

Daniel Cook – Child abuse

Cook was executed in 2012 for killing two men in 1987 .

Cook’s lawyers argued that he shouldn’t have been given the death penalty, as he had been horrifically abused as a child. Cook was raped by his mother, step-father, grandparents and foster parents, among others. His father burnt his penis with a cigarette.



A psychological report on Cook suggested the abuse he suffered as a child caused him to develop post-traumatic-stress disorder. Some of the things he did during the murders matched the torture he received as a child.

His lawyers suggested that Cook wasn’t in full control of his actions at the time of the murders.

After the execution, the brother of one of the victims said “I felt sorry for him... No one has to die alone.”

Marvin Wilson - Low IQ

Marvin Wilson murdered someone in 1992. His IQ was recorded as 61, which is in the lowest 1% of the population. The US Supreme Court banned the execution of people with learning disabilities in 2002. However, in Texas they have different criteria for determining ‘mental retardation’.

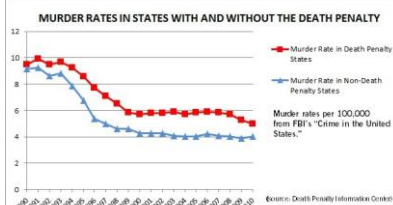


Professionals who work with people with mental illness claim that they are not fully in control of their actions, and should not received the death penalty.

Wilson wasn’t allowed to appeal after his lawyer missed a deadline, but the court overturned this, saying "We are satisfied that these are the sort of rare and extraordinary circumstances that justify" waiving the filing deadline. Despite this, and that Wilson was ‘legally retarded and ineligible for execution’, he was put to death in 2012.

Deterrence

In 2009, the Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology published a survey showing that 88% of criminologists do not believe that the death penalty acts as a deterrent.



Murder rates in death penalty states are consistently higher than in states without the death penalty.

Amnesty International says: “The threat of execution at some future date is unlikely to enter the minds of those acting under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, those who are in the grip of fear or rage, those who are panicking while committing another crime (such as a robbery), or those who suffer from mental illness or mental retardation and do not fully understand the gravity of their crime.”

Financial Cost

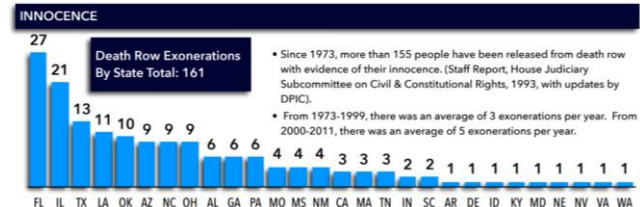
It costs a lot to keep someone in prison for life, but executions are much more expensive. The cost varies from state to state, but it totals billions of dollars.



This could be ethically relevant if you are a teleologist. However, most arguments focus on the reasons for punishment, which are retribution, vindication, protection, deterrence, reparation, reformation.

There are arguments on both sides as to whether the death penalty meets each of the aims of punishment. See ‘deterrence’ (left) for a detailed look at one. Religious views differ, with some focusing on God being just (“an eye for an eye”), whilst others use teaching about love and forgiveness to argue against the death penalty.

Miscarriages of justice



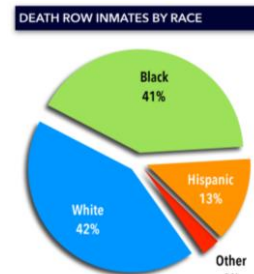
A study in 2014 published by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in America showed that at least 4.1% of those on death row have been wrongfully convicted. That’s more than one in 25 people. The Guardian claims that this means over 8,000 people who have been put to death were wrongfully convicted.

The Guardian states that “36% of all those sentenced to death between 1973 and 2004... were taken off death row after doubts about their convictions were raised.”

Witness to Innocence is a charity that arranges an annual gathering of people on death row found to be innocent.

Racial Discrimination

Less than half of death row inmates are white, despite more than three quarters of Americans being white. 288 black men have been put to death for interracial murders, whereas only 20 white men have.



Several studies have shown that jurors are much more likely to recommend a death sentence for a black defendant. In Louisiana, the odds of the death penalty are 97% higher if the victim was white.

There have been reviews of the death penalty and race – in 96% of states, there was a pattern of race-of-victim or race-of-defendant discrimination.

Campaigners argue that the inequalities in the system undermine the sense of justice that the death penalty is intended to give.