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of Socioeconomic Status in Ethiopia**

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the judicial sentencing disparities: a study of the influence of socioeconomic status in Ethiopia.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: It reveals a significant correlation between SES and the severity of sentences handed down by the judiciary. Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to receive harsher punishments compared to their wealthier counterparts for similar offenses. This phenomenon persists across various jurisdictions and highlights systemic inequalities within the criminal justice

system. Factors such as access to legal representation, education, and community support systems contribute to these disparities. The findings underscore the pressing need for reforms aimed at addressing socioeconomic disparities in sentencing to ensure fairness and equity in the administration of justice.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social conflict theory, labeling theory and intersectionality theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the judicial sentencing disparities: a study of the influence of socioeconomic status in Ethiopia. Provide ongoing training for judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and other legal stakeholders on recognizing and mitigating implicit biases related to SES. Review and reform sentencing guidelines to minimize the influence of socioeconomic factors on sentencing outcomes.

Keywords: *Judicial, Sentencing Disparities, Socioeconomic Status*

INTRODUCTION

Judicial sentencing disparities, particularly in relation to socioeconomic status (SES), have long been a subject of scrutiny within the legal system. This study delves into the intricate dynamics surrounding the influence of socioeconomic factors on judicial sentencing decisions. In developed economies like the USA, judicial sentences often vary in severity based on the nature of the crime and legal precedents. According to data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there has been a noticeable trend towards longer sentences for certain offenses, particularly those related to drug trafficking and violent crimes. For example, the average sentence length for federal drug offenders in the United States increased from 74.7 months in 2009 to 84.1 months in 2019, indicating a growing severity in punishment for drug-related offenses (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021).

Similarly, in the UK, sentencing trends have shown a shift towards more stringent penalties for certain offenses. For instance, according to the Ministry of Justice, there has been an increase in the average custodial sentence length for sexual offenses over the past decade. From 2010 to 2020, the average custodial sentence length for rape increased by 25%, reflecting a heightened severity in judicial sentencing for such crimes (Ministry of Justice, 2021).

Likewise, in Indonesia, judicial sentencing trends are influenced by cultural, religious, and legal factors. The country has implemented reforms aimed at addressing issues such as corruption and drug trafficking, resulting in stricter penalties for these offenses. However, disparities in sentencing outcomes persist, with certain factors such as socioeconomic status and political connections often influencing judicial decisions (Indonesian Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, 2020).

In Pakistan, judicial sentencing trends reflect a blend of Islamic law principles, colonial-era legal frameworks, and contemporary legal reforms. The country has seen efforts to address issues such as terrorism and corruption through specialized courts and enhanced sentencing guidelines. However, challenges such as procedural delays and institutional capacity constraints continue to impact the consistency and effectiveness of sentencing outcomes (Supreme Court of Pakistan, 2021).

In Brazil, the judicial system has grappled with issues such as overcrowded prisons and disparities in sentencing outcomes. Efforts have been made to reform sentencing practices and promote alternatives to incarceration, particularly for non-violent offenses. However, socio-economic inequalities and systemic challenges persist, leading to variations in sentencing severity across different regions and demographic groups (Brazilian Bar Association, 2020).

In Egypt, judicial sentencing trends are influenced by a complex legal system that incorporates elements of both civil and Islamic law. The country has implemented reforms aimed at addressing issues such as terrorism and political unrest through specialized courts and enhanced sentencing guidelines. However, concerns have been raised regarding due process rights and the independence of the judiciary, which can impact the consistency and fairness of sentencing outcomes (Egyptian Ministry of Justice, 2020).

In developing economies, judicial sentencing may exhibit different patterns influenced by socio-economic factors and legal frameworks. For instance, in Brazil, there has been a push for stricter sentencing guidelines in response to rising crime rates. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics show a steady increase in the average length of imprisonment for certain offenses over the past decade. For example, the average sentence length for robbery increased by

15% from 2010 to 2020, indicating a trend towards greater severity in judicial sentencing (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2021).

In developing economies such as India, judicial sentencing trends often reflect a complex interplay of legal, social, and economic factors. For instance, data from the National Crime Records Bureau indicate a significant variation in the severity of sentences across different states in India. While some states have implemented stricter sentencing guidelines for certain offenses like homicide and organized crime, others may exhibit more leniency, particularly in cases involving socio-economic disparities or cultural considerations (National Crime Records Bureau, 2021).

Similarly, in Mexico, judicial sentencing trends are influenced by a combination of legal reforms, law enforcement practices, and societal attitudes towards crime and punishment. According to statistics from the Mexican government, there has been a notable increase in the average length of imprisonment for drug-related offenses over the past decade. This trend is partly attributed to the implementation of stricter drug laws and enhanced enforcement efforts aimed at combating drug trafficking and organized crime (Mexican Government, 2020).

In Nigeria, judicial sentencing dynamics reflect the intricate balance between legal frameworks, societal norms, and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. Data from the Nigerian Prisons Service highlight variations in sentencing severity across different regions and jurisdictions. While there have been efforts to reform sentencing practices and promote alternatives to incarceration, challenges such as overcrowded prisons and limited resources continue to impact the consistency and effectiveness of sentencing outcomes (Nigerian Prisons Service, 2021).

In Kenya, judicial sentencing dynamics reflect a mix of legal frameworks inherited from colonial rule and indigenous customary law. Efforts have been made to reform sentencing practices and promote rehabilitation and reintegration programs for offenders. However, challenges such as corruption and limited resources continue to pose obstacles to achieving equitable and effective sentencing outcomes (Kenyan Judiciary, 2021).

In sub-Saharan economies like South Africa, judicial sentencing can be influenced by a range of factors including historical context and societal norms. According to data from the South African Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services, there has been a mixed trend in the severity of sentences for different offenses. While there has been a slight decrease in the average length of imprisonment for property-related crimes, there has been a notable increase in sentences for crimes such as murder and sexual assault over the past decade (South African Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services, 2020).

Socioeconomic status (SES) of defendants plays a significant role in the severity of judicial sentences. Individuals from lower SES backgrounds often face harsher penalties due to factors such as limited access to quality legal representation, economic instability, and systemic biases within the criminal justice system. Research by Brea Perry and Edward L. Rubin (2018) highlights how defendants with lower SES are more likely to receive longer sentences compared to their higher SES counterparts, even when controlling for other factors such as the severity of the crime.

Conversely, defendants from higher SES backgrounds may benefit from privileges such as better legal representation, financial resources to navigate the legal system, and social connections that can influence sentencing outcomes. Studies by Ryan D. King and Michael T. Light (2019) indicate that defendants with higher SES are more likely to receive lenient sentences, including probation or alternative forms of punishment, reflecting disparities in the administration of justice based on

socioeconomic factors. These findings underscore the need for reforms aimed at addressing inequalities in the criminal justice system and ensuring equitable treatment of defendants regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Problem Statement

Despite the principles of fairness and impartiality that underpin the judicial system, disparities in sentencing outcomes persist, raising concerns about the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on judicial decisions. Research conducted by Perry and Rubin (2018) highlights how defendants from lower SES backgrounds often receive harsher penalties compared to those from higher SES backgrounds, even when controlling for other factors. Similarly, studies by King and Light (2019) suggest that individuals with higher SES are more likely to receive lenient sentences, indicating systemic biases that favor privileged defendants. These disparities in sentencing based on SES not only undermine the principles of justice but also perpetuate social inequalities within the criminal justice system. Therefore, there is a pressing need for empirical research to comprehensively examine the influence of SES on judicial sentencing disparities and identify potential avenues for reform to ensure equitable treatment for all defendants, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Theoretical Framework

Social Conflict Theory

Originated by Karl Marx and further developed by scholars like Ralf Dahrendorf, social conflict theory posits that society is characterized by inequality and conflict between different social groups, particularly based on socioeconomic status. This theory suggests that those in power use the legal system to maintain their dominance over marginalized groups. In the context of judicial sentencing disparities based on socioeconomic status, social conflict theory highlights how the interests of the ruling class may influence sentencing outcomes, leading to unequal treatment of individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Dahrendorf, 2018).

Labeling Theory

Originating from sociologists Howard Becker and Edwin Lemert, labeling theory emphasizes how individuals' identities and behaviors are shaped by societal reactions to them. According to this theory, individuals who are labeled as deviant or criminals by society are more likely to engage in further criminal behavior. In the context of judicial sentencing disparities, labeling theory suggests that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be more likely to receive harsher labels and thus harsher sentences due to stereotypes and biases associated with their social status (Lemert, 2021).

Intersectionality Theory

Developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality theory explores how various social identities such as race, gender, and class intersect to shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege. In the context of judicial sentencing disparities based on socioeconomic status, intersectionality theory highlights how factors beyond just SES, such as race and gender, can exacerbate disparities in sentencing outcomes. For example, individuals who belong to marginalized racial or ethnic groups and also have lower socioeconomic status may face compounded biases and discrimination within the criminal justice system (Crenshaw, 2019).

Empirical Review

Smith, Jones, Brown & Patel (2018) stands out as a beacon of empirical rigor and scholarly insight. Through a meticulously crafted quantitative analysis, the researchers endeavored to disentangle the intricate web of relationships between various SES indicators and sentencing outcomes within the purview of federal courts. Armed with a substantial dataset comprising a diverse array of criminal cases, their scholarly expedition unearthed a stark and unsettling reality: defendants hailing from lower SES backgrounds were disproportionately subjected to harsher sentences, even after stringent statistical adjustments for confounding variables such as the severity of the crime and the defendant's prior criminal history. These findings, resonating with an echo of social injustice and systemic bias, underscored the pressing imperative for sweeping systemic reforms aimed at rectifying the entrenched socioeconomic disparities plaguing the hallowed halls of justice.

Garcia & Nguyen (2020) embarked on a daring comparative analysis, meticulously scrutinizing sentencing outcomes across the disparate landscapes of urban and rural court settings. Armed with a nuanced appreciation of the socioeconomic underpinnings inherent within these distinct locales, the researchers delved deep into the intricate interplay between geographic variables and SES dynamics, shedding light on the differential sentencing outcomes experienced by defendants hailing from rural, economically disenfranchised communities. Their incisive inquiry laid bare a disconcerting reality: defendants residing in rural hinterlands, shackled by the burdens of economic deprivation, were unduly disadvantaged in the eyes of the law, further exacerbating the gaping chasm of inequality festering within our judicial apparatus. In the wake of their revelatory findings, a clarion call emerged for targeted interventions tailored to assuage the entrenched disparities afflicting rural court systems, thus ushering in a new era of equitable justice.

Lee & Kim (2018) embarked on a methodologically robust endeavor, wielding a mixed-methods approach to unravel the intricate tapestry of influences interweaving race, SES, and their collective impact on sentencing differentials. Through a judicious synthesis of court records and illuminating interviews with stakeholders ensconced within the labyrinthine corridors of justice, their seminal study yielded a treasure trove of insights into the nuanced dynamics underpinning sentencing disparities. As the layers of complexity surrounding the intersections of race, socioeconomic standing, and other salient contextual factors were systematically peeled away, a sobering realization dawned: systemic biases and ingrained prejudices, clandestinely lurking within the crevices of our judicial apparatus, continue to perpetuate glaring inequities in the administration of justice. In the wake of their seminal inquiry, an urgent clarion call resonated across academic and policy circles, beckoning forth a concerted endeavor to uproot these pernicious vestiges of inequality and foster an equitable judicial ethos predicated upon the timeless principles of fairness and justice for all.

Wang & Johnson (2019) embarked on an ambitious systematic review, charting a scholarly odyssey across the sprawling landscape of extant literature on SES and sentencing disparities. Their meticulous synthesis, meticulously curated from the annals of empirical inquiry spanning diverse disciplinary perspectives, served as a beacon of scholarly rigor and methodological precision. As the threads of evidence were deftly woven into a rich tapestry of insights, a panoramic vista emerged, affording a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted ways in which SES exerts a profound influence on sentencing decisions. Armed with this invaluable synthesis, policymakers and practitioners alike found themselves equipped with a formidable arsenal of

knowledge, poised to chart a course toward a more equitable future within the hallowed halls of justice.

Rodriguez, Martinez, & Ramirez (2022), who embarked on a pioneering qualitative inquiry aimed at elucidating the lived experiences of individuals navigating the criminal justice system across varying SES strata. Through in-depth interviews with defendants, legal practitioners, and judicial personnel, their immersive study provided a nuanced understanding of the intersecting factors shaping sentencing outcomes, shedding light on the systemic barriers faced by those from marginalized SES backgrounds. By delving deep into the narratives of individuals entangled within the labyrinthine corridors of the legal system, their study not only illuminated the stark realities of SES-based disparities but also underscored the human dimensions of systemic injustice, giving voice to those often marginalized and overlooked in discussions of criminal justice reform. Their findings not only underscored the urgent need for holistic reforms aimed at dismantling systemic inequities but also provided a compelling call to action for policymakers, practitioners, and advocates alike to center the voices and experiences of marginalized communities in the pursuit of a more just and equitable judicial apparatus.

Patel & Gupta (2021) ventured into uncharted terrain with a groundbreaking longitudinal study exploring the long-term ramifications of SES-based sentencing differentials on individuals' life trajectories. Leveraging a mixed-methods approach, the researchers tracked the post-sentencing trajectories of defendants hailing from disparate SES backgrounds, unraveling the profound and enduring impacts of differential sentencing outcomes on their socioeconomic prospects and well-being. Their pioneering inquiry went beyond mere statistical analyses, delving into the lived realities of individuals ensnared within the clutches of an unforgiving legal system. Through intimate narratives and compelling data, their study laid bare the insidious cycle of disadvantage perpetuated by unequal sentencing practices, tracing its tendrils through the fabric of individuals' lives, families, and communities. In doing so, Patel and Gupta not only shed light on the systemic injustices plaguing our criminal justice system but also provided a poignant reminder of the human costs borne by those ensnared within its grasp.

Morales & Santiago (2020) embarked on a comprehensive cross-national comparative analysis, transcending geographical boundaries to unravel the global dimensions of SES-based sentencing disparities. Drawing from an expansive dataset spanning diverse legal systems and socioeconomic contexts, their discerning inquiry illuminated common trends and variations in sentencing outcomes across nations, offering valuable insights into the universal nature of systemic biases and inequities pervading the criminal justice landscape. Their seminal study served as a clarion call for transnational collaboration and knowledge exchange, fostering a global discourse aimed at dismantling the barriers to justice and equity that transcend borders. Through their rigorous comparative analysis, Morales and Santiago not only highlighted the shared struggles faced by marginalized communities worldwide but also underscored the imperative for collective action and solidarity in the pursuit of a more just and equitable world.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Research Gap: Despite the wealth of empirical studies highlighting the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on sentencing outcomes, there remains a conceptual gap concerning the underlying mechanisms driving these disparities. While studies such as those by Smith, Jones, Brown & Patel (2018) and Lee & Kim (2018) have shed light on the association between SES indicators and harsher sentencing, there is a dearth of research that delves deeper into the mediating factors and causal pathways linking SES to judicial decisions. Understanding the nuanced processes through which socioeconomic disadvantage translates into disparate sentencing outcomes is crucial for developing targeted interventions and policy reforms aimed at addressing systemic inequities within the criminal justice system.

Contextual Research Gap: Another notable research gap lies in the contextual understanding of SES-based sentencing disparities, particularly in the context of rural communities. While studies like that of Garcia & Nguyen (2020) have highlighted the differential sentencing outcomes experienced by defendants from rural, economically disenfranchised backgrounds, there is a lack of nuanced research examining the unique contextual factors shaping judicial decisions in rural settings. Factors such as limited access to legal resources, community norms, and perceptions of law enforcement may play pivotal roles in exacerbating sentencing disparities in rural areas. Further research exploring these contextual nuances is essential for devising contextually relevant interventions tailored to address the specific needs of rural communities within the criminal justice system.

Geographical Research Gap: Additionally, there exists a geographical research gap concerning the global dimensions of SES-based sentencing disparities. While studies such as that of Morales & Santiago (2020) have provided valuable insights into cross-national variations in sentencing outcomes, there remains a lack of comprehensive comparative analyses that transcend geographical boundaries. Understanding how different legal systems and socio-cultural contexts interact with SES dynamics to produce disparate sentencing outcomes is crucial for fostering transnational collaboration and knowledge exchange in the pursuit of global justice reform efforts. Bridging this geographical research gap is essential for developing evidence-based policy recommendations that address the universal challenges of socioeconomic inequality within the criminal justice system.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of judicial sentencing disparities concerning the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) is pivotal for understanding and addressing systemic inequalities within the criminal justice system. Empirical research, such as the studies reviewed in this analysis, has shed light on the pervasive nature of SES-based sentencing differentials, revealing stark disparities in sentencing outcomes based on socioeconomic background. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms aimed at rectifying systemic biases and fostering a more just and equitable judicial apparatus.

Through meticulous quantitative analyses, qualitative inquiries, and comparative studies, researchers have elucidated the multifaceted dynamics underpinning SES-based sentencing disparities. From uncovering the nuanced mechanisms linking SES indicators to harsher sentencing outcomes to examining contextual factors shaping disparities in rural and urban

settings, the body of research underscores the complexity of the issue and the necessity of multifaceted interventions. Furthermore, comparative analyses across nations have highlighted the global dimensions of SES-based sentencing disparities, emphasizing the imperative for transnational collaboration and knowledge exchange in the pursuit of global justice reform.

Moving forward, addressing the identified research gaps in conceptual understanding, contextual nuances, and global dimensions is essential for advancing scholarly discourse and informing evidence-based policy interventions. By bridging these gaps, stakeholders can work towards fostering a criminal justice system that upholds the principles of fairness, equity, and justice for all, regardless of socioeconomic status. Ultimately, the pursuit of a more equitable judicial system requires continued interdisciplinary research, stakeholder engagement, and concerted efforts towards systemic reform.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Foster collaboration between legal scholars, sociologists, criminologists, and economists to develop comprehensive theoretical frameworks that elucidate the complex interplay between SES and sentencing outcomes. This interdisciplinary approach can contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying sentencing disparities and inform more nuanced theoretical perspectives. Emphasize the intersectionality of SES with other social identities such as race, gender, and ethnicity in shaping sentencing outcomes. Develop theoretical models that account for the intersecting influences of multiple social factors to better capture the lived experiences of marginalized individuals within the criminal justice system.

Practice

Provide ongoing training for judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and other legal stakeholders on recognizing and mitigating implicit biases related to SES. Incorporate evidence-based practices for promoting fair and equitable decision-making in sentencing proceedings. Enhance access to legal representation and support services for defendants from marginalized SES backgrounds. This may involve increasing funding for public defender offices, expanding pro bono legal services, and providing resources for defendants to navigate the complexities of the legal system.

Policy

Review and reform sentencing guidelines to minimize the influence of socioeconomic factors on sentencing outcomes. Consider implementing guidelines that prioritize factors relevant to the offense and individual circumstances while mitigating the impact of extraneous socioeconomic considerations. Invest in community-based interventions, diversion programs, and restorative justice initiatives as alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders, particularly those from disadvantaged SES backgrounds. Redirect resources towards addressing underlying social determinants of crime, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and healthcare.

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