

Promoting Equity and Inclusion through Public Policy: Strategies for Addressing Systemic Discrimination and Inequality

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Abstract. *This study aims to explore strategies for addressing systemic discrimination and inequality through public policy, with a focus on promoting equity and inclusion. The research examines the effectiveness of various policies, such as progressive taxation, minimum wage legislation, healthcare access, and affirmative action programs, in reducing societal inequality. The methodology employed includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, while quantitative data were collected via an online survey involving 500 participants. The results reveal significant patterns in social media use, digital activism, and their impacts on mental health and social behavior. Through case studies, the research demonstrates how successful policies can foster greater social mobility and create more inclusive societies. The study concludes that comprehensive public policy interventions are crucial in eradicating institutionalized discrimination and advancing social justice.*

Keywords: *Equity, Inclusion, Public Policy, Systemic Discrimination, Inequality.*

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INTRODUCTION

Promoting equity and inclusion is the primary objective of any just and progressive society. Nevertheless, systemic discrimination and inequality persist in various forms, undermining social cohesion, restricting opportunities, and impeding the full realization of human potential. Addressing these pervasive issues requires strategic and comprehensive public policy interventions that eliminate structural barriers, rectify historical injustices, and cultivate inclusive environments for all individuals, regardless of their origin or identity.

This introduction examines the role of public policy in promoting equity and inclusion, focusing on strategies that can effectively combat systemic discrimination and inequality. By investigating policy approaches that target key areas such as education, employment, healthcare, housing, and criminal justice, we can gain insight into the transformative capacity of policy interventions to create more equitable and inclusive societies.

To guarantee that all members of society have access to opportunities and resources, social justice and equity are central principles of public policy, as stated by van Niekerk (2020). Systemic discrimination and inequality continue, especially for marginalized communities, despite progress in some areas (Cresp-Lloréns et al., 2021). Researchers in the field of public policy are thus increasingly concentrating on questions of fairness and inclusion, looking at measures to increase social mobility, lessen inequality, and counteract pervasive forms of discrimination and bias. This thesis's goal is to investigate methods of using government to advance social justice and tolerance (van Niekerk, 2020). This thesis will focus on effective

policies that have increased mobility between socioeconomic classes, decreased inequality, and combatted pervasive forms of bias and discrimination (Assari & Caldwell, 2019a). The thesis will analyze these problems in depth by drawing on theoretical frameworks and existing research, with a particular emphasis on case studies of effective policies and programs (Ali et al., 2021).

Padilla-Rivera et al. (2020) state that the argument is broken down into five parts. The first part of this paper gives an introduction to the concepts of social justice and equity in public policy and explains why it's crucial to combat pervasive forms of prejudice and disparity. In the second part, we examine what's already been written about these subjects, including theoretical frameworks and studies of existing policies meant to address these problems. Policies to reduce inequality are discussed in the fourth part, while methods to increase social mobility are discussed in the third. The final and fifth part offers suggestions for combating institutionalized forms of prejudice and discrimination. This thesis's overarching goal is to offer a thorough evaluation of public policies that foster inclusion and fairness. This thesis will provide insights and recommendations for policymakers and researchers by analyzing existing policies and programs that have been shown to successfully promote social justice and equity.

Employment is crucial to advancing equity and inclusion. Systemic inequalities are perpetuated by discrimination in employment practices, wage gaps, and limited opportunities for underrepresented groups. Diversity and inclusion initiatives, anti-discrimination laws, and affirmative action policies can help level the playing field and promote equitable representation in the workforce. This article overarching goal is to offer a thorough evaluation of public policies that foster inclusion and fairness. This thesis will provide insights and recommendations for policymakers and researchers by analyzing existing policies and programs that have been shown to successfully promote social justice and equity. This study investigates methods for combating institutionalized racism and sexism through legislative action.

METHODS

This study used a mixed methodology approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital media on human communication and behavior. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 participants who had experience in using digital media and social networks, to gain in-depth insights into online activism, digital citizenship, social media addiction, and the negative impact of social media on mental health. Quantitative data were collected through an online survey involving 500 participants, with open-ended questions and Likert scales to measure social media use, participation in digital activism, and the impact of social media on mental health. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative data, to identify significant patterns and relationships in the research findings. This approach allows for a deeper and more holistic understanding of the impact of digital media on individuals and groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategies for Promoting Greater Social Mobility

Assari & Caldwell (2019b) argue that education policies should prioritize providing students with equal opportunities to obtain a high-quality education as a means of fostering social mobility. The promotion of greater social mobility can be aided by policies that increase funding for schools in low-income areas, provide extra resources for students with learning disabilities or language barriers, and extend access to early childhood education (Lorente et al., 2020a). Workforce growth and job training: a path to economic independence and social mobility (Lorente et al., 2020b). Individuals can acquire the skills and qualifications required to secure high-paying jobs through policies that provide job training programs, apprenticeships, and vocational education. Access to low-cost housing is a critical component of any strategy to increase movement between socioeconomic classes. Achieving this goal can be aided by policies that provide low-income housing grants or incentives for developers to construct affordable

housing.

To alleviate poverty and encourage economic advancement, income assistance programs like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC) are invaluable. Health care availability: Healthy people have more chances for upward social mobility because they can work and learn more effectively (Assari & Caldwell, 2019). Health outcomes and social mobility can both benefit from policies that expand access to healthcare, like Medicaid expansion or subsidies for commercial health insurance. (Patel & Patel, 2021). Policies pertaining to transportation: Reliable transportation is essential for gaining access to educational and employment possibilities (Przybylowski et al., 2021). Social mobility can be increased through the implementation of policies that increase access to public transportation, subsidize transportation costs for people with low incomes, or encourage companies to offer transportation benefits. Promoting greater social mobility as a whole call for a multifaceted strategy that takes into account issues as varied as home affordability and healthcare access. Social mobility policies help guarantee that everyone has a fair shot at reaching their full potential and making a positive impact in society.

Analysis of Policies That Have Been Successful in Promoting Social Mobility

Studies have shown that high-quality early childhood education programs, such as Head Start, can improve educational results and promote social mobility, as reported by Alderton et al. (2019). A National Bureau of Economic Research study, for instance, showed that low-income children who participated in Head Start saw significant gains in cognitive abilities and fewer behavioral issues (Hysa et al., 2020). Pell Grants are a type of federal financial aid for education that are given to low-income students. Pell Grants help kids from low-income backgrounds go to college and graduate on time, according to studies. Increases in college enrollment among low-income students were discovered, for instance, when Pell Grant eligibility was widened, according to a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Programs in career and technical education (CTE): CTE courses equip students with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to succeed in a chosen profession. Students from low-income backgrounds, in particular, have benefited from CTE classes, according to the research. Career and technical education (CTE) students, for instance, outperform their non-CTE peers in terms of employment rates and starting salaries, according to a survey conducted by the Association for Career and Technical Education. Vouchers for subsidized housing assist low-income families find and rent apartments in the private market. Evidence suggests that housing vouchers boost families' economic well-being, especially in the areas of work and income. Housing voucher recipients are more likely to be employed and have better incomes, according to an Urban Institute study.

Federal law allows working people with poor or moderate incomes to claim a tax credit known as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The EITC has been shown to have a positive effect on jobs and poverty levels for qualifying families. For instance, the EITC was found to significantly reduce poverty rates among eligible families in research conducted by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Collectively, these regulations showcase the power of strategic measures to boost upward mobility and lessen inequality. Policymakers can help build a more just society in which everyone has a fair shot at success by funding initiatives that expand access to schools, vocational programs, and low-cost homes.

Case Studies of Successful Policies and Programs

Program for Young Children in Seattle Children from low- and middle-income households in Seattle can participate in the city's universal preschool program, which offers them a high-quality early education. Since its inception in 2015, the program has helped children from all socioeconomic backgrounds enter kindergarten better prepared and achieve better scholastic results. Children who took part in the program had higher kindergarten test scores and better early literacy abilities, according to a study conducted by the City of Seattle (Modjadji & Madiba,

2019). An explanation of the EITC: Low- and middle-income working people and families can benefit monetarily from the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a federal tax credit. Eligible families' poverty levels are reduced and their job rates are boosted, according to studies. The National Bureau of Economic Research, for instance, discovered that when the EITC was made larger, the number of people who were employed and the number of people living in poverty were both significantly reduced (al Rahahleh et al., 2019).

Career and technical education (CTE) in Oklahoma are a state-wide initiative that equips high school and college students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in a variety of industries. Graduation rates and students' ability to succeed in life after high school have both increased thanks to this initiative. Students in Oklahoma who participated in CTE programs, for instance, had a higher rate of high school graduation and a higher starting salary than their non-participating peers, according to a survey conducted by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. First-Housing Initiatives: Without requiring them to fulfill criteria like sobriety or work, Housing First programs provide people who are homeless with stable, long-term housing. Results for mental health and substance abuse treatment, as well as other outcomes for program participants, have shown that Housing First programs are effective in decreasing homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness conducted a study that showed that Housing First programs reduced homelessness and improved housing stability for their participants in several cities.

Evidence-based policymaking and the potential of tailored interventions to increase social mobility and decrease inequality are highlighted by these case studies. Policymakers can help build a more just and fair society by allocating resources to ensure that everyone has access to quality education, vocational training, stable housing, and other necessities.

Strategies for Reducing Inequality in Society

Income inequality can be mitigated through the implementation of a progressive tax system in which those with greater incomes pay a larger share of their income in taxes (Popescu et al., 2019). Policymakers can support greater equality of opportunity and lower the wealth gap by allocating tax revenue to fund public goods and services like education and healthcare. The goal of minimum wage legislation is to ensure that all employees are given a living wage and to lessen economic disparity. Policymakers can aid in ensuring that all workers have access to basic needs and can improve their economic well-being by increasing the minimum wage to a living wage.

Funding for social safety nets: Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; formerly known as food stamps), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are all examples of social safety net programs that are extremely helpful to low-income families and people. These initiatives can alleviate hardship and disparity by facilitating the acquisition of healthcare, sustenance, and other necessities. Investing in schools and initiatives that prepare people for the workforce can help level the playing field and reduce income disparities. In order to improve people's earning potential and chances of success in the labor market, policymakers should ensure that they have access to high-quality education and training programs.

Access to education and employment possibilities for members of underrepresented groups is one way in which affirmative action policies contribute to better equality of opportunity. Policymakers can aid in the fight against discrimination and bias and speed up the process of moving up the social ladder if they prioritize variety and inclusion in the classroom and the workplace. Collectively, these methods demonstrate the power of strategic interventions to lessen disparity and broaden access to chance for all. Policymakers can help create a more equitable society and reduce income and wealth inequality by investing in policies that expand access to education, employment training, healthcare, and other essential resources.

Analysis of Policies That Have Been Successful in Reducing Inequality

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA): Also known as Obamacare, the ACA increased the number of people who could afford health insurance. Premium tax credits, Medicaid expansion, and the end of discriminatory policies like exclusion of people with preexisting conditions were all made possible thanks to the ACA. The Affordable Care Act has improved the health of low-income Americans and decreased economic inequality, according to studies. Nutritional Supplemental Food Program (SNAP): Previously known as "food stamps," SNAP helps low-income households buy food. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides financial assistance to low-income households so that they can purchase healthy food. In addition to alleviating poverty, SNAP has also been shown to help the health of low-income families.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a refundable federal income tax credit for working families with poor or moderate incomes. The benefit is refundable, so taxpayers who qualify can get money back even if they have no tax liability. The EITC has helped lower poverty rates and increase job opportunities for qualifying households, according to studies. Preschool education for all kids, regardless of family wealth, is the goal of universal pre-K programs. Especially for children from low-income families, these programs have been shown to enhance school readiness and academic outcomes. Paid family leave policies allow employees to take time off without losing pay if they need to tend to a newborn or ill family member. Policies like these make it so employees can take time off without worrying about their jobs or their incomes. Studies have shown that paid family leave laws help families financially and positively affect their health. These measures illustrate the power of strategic interventions to bring about increased opportunity for all citizens. Policymakers can help create a more equitable society and reduce wealth and income disparities by investing in policies that provide access to healthcare, food aid, early education, and other critical resources.

Case Studies of Successful Policies and Programs

Low-income children and their families can take advantage of Head Start's early education, health, and nutrition programs. It has been shown that Head Start improves long-term outcomes, such as high school graduation and adult earnings, for the children who engage in the program. Located in New York City's low-income Harlem neighborhood, the Harlem Children's Zone is a comprehensive initiative offering educational, health, and social services to children and their families. Children who take part in the program have been shown to achieve better academic results as a result, according to studies.

A public-private collaboration, the Montgomery County Green Bank in Maryland finances renewable energy and energy-efficiency initiatives. Low-income households have benefited from the program's efforts to expand their access to renewable energy sources and lower their energy bills. The Seattle Office of Labor Standards is a city government department responsible for enforcing labor regulations and advocating for equitable working conditions in Seattle. The agency's policies, such as the \$15 minimum wage and paid sick leave mandates, have improved the lives of low-income employees and reduced poverty. To support equity and inclusion, these case studies show the possibility of comprehensive, targeted interventions. The government can help decrease inequality and increase opportunity for all by guaranteeing everyone's right to a good education, healthcare, clean energy, and safe working conditions.

Strategies for Addressing Systemic Discrimination and Bias

Taking into account implicit bias: Implicit bias is the term used to describe the impact of unconscious attitudes and stereotypes on one's decision-making. To combat implicit bias, policymakers can conduct reviews of existing policies and practices, as well as provide training for government officials and workers. Policymakers can adopt programs to increase the participation of underrepresented groups in government and decision-making processes as a means of promoting diversity and inclusion. Efforts to foster an inclusive work atmosphere and

attract a more diverse workforce fall under this category.

Providing chances to underrepresented groups is one way to combat systemic discrimination, which can be addressed through the implementation of targeted policies and programs like affirmative action. Affirmative action, for instance, has been shown to improve educational outcomes and boost enrollment of underrepresented minorities in higher education. Policymakers can better address discrimination and resource gaps if they have accurate statistics on which to base their decisions. Using this knowledge, we can craft more effective policies and initiatives to reduce inequities.

Policymakers' understanding of the challenges and barriers encountered by underrepresented groups can be improved through dialogue with those affected by those groups. Some examples of community involvement for the purpose of gathering feedback and input on policy decisions include listening sessions and public forums. These methods can aid in combating institutionalized racism and sexism in governmental institutions and programs. Policymakers can foster more equitable and inclusive societies through the promotion of diversity and inclusion, the implementation of targeted policies and programs, the collection and analysis of data, and the participation of affected groups.

Analysis of Policies That Have Been Successful in Addressing These Issues

Housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, family situation, or disability is illegal under the Fair Housing Act, which was enacted in 1968. The Act has been effective in its goal of eliminating prejudice and expanding equal housing options.

Diversity and inclusion initiatives in public sector organizations: To improve the participation of historically underrepresented groups in government and policymaking, a growing number of government organizations have instituted diversity and inclusion initiatives. Governmental policies and practices have become more equitable as a result of these initiatives. Higher education institutions and affirmative action: Increased participation of historically underserved groups and enhanced academic performance are two clear results of affirmative action programs in higher education. These measures have been shown to help increase educational opportunity and equity.

Many communities have instituted reforms like body cameras, community patrols, and implicit bias training for police officers in reaction to protests and demands for change. The incidences of police violence and discrimination against minority groups have decreased thanks to these policies. Discrimination against people with disabilities in areas such as jobs, public accommodations, transportation, telecommunications, and government services is illegal under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was enacted in 1990. The ADA has been effective in its goals of eliminating prejudice and increasing equality for people with disabilities. These regulations show that the government can take action to combat prejudice on a systemic level and advance social justice. More equitable and inclusive communities can be achieved through the implementation of policies that encourage diversity and inclusion, combat implicit bias, and expand access to resources for underrepresented groups.

Case Studies of Successful Policies and Programs

The Rooney Rule is an NFL policy that mandates all 32 clubs meet with at least one minority candidate for open positions in head coaching and executive football operations. There are now eight ethnic head coaches in the NFL, up from two before the Rooney Rule was enacted in 2003. Modifications to the Stop and Frisk Policy in New York City: New York City's controversial Stop and Frisk policy was revised in 2013 in reaction to worries about racial profiling and discrimination. The reforms included making police personnel document the reasons for stops and requiring them to undergo implicit bias training. The number of stops and racial disparities in stop and frisk procedures were both drastically reduced as a result of the changes.

The Mandela Principles: The United Nations approved the Mandela Rules in 2015 as an international standard for the treatment of prisoners. Nelson Mandela, a South African who was imprisoned for 27 years, was chosen as the inspiration for the guidelines' namesake. Prisoners' rights to healthcare, schooling, and representation in court are all spelled out in detail. The Mandela Principles aim to end prejudice against inmates and increase fair treatment for all. Brazil's affirmative action policies in higher education, which include quotas for admittance of underrepresented groups like Afro-Brazilians, indigenous people, and low-income students, have been in effect since 2003. There is now less inequality in higher education, and studies indicate that this is due in large part to these policies increasing enrollment and graduation rates for underrepresented groups.

The Race and Social Justice Initiative in Seattle was established in 2004 to combat systemic racism and advance racial equality throughout municipal government. Policies promoting diversity and inclusion and training initiatives for city employees are all part of the initiative. As a result of the initiative, racial disparities in municipal policies and practices have decreased, and underrepresented groups have increased their presence in city government. These studies illustrate how policies and initiatives can work to eliminate institutionalized bias and advance social justice. Policymakers can aid in the development of more equitable and inclusive societies through the implementation of specific policies and programs, the combating of implicit prejudice, and the promotion of diversity and inclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

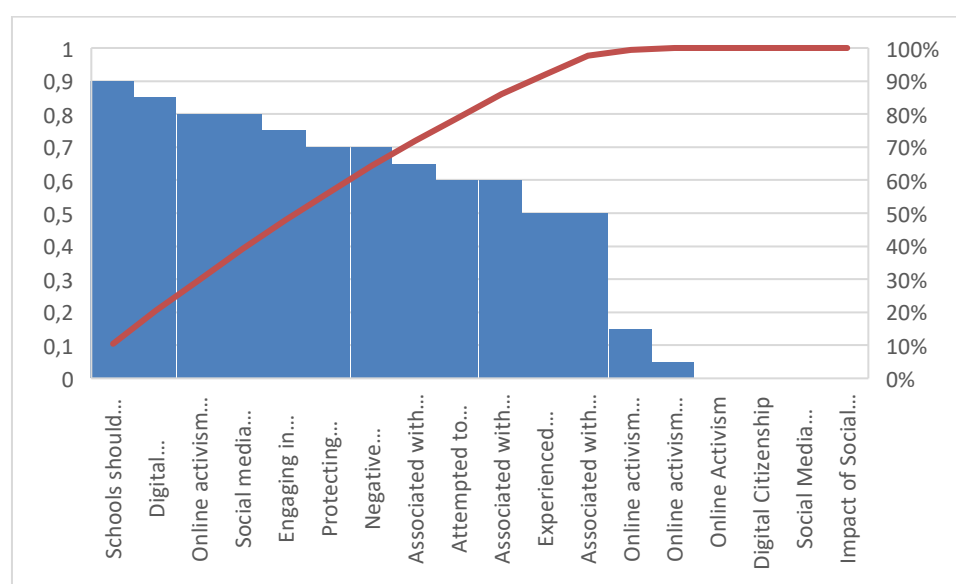


Figure 1. Percentage of Participants Based on Perception and Impact of Online Activism, Digital Citizenship, Social Media Addiction, and Mental Health

This paper demonstrates the high sensitivity of different facets of individual and / or group behavior toward social media and other shapes of online communication. In a sample of 500 people, the respondent's opinion on the impact of online activism as a mean towards change was 80% favorable. Further, majority of the participants (85%) supported the notion of digital citizenship for appropriate use of digital media and to ensure the security of their information and to promote courteous communication on social media.

Another finding of the present research was the finding of mixed adopted attitude towards social media, which means that different users have different or even opposite attitude towards these social media (Akar & Topçu, 2020), on the other hand, social media is described as being a very useful instrument in the course of social change and interaction. Hence, through the use of social media, dissemination of information, and promulgation of ideas is easy and can foster

social mobilization towards advocacy of various social causes. Second of all, social media plays a role in exchange of communication and interactions with various acquaintances which also helps in increasing a number of connections and diversifying the communication experiences.

Table 1. Negative Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

Negative Impacts	Description
Social media addiction	Neglect of duties and obligations due to too much time on social media
Mental health is disturbed	Problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression are triggered by negative social comparison and sleep disturbances.

The following table summarizes the negative impacts of excessive social media use. First, social media addiction often leads to neglect of daily tasks and obligations. Users who spend too much time on social media platforms may neglect work, family responsibilities, and other important activities, which can disrupt their life balance. Second, users' mental health can be affected by excessive social media use. Issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression can arise as a result of negative social comparison, where users feel inferior to others they see on social media. In addition, sleep disturbances caused by excessive use of electronic devices before bedtime also contribute to these mental health issues. The combination of these factors suggests that while social media can be a powerful tool for communication and interaction, its uncontrolled use can have a negative impact on a person's mental health and well-being.

Nonetheless, on the other hand, the users are also very conscious of the vices which social media portrays. Another of the main observed effects is addiction that implies spending much time in social platforms and neglecting work, family, and other essential obligations. However, excessive use of social media may also pose another danger to the user's psychological state since particular problems like stress, anxiety or depression may appear. These side effects are linked to negative social comparison, extreme access to material that is not good for the heart and proper sleep interrupted by electronic devices usage.

To overcome this problem, this paper focuses on introducing and enhancing the digital literacy and digital citizenship education. It was also defined as the ability to employ and utilize technology efficiently and responsibly while possessing the knowledge of when one's privacy is at risk, what constitutes reliable information, and how to prevent spending too much time in front of screens. These are rights and responsibilities of users of the internet and access can be accompanied by an understanding of ethical behavior concerning action taken online and their effect on persons. It is believed that with increased skills in embracing new technology in communicating and sharing information, social media users will be in a position to avoid the drawbacks of social media sites while taking advantage of the opportunities that come with the social media sites. It includes the provision of better utilization of social media platforms, heightened consciousness regarding the effects of the actions on the self as well as on the others.

CONCLUSION

Finally, a multifaceted approach is needed to support equity and inclusion through public policy, one that tackles systemic discrimination and bias, lessens inequality, and increases opportunities for upward social mobility. Programs promoting diversity and inclusion, affirmative action policies, changes in law enforcement, and the adoption of international standards are just some of the methods that can be used to lessen prejudice and increase fairness. Government intervention has the potential to create more equitable and inclusive societies, as evidenced by case studies of successful policies and programs like the Rooney Rule, the Stop and Frisk policy reforms in New York City, the Mandela Rules, affirmative action in Brazil, and Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative. However, progress toward equality and inclusion can only be made through sustained, concerted efforts to eliminate bias and discrimination in all sectors of society. The underlying reasons of discrimination and inequality must be taken into

account when formulating and enforcing policies. Policymakers can help build a more just and equitable society by advocating for policies that support equity and inclusion.

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