

Themis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science

Volume 11 | Issue 1

Article 4

September 2023

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Recommended Citation

Castaneda, Joanna (2023) "The Downfall of Capitalism: Its Exploitation of Mental Health and the Working Class," *Themis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55917/2324-6561.1107>

<https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/themis/vol11/iss1/4>

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Abstract

Capitalism has been part of American culture for so long, but so has the topic of mental health. America has seen high rates of mental health issues occurring among working-class people of America. High-end companies making billions of revenues have taken advantage of their workers, leaving many to rely on working multiple jobs to get their families by. As for women and minorities, the job setting has not come easy for many as they face major inequality in the workforce and setbacks in wanting to reach positions. Capitalism has shown that income inequality has made life in America difficult, leaving families and individuals to work in dangerous environments without government help to ensure that workers are treated fairly. Capitalism in America has abused many Americans from accessing quality life by limiting healthcare and giving decent wages for American workers to live off, pushing many to face mental health issues.

Keywords

Capitalism, Mental Health, Working Class, Income Inequality, Workers' Rights

The Downfall of Capitalism: Its Exploitation of Mental Health and the Working Class

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May 19, 2022

Abstract

Capitalism has been part of American culture for so long, but so has the topic of mental health. America has seen high rates of mental health issues occurring among working-class people of America. High-end companies making billions of revenues have taken advantage of their workers, leaving many to rely on working multiple jobs to get their families by. As for women and minorities, the job setting has not come easy for many as they face major inequality in the workforce and setbacks in wanting to reach positions. Capitalism has shown that income inequality has made life in America difficult, leaving families and individuals to work in dangerous environments without government help to ensure that workers are treated fairly. Capitalism in America has abused many Americans from accessing quality life by limiting healthcare and giving decent wages for American workers to live off, pushing many to face mental health issues.

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The Downfall of Capitalism: Its Exploitation of Mental Health and the Working Class

The political ideology of capitalism has been embedded in our heads from a young age. It is part of our daily lives. This ideology has been glamorized and is the driving force that can secure anyone a life of financial freedom and success. Yet, America fails to see how capitalism has had adverse effects on the working class, and has brainwashed them into believing that working long hours leads to a happy future. The political state of America is not focused on the well-being of people but rather on the economic value of the economy. The phrase "the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer" is a saying that the U.S. is now prioritizing. As they are putting wealthy elites first, who have committed multiple federal human rights violations, and the needs of the labor force second.

The focus on mental health within the working class is rarely discussed. Still, various news and social media outlets such as TikTok and Facebook have had workers from companies such as Tesla, Walmart, and other billion-dollar corporations have been exposed for the mistreatment going on within warehouses and have been. Countless workers have documented and shared their experiences working for billion-dollar corporations that have taken advantage of them, working them to the verge of death.(Ben Goggin) For example, Amazon, one of the top-selling companies globally, has over one million workers throughout America and has been making headlines recently over the treatment of its workers. They have claimed that they give their workers enough time for a break and lunch. But some workers have reported that their working conditions are unbearable and inhumane (Gruenberg, 2022). This is just one example of how capitalism has normalized abusive working conditions and detains working-class people from having access to a healthy life outside of work that is not tied to corporate America . The U.S. has failed to see the significance of its workers and how they bring a change to the world. It

has also not lived up to its expectations of being a country that can provide the necessities to individuals and families to live a safe and healthy life. This paper investigates the capitalist structure of work and mental health in order to argue that capitalism is slowly taking away the right to a healthy life. It will analyze the areas of social classes, job inequality, poverty, and unfair work laws, that are taking over America and leaving many to suffer.

Literature Review

Numerous studies and ideas have been thrown into the mix of capitalism and how it should run. Karl Marx has debated and criticized capitalism in many ways as well as advocated for the working-class people who fall under inequity. In his work, he has argued that labor and wage should be equal and that workers should be given enough to live a suitable lifestyle that promotes the idea of work to be something positive rather than a negative. (Karl Marx) As Marx says, "If the owner of labour-power works to-day, to-morrow [they] must again be able to repeat the same process in the same conditions as regards health and strength" (Marx & Engels, 2013). With his critiques and explanations, capitalism has faced misfortunes but has only helped private businesses race for competition and consumerism. One could argue that consumerism creates jobs and benefits the economy; in reality, it creates a false hope that the government will assist the working class in challenging moments.

A series of recent studies performed by Author Das has made multiple implications for why and how capitalism has not achieved or followed Marx's suggestion of putting the working class first. Some have stated that Marx's approach on how to perfect or come to terms with the system of capitalism should be constructed in different directions. But Marx has explained that wage is the most important to keep the people moving. But as Das states, "wages fall below the value of labour power for millions of people, which is why they cannot meet their needs" (Das,

2019). Without being able to have sufficient aid, the work done by the people falls under threat, generating long hours of work, leading to a lack of food and medicine and forcing poverty to arise. To have a sufficient world that generates people to live long lives, America has shown that exploitation in anything that creates wealth and consumption is far more essential than allowing workers to be treated with respect and admiration. (Christian E. Weller)

Social Classes within Capitalism

Social classes in America have progressed over the years. They have now been organized into five categories: upper, upper middle, middle, working, and lower class creating an act of class discrimination and making it difficult for some to jump into a new class ranking. There is social stratification within these social classes because of capitalism. The top class is seen with power, authority, and prestige in America, while the bottom class is seen as weak, uneducated, and in most cases, unemployed. It is important to understand that class consciousness was created by capitalism; class consciousness is the effect of one's stance within society (Crossman, 2019). It is creating and forcing exploitation on working-class people and letting the upper class live a life of luxury. These ideologies have created conflict, and in America, 30 percent of working-class families have incomes ranging from 100 to 250 percent, which is at the poverty level (Kearney et al., 2017). Casting them to face economic hardships that can be detrimental when raising a family and working a job that is not providing enough.

Since capitalism works around the private sector, private individuals who support the system often fall under the first-class party, also known as the bourgeoisie. (Communist Manifesto) They have a more effortless advantage in life and easier privileges to maintain, whereas the lower class faces an exclusion to a better life. Those associated with the term low-class have been linked to having mental issues; a low status brings a low ego bringing mental

disorders along, indicating that class status and mental health bond (Rubin & Stuart, 2018).

Capitalism has not just created disparities among those with a low income but fails to make them be seen as working members of society; because of the areas they live in, capitalism has tied exclusionary zoning in low-class communities creating segregation and making it difficult for social mobility (Rigsby, 2016). With a negative connotation connected to the meaning of low-class, it adds another obstacle to be dealt with; class consciousness refrains people from wanting to reach a better life.

Work, money, and hours are three fundamental factors that social classes experience differently. The ideas of hours worked within a job are portrayed in different aspects. Some may think that those who hold a higher-level position work an insane amount, and those who fall under the low-class spectrum vary with hours. In reality, both share a harmful lifestyle, but the lower class loses at a disadvantage when their employers are the ones who impose how they will work. Low-wage jobs are often the ones that hold back hours, and this greatly increases the outcome of how families will survive. Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union has been tackling the issue of high-end brands giving ten hours a week to their employees (Brown, 2012). Capitalism is failing the job market for those receiving a low wage signifying that hours can only be accustomed to fit a job that holds a specific value in America, leaving individuals in difficult situations when trying to obtain a financial safety net.

Social classes and capitalism show that one can be perceived differently and have higher prestige with wealth, while those who struggle are neglected. America is taking advantage of labor and seeing it only as an economic competition than finding solutions to overcome social stratification that exploits workers, “Being poor doesn’t make you a favored object of government attention—instead, it means you’re likely to be used and abused” (Chartier, 2019).

The capitalist structure is not built to see social classes as equal but creates the inequality that will generate a dissociated society that holds working at different standards. Capitalism only helps those willing to see economic instability rise and benefit specific individuals who have enough to maintain themselves.

Women and Minorities in the Workforce

Job inequality has been a present feature throughout the American workforce. Capitalism has brought a division and has genderized professions, making it difficult for individuals to be offered opportunities to advance their careers. In the act of gender working within capitalism, providing value and entitlement to the qualities in a job that is deemed accustomed to the attributes of male quantities and devaluing women in the accomplishments of labor (Hawesworth, 2006). As companies strive for competition, they create an unideal work environment catered to stress and trauma. The ones who begin to suffer are women and minorities who become exposed to racial and gender bias. In contrast, men are offered the opportunity to accept promotions to become CEOs and managers, earning them high pay and connections for the future. (International labor organization, 2017).

The glass elevator is a term that is correlated to job inequality within capitalism; It addresses the concealed advantages men face in the workplace. In standard work organizations, workers are predicted to serve their life to a single employer that will supply them with rewards, such as raises and promotions. While public unions have worked to guarantee protection for their hard work, traditional work organizations favor men because of the continuous work they perform (William, 2013). With a gendered division in the work environment, employers tend to forget that most women take on additional commitments outside of work that the world has labeled as too feminine for a man to do. A recent study done by Colombia University found that

women who made less than males were four times more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression (Stieg, 2020). As capitalism only seems to benefit the male, motivation and dedication for a job have lost their significance for what can be accomplished. Professor Sarah Kaplan states, “60 percent of investors will choose to invest in the man’s business plan”(University of Toronto, 2015). We can see how this drives male dominance in the workplace pushing them to succeed but making feel women feel less valued in their careers.

The idea of capitalism focuses on economic riches but only for a certain kind. As capitalism only seems to benefit the male, motivation and dedication for a job have lost their significance for what can be achieved. Women and minorities face the challenge of quickly being burnout by trying to prove their value in a workplace that men perhaps dominate. Companies and corporations are heading in different directions by limiting promotions, most notably, creating a patriarchy that makes women and minorities invisible. Capitalism restricts privilege for those who deserve it and has executed that a job held by a man should be rewarded with power.

Income Inequality and its Effects on Poverty

Through downfalls and uprisings, recessions, global pandemics, and stock market crashes, America's economy has gone through different routes. People's lives have desperately changed with the chaos. Capitalism has brought unnecessary changes, and now people see high housing, food, medical, and education costs. It has promoted a life of insecurity and halted families and individuals from being capable of living a life of stability and saneness. These historical moments showed how quickly the government was able to act to avoid the loss of money, but the U.S also witnessed who became the enemy of the people and supporters of the rich.

Consumerism is an asset for many companies and corporations, and with inflation causing distress among individuals, they are at risk, making it the trump card for the rich. Companies find ways to franchise mental issues off to the world, and as individuals find ways to cope with mental health, pharmaceutical drugs become the new form of exploitation (Fergie, 2019). Consumerism works its way to creating new inventions and innovations that transform the world; jobs are made, but to the extent that capitalism is physically and mentally changing the world for the worse. The capitalist structure is not designed for all but made for profit on those easy to undermine. This comes to the lower class as they signify high rates of mental health problems; the rich exploit them in work and what they consume.

In all parts of the U.S., inflation is taking over prices for necessities that have become far too expensive for what people bargained for. With Covid-19, capitalism is pushing people to work numerous jobs to put food on the table and keep a roof over their families' heads. Some have even gotten the chance to be labeled as essential workers. Home health aides, for example, have actively kept hospice centers under control by working long hours, but to them, it is not sufficient with what they get paid (Totaro, 2019). As home aid Pauline Moffitt from Pennsylvania, where the minimum wage is \$7.25, states, "I just wish they would raise it and give us a little more" (Kassens et al., 2021). Pay is what keeps the world running, and for most families, America's idea of minimum wage is not enough to promote an ideal life for a family. Income is keeping people on their toes, and most minority communities in America are experiencing a range of mental health issues due to pay (The Century Foundation). Pay and correct income are fundamental rights for all employees, but capitalism has outlined itself as bias, deeming that one's occupation determines the likelihood of unfair pay.

Income inequality in America contributes to other sources that create a society that is

inefficiently promoting the way of living. California, for example, is one of the wealthiest states in America but also faces one of the highest rates of homelessness (Mccarthy, 2021). Capitalism has triggered an effect that puts most individuals and families at risk. Not paying a living wage and limiting the approach of pursuing college careers, and purchasing property; things that can change the outcome for many people. The concept of capitalism was to keep a vigorous economy that constantly keeps the world being innovative. While one might think it vastly creates new jobs to keep people active, it focuses on the wrong idea. Martin Luther King Jr (1952) argues, “capitalism has outlived its usefulness.” Furthermore, exploitation has gone against working-class Americans, pushing setbacks that are difficult to push forth. America has the capability to provide change and give proper assistance to actively promote a country that values the health of its people.

With the issues of high prices and low pay, poverty is now becoming a mixed situation in America. Capitalism has bought advancements through the acts of globalization, but only benefits some. As of 2020, 37 million Americans live in poverty (Poverty USA, 2022), affecting their mental health as 2.5 million adults living in poverty now have mental disorders (Samhsa, 2016). Poverty in America is seen as a personal failure rather than a societal one making it difficult for some to leave these conditions, creating a repeating cycle. As the top one percent drives corporate America, they create modern slavery in jobs supporting longer hours but opposing a higher that can end poverty (World Economic Forum).

Capitalism running under an unfair system leaves the majority of the world with so little to access. It runs with unethical laws that lack access to resources that can give one financial stability (Vap, 2020). Without reasonable economic earnings, it is troublesome to avoid certain acts of despair. As young adults are exposed to traumatic living situations, their lives take a

complete turn. Low-income communities face high levels of suicide, showing depression, anxiety, and other behavioral troubles resulting from poverty (Carol, 2009). With such traumatic experiences, some may often seek out help, but with limited access to support, mental health comes with a price. Any act of healthcare in America is expensive, but the price of therapy ranges from \$65 to \$200 an hour (Good Therapy, 2022). While most families may have insurance plans to cover these costs, it is an unfortunate look for those who do not. While the U.S has invented welfare programs like CalFresh, MediCal, etc., 77% of Americans say that government help has been ineffective (Enkins, 2019). As capitalism plays a private role, government interference is limited, but not to the extent that politicians actively play a role in it. At least 220 members of Congress and 40 senators and representative's own stocks (Hasting, 2015). The stock market is the gains for capitalism and the villain of poverty. It benefits the rich and exposes how money can control the role one plays in the market, granting them success to participate in something that will help the future. As politicians actively seek and support a role in the world of capitalism, they often forget how different they are from the people they serve. Government assistance in America has failed as the ones who make these policies are receiving the best income and the best benefits.

The disparities within poverty are difficult to overcome as people are often told that hard work leads to a road to success. But hard work only gives one group the advantage, the rich, who have better access to education and some generational wealth. With lower-income communities facing segregation in their school system, education for them constructs a different route. Capitalism detains them from receiving a degree, landing them a well-paying job; instead, some rely on jobs that merely are created to fund others' life of luxury. For example, the Cares Act came into effect in a time of need; many families were struggling. Families received a \$1200

check, but for the rich, it was a tax break (Gross, 2020). This outlet for the rich shows that "work smarter, not harder" is interpreted differently. As the rich work smarter advancing in wealth, they are also praised for their accomplishment, while the poor who work harder are told that it is the normal way of life.

As capitalism creates a false scenario that poverty is a choice and caters to the success of an economy and resources. Anyone can become successful if they follow the correct pathway. But the path is insufficient, and help is rarely given to achieve success, especially for those who live in poverty. Victor Hugo (1887) states, "The paradise of the rich, is made out of the hell of the poor." For some, a life out of poverty is difficult to achieve when employers and politicians think hard work is the hidden agenda to live a life of achievement. Being in a state of poverty prevents someone from being given the best opportunities; people with mental illness are not presented with quality care and, therefore, are treated like an outcast (Verbenas, 2020). Therefore, mental illness in capitalist America should not be discussed because it ruins the image and idea that work is destined to overcome barriers in any life situation.

Unfair Laws and Unions Breakthroughs

America has fallen under the short end of the spectrum of being a progressive country; capitalism works under many countries that have granted their citizens free health care and paid sick time off but, most importantly, have shifted the idea of how work is supposed to be. The three countries with the best work-life balance are The Netherlands, Switzerland, and Sweden (Porter, 2022). What makes them different from America is that these countries have set up policies that prioritize their workers, such as health and safety at work, equal opportunities for women and men, protection against discrimination, and labor laws (European Commission). Workers in the U.S. are not as protected, they come at a price, and there is currently no federal

law enacted to show that every worker in the U.S. has or will acquire benefits. Capitalism has created a market of employers and workers, and while the economy has sufficient funds, they are hoarded by the elites.

Labor laws in America have been misrepresented and have gone through loopholes to be avoided by businesses and corporations. Now living in a time where apps such as Uber, Doordash, and Instacart allow people to make quick cash or do it as a full-time job, one would think benefits would be given for working in these companies. In November 2020, capitalism undertook California in the state elections by introducing proposition 22. Ride-sharing companies wanted to classify their employees as independent contractors rather than employees leaving them not to be covered by state employment laws such as minimum wage, overtime, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation (Ballotpedia, 2020). These companies are known for making millions in revenue, but greed within capitalism makes employers selfish by not wanting a single dime on employees. In 2021, most workers who quit their jobs said they lacked good benefits such as health insurance and paid time off (Parker & Horowitz, 2022). It is in no way fair that workers often rely on working extra hours and do not receive benefits in return. A recent study found that suicide and depression are linked to the hours worked in a job (Park et al., 2020). America has let capitalism and employers construct a corrupt cycle of exploitation for workers who go above and beyond in a country that values assets rather than dedication.

In America, it is also prevalent for most workers to avoid sick days, and as of now, America is one of the few countries that does not guarantee paid sick leave by law (Department of Labor). In contrast, countries with different economic revenue are lenient when their citizens take days off. For example, in the Netherlands, if an employee is sick, the employer must

continue to pay at least 70% of their pay for two years (European Commission). Whereas most Americans are exposed to treacherous work hours, most do not feel compelled to take days to focus on themselves because of the outcomes. Most Republicans are against allowing sick pay or leave due to the response it may lead to business (Wheeler, 2016). Mental health days in America seem much like a taboo thing, but mental health discrimination lawsuits against them have been on the rise (Spiggle, 2022). Capitalism has put the idea of self-care within mental health as an act of atrocity, making workers in America feel as if their mental and physical health must be on hold for their job to continue to pay them.

With unfair work laws in America, workers have banded together to create and organize unions. Many corporations have paid \$340 million per year on union avoidance. It teaches them how to create a work environment designed to threaten workers voicing their freedoms for fair treatment (Lafer & Loustaunau, 2019). With economic inequality in America risking undermining the value of workers with such threats being made, it leaves workers to face the consequences of work discrimination. In recent news, McDonald's stole \$213,000 in wages and violated health and safety regulations (Green America, 2019). Unions in America have actively been trying to keep workers protected from exploitation. But the U.S keeps digging itself into a hole, as data now shows that employers were charged with violating federal law in 41.5% of all union election campaigns (McNicholas et al., 2019). As employers take charge of who works for them, capitalism has blinded them to understand that workers live entirely different lives from them, which does not give them equal access to afford suitable living or proper medical attention.

Conclusion

Work in America has progressed in different stages, just like the world. But capitalism has also gone through modifications itself. Rather than creating positives, it has moved on to hold entitlement for those who run and operate their own companies and corporations. These so-called entitlements have landed them recognition for creating a society that pushes innovation and creativity, but the downside is that work gets misrepresented for what it is. Families and individuals have been subjected to live a life that suggests working a 9 to 5 is the only act of fulfillment without downfalls. Mental health pays the price for it and makes society forget the idea of living. Capitalism has not just gone on to make revenue but has boughten significant issues that most people in the U.S deemed acceptable. With the unfair advantages, families and individuals do not understand that capitalism creates the idea that work should solely be relied on to live a healthy life. But America is suffering, and while wealthy elites are advancing in their wealth, people's jobs do not provide enough benefits, nor do they provide sufficient hours to make a living. America has fallen for a system that has created false advertisements and has manifested greater threats to overtake the working-class people of the U.S.

The capitalist system has undergone centuries of worker exploitation, and as of now, America is still failing to see its effects. Exploitation has created a series of unfortunate events that are still ongoing and normalized. With wealthy elites taking reign, the U.S is limited in what they can do to make a sufficient world to provide equality in income, jobs, and classes. As this ongoing system continues to take charge, America will continue to witness an unfair system where wealthy elites are held to a pedestal and make a difference in their lives by building on their personal wealth rather than helping others who are struggling financially. As capitalism was designed to bring economic success, the U.S has no concept of how to deliver. By failing to give government assistance, America displays itself as a country that rather see trauma emerge than

see a society equally acquire help from its government.

To develop a change and see growth within the working-class population, America must cut ties with capitalism as it generates false hope of achieving a better life. Social stratification continues to be America's top priority and insecurity, indicating that wages need to be raised. But simply changing a salary does not summon success for many. Job environments need to be critiqued for how they operate in society, as they are also the barrier that causes a delay in rerouting a new beginning for others. As workers are what garner mobilization in the economic sphere, those who receive credit for it are the wealthy elite who contribute to the malfunctioning system of mental health problems. Capitalists must stop enforcing the idea of work within people's lives in a system only catered to fit them; rather, they should equally distribute their wealth as it can solve many problems in the U.S.

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