even themselves. Such awareness can stem from balanced

media ownership and coverage of different events, as well as comprehensive education and the work of archives. According to Duff, Flinn, Suurtamm, & Wallace (2013), archives are some of the organizations that provide disadvantaged groups with knowledge and other useful resources; these institutions have the power to address political influences and other attempts to reshape social memories (p. 322, 329). In this way, elites can perpetuate inequality. Hence, archives play an essential role by preserving the historical records of oppression and dispossession. By accessing these records, communities and individuals can understand various aspects of their past, implications for the future, and the preferred course of action. For that reason, free access to unbiased information is an essential aspect of social justice that people can anticipate when oppression ends.

While this evidence reveals many facts about social justice and its implications, it overlooks the problem of human perception of social justice. This issue requires an in-depth examination since people sometimes refuse to recognize or even openly question those benefits of social justice that many societies have already accomplished. For instance, harsh criticism of the western inclusive model of society often comes from citizens of respective nations—not non-western politicians or thinkers. Such attitudes imply that the current model of social justice does not meet their expectations for various reasons. In these conditions, it becomes crucial to determine the criteria that individuals use to judge the ideals of social justice and the way a given society has implemented them.

The first significant factor is the subjective perception of the personal benefits of social justice and the losses incurred. Specifically, Thurston & McNall (2010) observe that people often

evaluate the fairness of specific social arrangements based on the balance between the contributions to the common good (they think they have made) and the rewards received (p. 204). In other words, if social progress did not meet one's expectations, the most likely reason is that they did not witness the anticipated gains of social justice. Although such a vision of social justice is simplistic, it can explain why many seemingly progressive reforms produce nothing but rejection and disappointment among citizens. Unfortunately, governments and communities that struggle to deliver social justice face numerous constraints. They might lack the resources to support every disadvantaged individual or group. In other cases, long-term positive changes require immediate sacrifices, including higher taxes, which is likely to dismay earners of average or high incomes. Consequently, people who bear the financial or other burdens of policies pursuing social justice tend to be skeptical.

The second consideration includes factors of interpersonal justice. These factors characterize the overall treatment individuals receive and the attention to their needs or feelings. Notably, when one encounters respectful and sensitive superiors, they are more likely to conclude the treatment they received was fair (Thurston & McNall, 2010, p. 206). Attention to their needs and well-being can encourage people to see outcomes as fair even if they are negative. Today, many people feel that their governments or communities have abandoned them or do not understand their concerns. This problem is widespread since policymakers often prioritize procedures and rules over the human factor, trying to create a system that would treat all citizens equally. Namely, ideals of social justice might require the distribution of educational grants based solely on the skills and the demand in the labor market regardless of personal

preferences. In this situation, the pursuit of social justice might become a victim of its success and noble goals. Many people can experience disappointment upon seeing that the new version of social justice ignores their feelings even if the improvement of their well-being is the ultimate goal.

The third factor is perceived informational justice. This concept represents the perceived quality of information about the decisions made and procedures applied (Thurston & McNall, 2010, p. 206). People should be able to receive detailed feedback and understand why they could not claim the desired benefit (such as a higher wage, free education, or a license for a specific economic activity). If authorities delivering social justice also manage to provide adequate information, they reduce the risk of disapproval or alienation among citizens. However, insufficient access to such information can compel people to conclude that the entire system pursues odd goals instead of making a positive difference. Therefore, advocates of social justice can expect criticism whenever they fail to clarify their goals, methods, and principles.

In conclusion, social justice can improve many aspects of human life, including the protection of essential rights, economic well-being, and the equal access to information even though individuals might have different perceptions, depending on personal benefits, attention to their needs, and transparency. Indeed, social justice often involves the adoption of rules that might require unforeseen sacrifices or confuse citizens due to their complexity and impartiality. In such conditions, many people might express disappointment with the ideals of social justice. Policymakers, who seek to introduce progressive reforms, must be ready to address such challenges.

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