

A Global Comparison of the Incarceration of Women and Societal Punitiveness

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Perceptions of Punitiveness

One aspect of the act of punitiveness is attitudes and perceptions of punitiveness. According to Caroline A. Spiranovic (2012) some factors that contribute to the perception and preference for harsh punishment are “perceptions of crime levels; education; and reliance on tabloid/commercial media for news and information.” (Spiranovic 2012:249) Her study also found that the different perceptions of crime and justice played a role in how the preference for harsh punitive nature occurred. When individuals feared crime or saw crime as a social problem they tended to favor harsh punitive actions. The fear of crime is actually the fear that crime is rising; or more so the belief it is occurring more. However, one thing that did not seem to affect ones beliefs concerning punitiveness was if they had been a victim of a crime.

Gender and Punitiveness

The correlation between gender and punitive action is quite relevant on a global scale. Several studies found consistent reasons behind why women may sometimes receive lesser sentences than men. These reasons were: women commit less heinous crimes, women are often looked at as mothers and wives, and people’s varying beliefs regarding gender role attitudes.

Comparative Studies

I pulled global comparative studies from: Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, Finland, the United States, Canada, and Georgia. Chivalry, disparities in crimes committed, and feminism were among the explanations for differences in gender punitiveness. Exploring these gender differences in punitiveness are useful because they may have an impact on future policies.

Explanations

One theory suggests punitiveness is an attribute of one’s attitude, thus making them more or less punitive. Another study suggests that socialization also plays a role. While we know that “the United States has the highest incarceration rates in the world and a more punitive approach to criminal justice issues” in comparison to other Western democracies it would appear that as a country we may be more socialized to view criminals in a way that influences our punitive nature and the want for harsh punitive action. (Kugler 2013:1071)

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