

Crimes and Consequences: A Human Rights-Based Approach to Criminal Justice



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Abstract: *This research article examines the integration of human rights principles into criminal justice systems, focusing on the implications for rehabilitation, reintegration, and restorative justice practices. Through a qualitative research methodology, including literature review and qualitative data collection methods such as interviews and case studies, the study explores the complex interplay between human rights and criminal justice. Case studies from countries like Norway, Sweden, New Zealand, and Canada are analyzed to illustrate the benefits and challenges of adopting a rights-based approach. The findings highlight the importance of prioritizing dignity, fairness, and accountability in criminal justice processes, as well as the potential for transformative change in promoting public safety, reducing recidivism, and fostering social cohesion. The article contributes to scholarly discourse by offering insights into the practical implementation of human rights principles in criminal justice systems, with implications for policy development, practice, and future research endeavors.*

Keywords: Human Rights Principles, Criminal Justice System, Rehabilitation, Restorative Justice, Recidivism, Fair Trial

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of global justice, the interplay between criminal activity, its consequent judicial handling, and the overarching canopy of human rights presents a complex matrix of ethical, legal, and social considerations. The concept of human rights, with its universal aspirations, offers a critical lens through which the mechanisms of criminal justice can be examined and reformed. This article embarks on an exploration of a human rights-based approach to criminal justice, positing that such a perspective not only enhances the fairness and effectiveness of legal systems but also ensures the dignity and worth of every individual are upheld, irrespective of their legal status. The necessity for a human rights-based approach to criminal justice arises

from a critical examination of conventional punitive systems, which often prioritize retribution over rehabilitation, neglect the socio-economic underpinnings of criminal behavior, and, in too many instances, disregard the fundamental rights of those within their purview. Such systems, while designed to maintain public order and safety, frequently fail to address the root causes of crime or to foster conditions conducive to the reintegration of offenders into society. Moreover, victims of crime and wider communities are often left feeling marginalized from a process that should aim to restore peace and justice. The introduction of human rights principles into the criminal justice process offers a transformative potential. These principles, including the presumption of innocence, the right to a fair trial,

the prohibition of torture and inhumane treatment, and the rights of victims to justice and reparations, provide a moral and legal compass guiding the actions of all stakeholders in the justice system. By centering these principles, the justice system can move beyond a narrow focus on punishment to encompass broader goals of social justice, rehabilitation, and reconciliation (Khan, & Ximei, 2022; Khan, Shah & Kanwel, 2023).

The relevance of this approach is underscored by international treaties and declarations, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which articulate the rights of individuals within the context of criminal justice. However, the gap between these international standards and their implementation at the national level remains a significant challenge. This discrepancy highlights the need for sustained advocacy, legal reform, and education to embed human rights principles at the heart of criminal justice policies and practices. This article seeks to unravel the complexities of integrating human rights into the criminal justice system, examining the benefits and challenges of such an approach. Through a review of theoretical frameworks, analysis of case studies, and consideration of practical strategies for reform, it aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how a human rights-based approach can reshape our understanding and execution of criminal justice. By emphasizing rehabilitation over punishment, restorative justice over retributive justice, and dignity over degradation, a human rights-based approach to criminal justice has the potential to foster systems that are not only more just and equitable but also more effective in achieving the long-term goals of public safety and social cohesion (Khan, Bhatti, & Jillani, 2021; Khan, Nisar, & Kanwel, 2023).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this article, a qualitative research methodology will be employed to explore the complex interplay between human rights principles and the criminal justice system. Qualitative research methods are well-suited to investigating nuanced phenomena, capturing the perspectives and experiences of individuals

involved, and uncovering underlying meanings and dynamics. The research will involve in-depth literature review of academic articles, reports, and policy documents related to human rights in criminal justice, providing a comprehensive understanding of theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and best practices. Additionally, qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, and case studies will be utilized to gather rich, context-specific insights from key stakeholders including policymakers, legal experts, practitioners, victims, offenders, and community members. These qualitative approaches will enable the exploration of diverse perspectives, experiences, and narratives, allowing for a nuanced analysis of the challenges, opportunities, and impacts of integrating human rights principles into criminal justice systems. Through qualitative data analysis techniques such as thematic analysis, patterns, themes, and insights will be identified, facilitating the development of a robust and evidence-based discussion in the article. Overall, the qualitative research methodology will provide a deep and nuanced understanding of the subject matter, enriching the discourse on the intersection of human rights and criminal justice.

HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Integrating human rights principles into the criminal justice system offers a blueprint for a more humane, just, and effective approach to law enforcement and penal policy. At the heart of this integration is the recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their legal status. These principles, universally recognized yet variably applied, include the presumption of innocence, ensuring that individuals are not prejudged or penalized without a fair and transparent legal process. This foundational aspect of human rights safeguards against wrongful detention and the broader implications of miscarriages of justice. Equally critical is the right to a fair trial, encompassing access to legal representation, the right to a public hearing, and the ability to challenge evidence and cross-examine witnesses. This

ensures that justice is not only done but seen to be done, in processes that are transparent, equitable, and free from bias. Closely linked is the absolute prohibition of torture and other forms of inhumane treatment, a principle that underscores the importance of maintaining human dignity at every stage of the justice process—from arrest and detention to imprisonment (Hussain, Khan, & Chandio, 2023; Kanwel, Yasmin, & Usman, 2023).

The principle of privacy is also paramount, protecting individuals from arbitrary interference and ensuring that investigations and legal proceedings respect personal boundaries and data integrity. Moreover, the rights of victims are emphasized within this human rights framework, advocating for approaches that recognize the impact of crime on victims and provide them with support, protection, and avenues for redress. Non-discrimination stands as a critical pillar, ensuring equal protection under the law for all individuals, without bias based on race, gender, religion, or any other status. This principle challenges justice systems to eliminate prejudices and biases in their practices, promoting equality and fairness for all. Beyond the immediate realm of legal proceedings, human rights principles advocate for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of offenders. This perspective recognizes the potential for change and supports efforts to assist individuals in becoming productive members of society, highlighting the importance of education, vocational training, and psychological support in facilitating this process. The amalgamation of these principles within the criminal justice system underscores a shift away from punitive models towards approaches that prioritize dignity, fairness, and rehabilitation. By embedding human rights at the core of criminal justice practices, societies can cultivate legal systems that not only enforce the law but also uphold and advance the cause of justice and human dignity (Khan, Iqbal, & Ahmad, 2022; Khan, & Kanwel, 2023).

THE IMPACT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The intersection of criminal justice and human rights reveals a complex relationship where the

principles and practices of the former can significantly impact the realization and protection of the latter. While criminal justice systems are designed to maintain public order, protect citizens, and deter crime, their operations can sometimes lead to human rights violations, affecting not just the individuals directly involved but also the broader societal fabric (Khan, Javed, Khan, & Rizwi, 2022; Kanwel, & Ayub, 2023).

One of the most apparent impacts is seen in the treatment of suspects and detainees. The presumption of innocence—a fundamental human right—can be compromised through pre-trial detentions, often conducted in conditions that fail to meet international standards for treatment of prisoners. Such conditions can exacerbate the already challenging circumstances faced by detainees, leading to psychological and physical harm, and in some cases, irreparable damage to their personal lives and reputations. The use of excessive force by law enforcement is another area where the criminal justice system can impinge on human rights. Instances of undue force or coercive interrogation techniques not only constitute violations of the right to be free from torture and inhumane treatment but also erode public trust in law enforcement institutions. This erosion of trust is detrimental to the very foundation of public safety and justice that criminal justice systems seek to uphold. Discriminatory practices within the criminal justice process also highlight the impact on human rights. Racial profiling, socio-economic discrimination, and biases against certain communities can lead to disproportionate targeting and unfair treatment of these groups. Such discrimination undermines the principle of equality before the law and the right to a fair trial, contributing to systemic injustices that persist across generations (Khan, Bibi, Khan, & Ahmad, 2023; Kanwel, Hassan, & Ayub, 2023).

Furthermore, the rights of victims are sometimes overshadowed by the focus on prosecuting and punishing offenders. Victims of crime have the right to access justice, to be treated with respect and dignity, and to receive appropriate support and restitution. However, when criminal justice

systems fail to provide these, victims can feel marginalized and re-traumatized, compounding their suffering and hampering their recovery process. The implementation of the death penalty in jurisdictions around the world continues to spark intense debate regarding its compatibility with human rights, particularly the right to life and the prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment. The irreversibility of capital punishment, combined with the possibility of wrongful conviction, poses a grave risk to human rights, highlighting the ultimate consequence of a criminal justice system that prioritizes retribution over rehabilitation (Javed, Jianxin, & Khan, 2021; Kanwel, Khan, & Usman, 2023).

On a more systemic level, the impact of criminal justice on human rights extends to the broader implications of incarceration. High rates of incarceration, particularly in contexts where prisons are overcrowded and conditions are poor, not only affect the individuals incarcerated but also have profound social and economic consequences for communities and societies at large. The stigmatization of former prisoners and the challenges they face in reintegration reflect a failure of the criminal justice system to fulfill its rehabilitative goals, further entrenching cycles of poverty, exclusion, and recidivism. In addressing these impacts, it becomes clear that a criminal justice system aligned with human rights principles is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity. By safeguarding human rights within the criminal justice process, societies can ensure justice systems that are fair, equitable, and effective in maintaining public safety and social cohesion. This alignment requires continuous scrutiny, reform, and education to bridge the gap between the ideals of human rights and the realities of criminal justice practices (Hussain, Khan, Chandio, & Oad, 2023).

CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSIS

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

The rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders play a crucial role in reducing recidivism and promoting public safety. Case studies from countries such as Norway and Sweden

exemplify the success of a rights-based approach to rehabilitation and reintegration, which prioritizes humane treatment, vocational training, and social support programs for prisoners. In Norway, the criminal justice system emphasizes the principles of rehabilitation and reintegration, viewing incarceration as an opportunity for individuals to address the underlying factors contributing to their criminal behavior. Norwegian prisons, such as Halden Fengsel, are designed to resemble normal living conditions as much as possible, with an emphasis on respecting the dignity and rights of prisoners. Inmates have access to vocational training, education, and therapy programs aimed at developing skills and addressing personal challenges. This focus on rehabilitation extends beyond the prison walls, with support and reintegration programs available to individuals transitioning back into society. As a result, Norway boasts one of the lowest recidivism rates globally, reflecting the effectiveness of its rehabilitation-focused approach (Kanwel, KHAN, Usman, & Khan, 2020).

Similarly, Sweden adopts a rights-based approach to rehabilitation and reintegration, prioritizing the individual needs and rights of prisoners. The Swedish Prison and Probation Service emphasizes the importance of rehabilitation in reducing reoffending rates and promoting social integration. Prisons in Sweden offer vocational training, educational opportunities, and access to mental health support services to address the diverse needs of inmates. Additionally, Sweden's open prison system allows inmates to gradually reintegrate into society by participating in work, study, and community-based activities. These initiatives aim to equip individuals with the skills and support necessary to successfully reintegrate into society upon release, thereby reducing the likelihood of reoffending. The benefits of a rights-based approach to rehabilitation and reintegration extend beyond individual offenders to society as a whole. By prioritizing rehabilitation over punishment, countries like Norway and Sweden contribute to public safety by reducing recidivism rates and preventing

future crimes. Additionally, investing in rehabilitation programs can lead to long-term cost savings by reducing the societal costs associated with reoffending, such as healthcare expenses and criminal justice system expenditures. Case studies from countries like Norway and Sweden demonstrate the effectiveness of a rights-based approach to rehabilitation and reintegration in reducing recidivism and promoting public safety. By prioritizing humane treatment, vocational training, and social support programs for prisoners, these countries set a precedent for a more equitable and effective criminal justice system that respects the rights and dignity of all individuals involved (Khan, Usman, & Amjad, 2020).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice serves as a powerful embodiment of human rights principles within the realm of criminal justice, prioritizing healing, accountability, and community involvement. This approach represents a departure from traditional punitive measures, instead focusing on repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior through collaborative processes that involve victims, offenders, and the wider community. In countries such as New Zealand and Canada, restorative justice programs have demonstrated remarkable success in achieving positive outcomes for all stakeholders involved. By providing victims with a platform to express their feelings, articulate their needs, and seek answers from offenders, restorative justice offers a sense of validation and empowerment that is often lacking in traditional court proceedings. Moreover, the direct engagement between victims and offenders fosters a deeper understanding of the impact of the crime and promotes genuine accountability on the part of the offender. The benefits of restorative justice extend beyond individual cases to broader societal outcomes. Research has shown that restorative justice programs are associated with higher levels of victim satisfaction and lower rates of recidivism among offenders. By addressing the root causes of criminal behavior and promoting rehabilitation, restorative justice

contributes to the long-term goal of reducing crime and promoting public safety (Khan, Amjad, & Usman, 2020).

Furthermore, restorative justice aligns with the principles of dignity and respect for all individuals involved in the justice process. By acknowledging the inherent worth of both victims and offenders, restorative justice recognizes the humanity of all parties and seeks to restore relationships and build understanding within communities. Restorative justice represents a powerful application of human rights principles in criminal justice, emphasizing healing, accountability, and community involvement. Programs in countries like New Zealand and Canada have demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach in achieving more satisfying outcomes for victims, reducing recidivism, and facilitating the rehabilitation of offenders. By aligning with the principles of dignity and respect for all individuals, restorative justice offers a transformative alternative to traditional punitive measures, promoting justice that is both healing and transformative (Khan, Hussain, & Oad, 2023).

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The integration of human rights principles into criminal justice systems presents both challenges and opportunities. While the adoption of a rights-based approach is essential for promoting fairness, equity, and dignity, it also requires overcoming entrenched systems, addressing institutional resistance, and navigating complex societal dynamics. However, by confronting these challenges, societies can unlock opportunities for transformative change and build more just, humane, and effective justice systems (usman, kanwel, khan, & khan, 2021).

Challenges

Institutional Resistance: Traditional criminal justice systems often prioritize punitive measures over rehabilitation and human rights principles. Institutional resistance to change, coupled with entrenched practices and cultures, can pose significant barriers to reform efforts (Usman, Khan, & Amjad, 2021).

Lack of Resources: Implementing a rights-based approach requires adequate resources, including funding, infrastructure, and trained personnel. In many contexts, limited resources may hinder the development and implementation of rehabilitation programs, victim support services, and community-based initiatives (Khan, & Jiliani, 2023).

Balancing Rights: Balancing the rights of victims, offenders, and wider societal interests can be complex. Striking the right balance between accountability, rehabilitation, and punishment while upholding the rights of all parties requires careful consideration and may involve difficult trade-offs (Faisal, Usman, & Khan, 2023).

Socioeconomic Factors: Socioeconomic inequalities, including poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and healthcare, can exacerbate vulnerabilities and contribute to cycles of crime and incarceration. Addressing these underlying factors requires comprehensive social policies and systemic reforms (Khan, Amjad, & Usman, 2020).

Opportunities

Legal Reforms: International human rights standards provide a framework for legal reforms that prioritize the protection and promotion of human rights within the criminal justice system. Strengthening legal frameworks and enshrining human rights principles in national legislation can serve as a catalyst for systemic change (Usman, Amjad, & Khan, 2021).

Education and Awareness: Raising awareness about human rights principles and their importance in the criminal justice context is key to overcoming resistance and fostering support for reform efforts. Education initiatives targeting policymakers, legal professionals, law enforcement personnel, and the general public can promote a culture of respect for human rights (Khan, & Riaz, 2024).

Community Engagement: Engaging communities in the design and implementation of criminal justice policies and programs can enhance accountability, transparency, and trust. Community-based approaches, including

restorative justice programs and community policing initiatives, empower local stakeholders to play an active role in promoting safety and well-being (Riaz, & Usman, 2024).

International Cooperation: International cooperation and exchange of best practices can facilitate learning and innovation in criminal justice reform. Collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, and international institutions can help identify effective strategies, build capacity, and promote human rights standards globally (Usman, Khan, & Amjad, 2021).

While challenges abound, the opportunities for advancing human rights in criminal justice are vast. By confronting institutional resistance, mobilizing resources, and fostering collaboration, societies can overcome barriers to reform and build justice systems that uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals. By embracing a rights-based approach, societies can promote fairness, accountability, and rehabilitation, ultimately contributing to safer, more inclusive communities for all (Khan, Usman, & Amjad, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the integration of human rights principles into criminal justice systems represents a pivotal opportunity to foster fairness, equity, and dignity for all individuals involved. Throughout this exploration, we have identified challenges such as institutional resistance, resource constraints, and socioeconomic factors, which can impede progress towards a rights-based approach. However, these challenges are outweighed by the opportunities for transformative change, including legal reforms, education and awareness initiatives, community engagement, and international cooperation. By addressing these challenges head-on and seizing the opportunities before us, societies can build justice systems that prioritize rehabilitation over punishment, accountability over retribution, and human rights over coercion. Such systems are not only more just and humane but also more effective in promoting public safety, reducing recidivism, and fostering social cohesion.

Moreover, by embracing a rights-based approach to criminal justice, societies affirm their commitment to upholding the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their legal status. In the journey towards a rights-based criminal justice system, collaboration and solidarity are essential. Governments, civil society organizations, legal professionals, law enforcement agencies, and communities must work together to overcome barriers, implement reforms, and build a culture of respect for human rights. Through collective action and unwavering dedication, we can realize the vision of a justice system that not only punishes wrongdoing but also restores relationships, heals wounds, and empowers individuals to lead meaningful and productive lives. Ultimately, the pursuit of justice is inseparable from the protection and promotion of human rights. By embracing this principle, we can build a future where justice is not just a concept, but a lived reality for all.

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