

Social Justice in a Criminal Justice Organization

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Every person has fundamental rights and rights provided by a government and society. The infringement of these rights, as well as a country's laws, inflicts the proper punishment defined by the criminal justice system. People create institutions and organizations, and individuals who deliver justice make mistakes either intentionally or accidentally under the impact of various circumstances. Consequently, an innocent person might be imprisoned. However, in cases when punishment has been appropriately assigned, inmates may not receive treatment that secures their physical and mental well-being and that ensures integration into society after imprisonment. The criminal justice system works effectively when it comes to protecting citizens from offenders, yet it has flaws regarding re-educating and preventing possible recidivism. In this way, the introduction of social justice in a criminal justice organization is necessary owing to the opportunity to address the mentioned issues.

In the case of "painting" a portrait of a typical criminal, stereotypical thinking is likely to suggest an African-American man. The affirmative answer to this statement reveals racial inequality or racial discrimination as one of the issues that social justice aims to address. Goddard, Myers, & Robison (2015) have reviewed the available statistics to reveal that prison settings become a rite of passage for young people (mainly men) of color since they are more likely to be targeted, arrested, and prosecuted. Bruce Western (2019) enhances the situation while noting that "African Americans are five to six times more likely to be incarcerated than whites," with Latinos constituting the second minority group suffering from incarceration compared to whites (p. 10). In his report and book *Homeward* (both published in 2018), Western indicates that one of the problems within society is that significant racial disparities within

thought reflect the actual situation with people of color who commit more crimes than white people. Notably, police officers are more violent towards black people while also killing more black people than white or other minorities during shootings (Goddard et al., 2015). Equity and rights as social justice principles are necessary for the criminal justice system to not only make a problem public but also focus on crucial changes.

People of color might be sentenced unjustly with provided reasoning hidden in stereotyping, but when it comes to the actual crime, one should pay attention to the primary factors leading to such a situation. Most cases can reveal that poverty is the core reason for criminal behavior; also, it includes variables related to addictions, untreated mental illnesses, and overall household insecurity (Western, 2019). The combination of low income (or the absence of any income) and moral and physical well-being issues, which remain without attention, can lead to problems with law and confrontations with neighbors or police officers. Additionally, Western has conducted a study to investigate the background of prisoners or cases of confrontations with neighbors after their release; the familiarization with this piece can challenge prejudiced perceptions efficiently. It is human frailty that unites “mental illness, untreated addiction, and physical disability [...] under conditions of poverty” (Western, 2018, p. 25). It resonates with social justice principles appealing to the need for the fair and just distribution of wealth and social privileges. The inclusion of this or a similar concept can assist in understanding the aggravating factors related to living conditions of convicted people of color. Besides, it can become a significant improvement in developing rehabilitation programs and focusing on causes instead of providing punishment.

Further, biased perception, unjust incarceration, and a hostile attitude after release are not the only elements that can be reconsidered and improved with social justice inclusion. The major city of Missouri, St. Louis, has a history of poor inmates' treatment: during hot summers, people suffered from high indoor temperatures, guards' violence, medical negligence, and the invasion of insects and rodents (Ziegelheim, 2018). In St. Louis' "Workhouse" jail, there is a special pen for people who cannot pay their bills; simultaneously, plenty of similar places exist across the country, and many individuals who suffer from poverty serve sentences in inhuman conditions. At the same time, "Workhouse" represents a case in which residents have decided to act at the local level and close the jail without the possible appearance of the new one. The collaboration between a non-profit law firm and community organizations focused on the economic improvement and advancement of political reforms achieved conditions, decided to force the government to allocate the funds for solving problems with other conditions, and gathered money for programs that would reduce rates of non-violent offenders (Ziegelheim, 2018). As a result, "Workhouse" and St. Louis become an example of the practical implementation of social justice in the criminal justice system with their attempt to achieve a fair distribution of rights and opportunities.

Another representation of social justice in criminal justice refers to programs, policies, and organizations with a focus on preventing crime and decreasing risk factors. A few organizations such as Sistat and Brothas United engages young people from families with low incomes to train them to speak with public officials and helps in achieving employment opportunities (Goddard et al., 2015). The Center for Young Women's Development works with issues of marginalized women and includes those who have incarceration experience while

treating their problems and helping them with jobs centered on providing help to women in similar situations. Most organizations and centers choose people at-risk, crime victims, and inmates as a subject of positive changes, but Justice For Families also focuses on involving families in the whole process to make them work as a solution to problems instead of being a cause. Additionally, Justice For Families is responsible for closing one of the most troubled youth prisons located in Louisiana (Goddard et al., 2015). In this way, social justice brings hope and makes differences for people who are abandoned by officials or exposed to biased perceptions because of their status or living conditions.

To conclude, the criminal justice system is not perfect; neither will it be in the future due to unpredictable factors leading to violations of the law, the incarceration of innocent people, and the poor treatment of inmates. Social justice can become a significant change that will address issues left without proper attention or enhance the understanding of causes for racial disparities among criminals. It elicits the need to understand that biased perception results in a conviction or rough treatment of people of color because society is used to think that this ethnic group reflects actual crime rates. This belief might be accurate, but reality also stems from the environment with poverty, untreated addictions, and mental issues, which does not lead to any outcome other than a violent one. While seeking for the fair distribution of rights and opportunities, social justice highlights the gaps in current policies and treatments and calls for specific actions such as the appropriate treatment of inmates in “Workhouse,” the shutdown of troubled prisons, and working with people after their release instead of returning them to a hostile environment with a high recidivism risk.

References

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