

Trends in social welfare and crime control



- Georgiana Raluca Andrei

Explain and illustrate the claim that contemporary trends in social welfare and crime control policy are indicative of a ‘punitive turn’.

In contemporary Western societies the division between crime control and welfare is blurred, with the two coming together to produce a complex and sometimes ambiguous policy mix, within which crime control policy substitutes for welfare but may also incorporate welfarist notions of care and protection. The threat and fear of crime has impacted on public and policy attitudes towards welfare and crime control through a process of innovation in law and policy that blurs the boundaries between traditional crime control and welfare fields. Punitivity is a term which means that systems of punishment have become harsher and that tough measures have a large degree of popular support (Cochrane and Talbot, 2008, p. 11).

Allan Cochrane and Deborah Talbot (2008) suggest that the security/insecurity nexus illuminates a set of connections between the worlds of social welfare (broadly, the search for security) and crime control (broadly, responses to threats of insecurity). The policy worlds of social welfare and crime control need to be understood in relation to one another. In the contemporary world, demands for security and fears of insecurity are present and visible in personal lives, in political agendas and in policymaking domains. The search for security is likely to be unfinished as efforts to ensure security paradoxically heighten personal and societal senses of insecurity, in turn leading to further searches for more security. The emergence of security as a personal, governmental and policy concern is reflected in the work of social theorists and policy analysts, who have

<https://assignbuster.com/trends-in-social-welfare-and-crime-control/>

debated how the search for security may be understood as shaping social relations and social policy. There are competing approaches to achieving security. Some emphasize the need to extend criminal justice and legal systems to address the behaviors of those that threaten 'our' security; others highlight the need to address broader social divisions, inequalities and problems that undermine the security of societies.

Security is a concept with multiple dimensions at individual, group, national and global levels. It's sometimes argued that the responsibility for achieving security rests with us as individuals rather than with governments. Collective responses to the search for social and economic security are visible in the work of institutions, such as trade unions, credit unions, charities, businesses and governments. These organisations and institutions work to ensure economic security through work, welfare benefits, or pensions, and health security through medical support and care in times of illness and infirmity. They also work to ensure the air we breathe is free from pollution, the water we drink is clean, and the food we eat is uncontaminated. The loss of any one of these will undermine the security of individuals and potentially of societies. Government seek to defend the nation from perceived threats, such as terrorism, political dissent and foreign aggression, and to secure the resources necessary to support their economies and population's water, food and energy. They enter into international agreements with other governments to address threats of global crime. For example money laundering and trafficking of humans, environmental degradation such as problems of global warming, pollution and waning biodiversity; and also to cooperate with other countries on matters of policing and justice. Security

has meanings at every level of human existence from the most private needs and relationships to the broadest currents of international relations and global problems. Focusing on different sources of insecurity leads to different ideas about how we can achieve security. Focusing on security may heighten the anxieties and feelings of insecurity whether now or about the future. They may lead us to try to achieve our own security and that of our families in ways that make others less secure. For example, securing the houses with cameras, alarms, and fences, and having police officers visible on the streets, may make us feel safer. But it may also make others more fearful of crime. Actions taken by governments in the name of protection from internal and external security threats sometimes come at the cost of personal freedoms and civil liberties of entire populations. Measures used in pursuit of security often fail to deliver it, and may often, paradoxically, increase a sense of insecurity. Security is increasingly being sought (by those who can afford it) through private solutions. Examples of such solutions include living in secure residential enclaves or driving sports utility vehicles (SUVs). This recourse to private solutions represents a form of risk management and social retreat.

The media is one of the main drivers of insecurity. The news organisations create a false picture of the problem of crime, exaggerating certain categories of offending, such as random and violent attacks by strangers, and ignoring or underplaying other types, such as the crimes of governments and powerful organisations, or domestic crimes within the family. This can result in a distortion of public perceptions about crime, with greatest level of fear attached to crimes which are least likely to affect them. It has been

noted that fear of crime often exceeds the actual risk of personal harm (Jewkes, 2008, p. 33).

As individuals, people seek to manage risk by creating safe spaces in a variety of ways. At one extreme these strategies include narrowly delimited places of retreat for personal safety, which might incorporate a range of security devices including barred windows, spy glass, intercom systems.

Families are a site of both individual and social security; that is, they are seen as being a key social formation that ensures personal security, as well as a 'building block' of society and social order. Families have tended to remain at the top of political and policy agendas, with strong families being equated with strong societies. However, families can also be understood as sites of insecurity – for individuals, who experience family life as harmful or neglectful, and for societies more broadly. While recent debate has centred on whether family change represents some kind of social decline or descent into social disorder, 'family breakdown', 'problem families' or 'failing' families are not new anxieties. For many decades, families who were thought to be 'failing' in some way have been a target of social welfare interventions and, increasingly, of crime prevention strategies. Families mirror the contradictions in relation to security – they offer a range of securities and act as sites of safety and social welfare, but they also present a range of insecurities, threats and dangers. This means that families are the focus of not only social welfare policy but also crime control policy. Some families are perceived as 'better' and more competent than others, and some families are perceived as problematic, disorderly and threatening, and therefore in need of different kinds of policy intervention, including crime control and

<https://assignbuster.com/trends-in-social-welfare-and-crime-control/>

social welfare policies. These perceptions can be normative and influenced by assumptions based on class, ethnicity and sexuality. Families are closely connected to child welfare issues. Contemporary anxieties about the nature of childhood, together with conflicting ideas about children - as vulnerable and in need of protection and care, and as threats to society and in need of control - are reflected in child and family policy interventions. These tensions and ambiguities about children inform social policies aimed at providing both welfare support and reducing crime. Antisocial behaviour and hate crime legislation can both be understood as sites in which the criminal justice system has been extended into new areas. In this way, there is an increasing shift to a more punitive approach within criminal justice systems, particularly in the UK and the USA. Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), were part of an increasingly large and complex set of New Labour measures for managing and governing populations.

Wacquant stated that " various neo-conservative think tanks in the USA were able to valorise the diminution of the social or welfare state" and that punitive measures were spreading from USA through Europe. According to the article, the USA/UK policy is being defined by " mass imprisonment, curfews, interventions based on risk assessment rather than need, zero tolerance, naming and shaming" , becoming more punitive and affecting everyday social relations. States all around the world seem to take a punitive turn to young offending. The depth of the punitive turn in USA in the 1990s is undeniable and Wacquant's thesis is being supported by quantitative data that shows an increase of children detained in " juvenile secure estate" in UK and Wales. The American intolerance for those under 18 is getting more

popular in the rest of the world. A punitive turn in juvenile justice in a number of countries in Western Europe has been more repressive but not necessarily more effective. It has achieved a political legitimacy to the detriment of traditional principles of juvenile protection and support. The article provides important data that shows the high number of immigrants and minority groups under arrest or in detention and the more punitive elements of juvenile justice. It is difficult to estimate the total amount of the juvenile secure population in various countries at various times due to differences in defining a child, a juvenile. Different countries have different ages of criminal responsibility, there is also a difference in definition of offences which make it difficult to compare the countries.

Security cannot be fully understood without reference to insecurity, the idea of security implies the threat of insecurity, so that insecurity and security are intertwined. The ways in which welfare and crime control policies intersect and are entangled help to shape experiences of social inequality. Families can be sites of both security and insecurity. Identifying differences in experiences of security and insecurity is important for understanding, in turn, the different responses of policy and legislation to the (in)securities of family lives. In order to keep under control juvenile and adult crime rates, the system becomes punitive and adopts extreme solutions that will only lead to more drastic consequences.

Words: 1652 words

References

Cochrane, A. and Talbot, D. (2008) ' The search for security', in Cochrane, A. and Talbot, D. (eds) *Security: Welfare, Crime and Society* , Open University;

Jewkes, Y. (2008) ' Insecurity, fear and social retreat', in Cochrane, A. and Talbot, D. (eds) *Security: Welfare, Crime and Society* , Open University;

Muncie, John (2008). The ' punitive' turn in juvenile justice: cultures of control and rights compliance in western Europe and the USA. *Youth Justice*, 8(2) pp. 107-121.

Reflection

- I found it challenging to incorporate in my essay the details from the journal article due to the large amount of information provided. The journal article was written in a different way than the course materials from OU and it needed extra attention. The language used was complex and specialised and required further investigation.
- I developed the ability to integrate a journal article into my essay.
- I have used the skills that I have practiced before such as gathering ideas from different sources and create an essay, reading and interpreting different types of evidences such as journal articles or quantitative data.
- I have used my tutor's previous feedback and tried to be more confident with using references.