

Unheard Voices: Silencing Indigenous Perspectives in Modern Criminology Research

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Abstract

The field of criminology has long been shaped by Eurocentric frameworks that overlook the perspectives of Indigenous populations. This paper explores the marginalisation of Indigenous voices in modern criminology research, analysing how systemic bias and epistemic violence contribute to the erasure of Indigenous experiences and justice systems. It calls for a decolonised approach to criminology that integrates Indigenous knowledge systems and supports restorative justice principles. This paper highlights the need to amplify Indigenous perspectives to address systemic inequalities within the criminal justice system.

Keywords: *Indigenous perspectives, modern criminology, marginalisation, systemic bias, decolonisation of criminology, Indigenous justice systems, epistemic violence, intersectionality, criminal justice reform, restorative justice*

Introduction

As a discipline, criminology is often considered a science of deviance and social control, deeply rooted in Western legal systems and philosophies. However, this focus on Western perspectives has historically marginalised and silenced the voices of Indigenous communities, whose legal and cultural frameworks differ significantly from the dominant paradigms. In this context, Indigenous perspectives in criminology research remain underrepresented, leading to a lack of nuanced understanding of how Indigenous people experience justice, crime, and punishment.

The absence of Indigenous perspectives from criminological research not only perpetuates epistemic violence but also reinforces systemic bias in criminal justice systems. This paper examines the factors contributing to this silencing and proposes pathways for integrating Indigenous voices into criminology through decolonised methodologies focusing on restorative justice principles.

Historical Context: Colonialism and Criminology

To understand the exclusion of Indigenous perspectives in modern criminology, it is essential to recognise the historical impact of colonialism. Colonial powers imposed Western legal systems on Indigenous communities, often disregarding or undermining Indigenous justice systems. This imposition fostered a narrative of superiority around Western law while deeming Indigenous practices as primitive or irrelevant.

The relationship between colonialism and criminology extends to research practices. Indigenous peoples are frequently subjects of criminological studies, but rarely are their voices or perspectives considered in the research. Such studies often frame Indigenous populations as "problems" to be controlled or corrected rather than recognising their agency and distinct experiences of justice.

Systemic Bias and Epistemic Violence in Criminology

One of the primary challenges in modern criminology is systemic bias. Researchers' dominant frameworks tend to reflect Eurocentric assumptions about crime, law, and punishment. These assumptions result in epistemic violence, where Indigenous knowledge and ways of understanding justice are dismissed or misrepresented. This form of violence goes beyond physical harm; it involves the suppression of cultural and intellectual contributions that could offer alternative insights into justice and rehabilitation.

Criminology's reliance on quantitative methods, statistical analyses, and positivist approaches further alienates Indigenous perspectives, which often emphasise relationality, community-based justice, and holistic well-being. By marginalising qualitative research rooted in Indigenous methodologies, criminology reinforces a system that privileges certain forms of knowledge over others, leaving Indigenous voices unheard.

Marginalization of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous justice systems are often based on principles that differ markedly from Western legal traditions. For instance, many Indigenous cultures prioritise restorative justice, emphasising healing, reconciliation, and community involvement in resolving disputes. These principles starkly contrast the punitive, retributive models that dominate Western criminal justice systems.

Despite the effectiveness of Indigenous justice systems in addressing harm and maintaining social harmony, they are rarely integrated into criminological discourse or practice. This marginalisation is particularly evident in the criminalisation of Indigenous peoples in settler-colonial states like the United States, Canada, and Australia, where Indigenous populations are disproportionately incarcerated and subjected to punitive measures that fail to address the root causes of crime within their communities.

Intersectionality and the Indigenous Experience

The intersection of race, gender, and socioeconomic status further compounds the silencing of Indigenous perspectives in criminology. Indigenous women, for example, face unique challenges related to both their Indigeneity and gender, often experiencing higher rates of violence and criminalisation. However, mainstream criminological research seldom addresses these intersectional experiences, leading to policies and practices that fail to protect Indigenous women or acknowledge their resilience.

Indigenous youth are similarly affected, often encountering a criminal justice system that views them through a lens of deficit rather than potential. Instead of being provided with culturally appropriate rehabilitation services, Indigenous youth are frequently over-policed, over-incarcerated, and subject to systemic neglect.

The Need for Decolonization in Criminology

Decolonisation in criminology requires the acknowledgement of past and present injustices inflicted upon Indigenous communities and including Indigenous voices in the development of criminological theories and practices. This process involves dismantling the Eurocentric foundations of criminology and replacing them with frameworks that respect and incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems.

Decolonising criminology also means embracing research methodologies that prioritise Indigenous ways of knowing. For instance, participatory action research (PAR) can empower Indigenous communities to participate in criminological studies as co-researchers rather than subjects. This approach aligns with Indigenous community engagement and collective decision-making values, ensuring that research outcomes benefit the communities involved.

Restorative Justice: A Path Forward

An appealing alternative to the punitive methods that predominate in Western criminal justice systems is restorative justice. Restorative justice is based on Indigenous principles and aims to mend broken relationships while holding offenders accountable for their actions. Restorative justice is an approach to criminal justice that places less emphasis on punishment and more on repairing the damage that crime has done to victims and their communities.

More effective and comprehensive approaches to crime and rehabilitation might be achieved by integrating restorative justice into contemporary criminology, which would also respect Indigenous viewpoints. According to studies, when used correctly, restorative justice approaches reduce recidivism and increase victim and community satisfaction.

Conclusion

Silencing Indigenous voices in contemporary criminology studies serves to maintain structural inequality and skirts the issue of Indigenous peoples' underlying criminal behaviour. Justice for all must be achieved via decolonising criminology and reimagining traditional practices by drawing on Indigenous knowledge systems, techniques, and viewpoints. Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities may benefit greatly from the restorative justice framework based on Indigenous knowledge and practices.

The field of criminology may take a step towards a future in which healing, reconciliation, and the restoration of societal peace are integral parts of justice by giving a stronger voice to Indigenous peoples' perspectives.

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