



The peril of instant justice in jodi picoult's novel 'Perfect Match'

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Abstract

Instant justice, also known as vigilante justice, involves a person or group taking the law into their own hands without any authority. It is a measure people resort to when they believe that the law is incompetent and cannot get them justice. It is easy for an accused to get bail. People fear approaching the court as it might add to their troubles. Instant justice is a menace to society, and lately, the cases have been increasing. Why is this happening? Has law and order become obsolete? Are cases involving instant justice justified? These are some questions that the research attempts to answer. Justice should never be instant, and the judiciary should follow the due procedure to ensure that no innocent person is wrongly punished. Instances of victims and witnesses being harassed by police, a flawed legal system, and delayed justice are some factors that add to the frustration of the people who resort to instant justice. This research aims at providing clarity on the peril of instant justice and its adverse effects on society. It attempts to understand the causes and mental state of people who justify instant justice and take the law into their hands. Finally, it strives to find a correlation between instant justice and inefficiencies in the legal system, which incites people to take the law into their own hands. The question raised here is that how far a person can go in the name of love and justice.

Keywords: instant justice, sexual assault/victimization, vengeance, incompetent judiciary

Introduction

About the Author

Jodi Lynn Picoult (born May 19, 1966) is an American writer. Her work which primarily consists of fiction focuses on family-oriented issues. She has published a total of 26 novels, in addition to several popular short novels.

Picoult has covered various controversial topics in her books, including abortion, assisted suicide, LGBT rights, and school shootings. In the book 'Perfect Match,' the themes of family conflict, vengeance, inner emotional turmoil are brilliantly displayed. The book mainly focuses on heinous crimes such as child molestation, sexual abuse, instant justice, and justifiable murder.

About the Novel

In the book 'Perfect Match,' the author has highlighted the inadequacies of the legal system, which includes tedious processes and loopholes resulting in the accused getting off scot-free. She also highlights the sufferings of the victims and their families who, because of these inadequacies, spend months or sometimes years trying to get justice and the psychological trauma they go through before they get closure. It is what the protagonist of the book, Nina Frost goes through. She is a diligent woman committed to her work and lives a peaceful life with her husband Caleb and son Nathaniel in the beautiful city of Biddeford, Maine. Despite the expertise in dealing with gruesome cases involving children, she and her husband get the shock of their lives when they realize that their five-year-old son Nathaniel has been sexually assaulted and rendered mute due to the psychological trauma. Things become worse when they realize that the person who victimized their son is someone close to them, a man they trusted unconditionally with their beliefs. Nina, who is already distraught by her

son's current condition, realizes that the process to get him justice might do him more harm than good. So she musters up all her courage and decides to go to any extent to protect her son from harm, even if it means losing everything. She believes that being the mother, only she knows what is correct and appropriate for her son's betterment, and hence, despite being an upholder of justice, she decides to go against the law and shoots the man she believed had hurt her son in cold blood. While she feels content at having done the right thing, she gets the shock of her life when she realizes that the man she shot was innocent. This major twist in the plot keeps the reader on edge and wanting to know more.

The Legal Aspect of the Novel

The basic dictum of the law states that a person is innocent until proven guilty' and asks for the due procedure to be followed. However, the man whom Nina Frost believed had hurt her son did not get this chance. He was shot dead on the first day of his arraignment, having no chance to defend himself. This was all because Nina Frost believed that the legal system would fail her too like it had failed some of her clients. As a district attorney, she knew the law better than anyone else, but she did not believe in it enough for her to let the legal systems follow its due course and instead decided to choose the path of instant justice.

So what is instant justice? It is a form of retribution that shows the judiciary in a poor light because it implies that the people do not have faith in the judiciary, which happened in Nina Frost's case. She believed that even if her son got justice, the punishment that the accused would receive would not be sufficient to mitigate the trauma her son had suffered. As a well-known quote describes, 'Justice delayed is justice denied.'

This is the origin of the concept of instant justice or vigilante justice. Delayed justice and inaccessibility are some of the primary reasons why people turn to instant justice.

Recently, instances involving instant justice have been increasing, and we as citizens need to be concerned because this means that the control of Law and Order is decreasing, and this could be leading society to a precarious situation. Instant justice is detrimental to society; hence laws need to be amended, and reforms need to be brought in to ensure speedy disposal of cases and improve the legal system, deterring citizens from taking the law into their own hands.

Methodology

The current research highlights the issue of Instant Justice. It attempts to study the issue in detail with its causes and effects. It addresses the various psychological issues pertaining to the problem. Also, it describes the legal aspect related to the issue that questions its validity and justification of any related actions.

The research is qualitative in nature, and the researcher has used several secondary sources as references, including various books, journal articles, research papers, and some online sources. The research covers the legal aspect of the novel that addresses the inefficiency of the legal system and aims to clarify any issues related to the issue. The descriptive and systematic research aims to provide suggestions and any other such alternatives to help resolve the issue.

Analysis

Instant justice and its effects on society

Instant justice is a form of retributive justice that people resort to when they believe that the justice system has failed them. Instant justice as a concept is highly flawed and has been a menacing society for decades now. People often resort to instant justice as a last resort when they believe that they have not been given justice. A prime example of this would be the protagonist of the novel- Nina Frost. Nina Frost, who worked as an assistant district attorney, was well aware of the inadequacies and loopholes in the legal system, which often let the offender get off scot-free. Despite this, she chose law as her field of work to get her clients justice. She often faced failures, but she never let them deter her in the quest for justice. As shown in the first chapter, one of her clients, who was a five year old was sexually molested by her father. Nina tried her best to get the little girl justice. However, her attempts were in vain as the court held the little not competent to testify. There was always the option of trying again a few years later, but everyone, including Nina, knew it would not be beneficial for the girl would have to go through all the trauma and pain again with no sure guarantee of success. Cases like these always angered Nina, for she believed it was her duty to protect her clients. Little did she know that soon, she would find herself in the same predicament.

Nina finds out that her five-year-old son has been sexually molested, and the trauma of the incident has made him incapable of speech. Although she is heartbroken and frustrated about the situation, she is already convinced that the legal system would not get her son justice, for she had witnessed the same situation way too many times before. She was aware that even if the court held the accused guilty, the punishment wouldn't be sufficient and that the accused

would be out before her son even reached his teenage years. This awakened a sense of determination in her mind, and she believed that she couldn't trust anyone to get her son justice; hence, she decided to take matters into her own hands. On the first day of the trial for her son, she walked into the courtroom with a loaded gun in her bag and shot the accused in cold blood. Somewhere deep in her heart, Nina was aware that what she was doing was wrong, but she did it regardless, for she believed that there was no other way. This is the most common reason why people resort to instant justice. This helplessness of there being no other alternative is what drives people to resort to such measures. Instant justice is detrimental to society, and the lack of due procedure being followed has adverse effects on society. One of the biggest ones is innocent lives lost. As seen in the present story, the man Nina shot was innocent. Thus, instant justice does more harm than good, and hence, there needs to be reformed to ensure that justice is served without fail.

The Psychological Aspect of Instant Justice

It is essential to understand the psychological concept of Instant Justice, for it explains the mindset and behavior that guides people to do what they do. This aspect also helps us understand the pain and suffering that the victim and their families go through. This is crucial to create awareness about this evil. The protagonist of the story, Nina Frost knows somewhere deep within her heart that what she was doing was wrong; however, she convinced herself that her actions were proper. The emotional pain that she experienced blurred the line between right and wrong for her. However, the reader cannot entirely blame her, for she is portrayed as a mother willing to go to any extent to protect her son. The only thing that matters is her son and his well-being, and thus, even after shooting a man and finding out that he was innocent, she doesn't feel regret, for she believed that the incident was inevitable. Nina's husband, Caleb Frost, who kills the person who hurt their son, displays similar behavior. He kills the man discreetly without leaving a trace and stages it as a suicide. He also believes that he did what he had to protect and ensure his family's happiness. This is a trait that is often observed in cases of instant justice. The individual cannot distinguish between right and wrong and often cannot look at things from a broader perspective. They only care about themselves and the people close to them and don't heed what happens further or whom they hurt.

We also witness the pain and suffering that Nina and her family go through. The incident affects their family tremendously, and at times, it may seem that their relationships are beyond repair. The incident also strains Nina and Caleb's marriage as they both blame each other for what happened. We also see little Nathaniel, who is influenced by this and tries very hard but cannot express himself. His inability and his parents changed relationship further make him sadder, and he starts to believe that he was the wrongdoer in the present situation and that it is all this fault. These feelings make him feel suffocated to the point of him wanting to kill himself. This is a situation that several families of the victims who fall prey to the menace of instant justice go through. They have to go through much pain which may often leave them traumatized. There are often cases in which the families are shunned by society. However, as a famous proverb says, 'There is light at the end of every dark tunnel,' the situation of Nina and her

family eventually improves. Nina and Caleb sort things out, and Nathaniel's condition improves after going to therapy, and he soon goes back to his everyday life. This is what should be done in the case of every family that suffers due to instant justice. There is a need to ensure that justice is served and compensated adequately for their losses.

Justification of Instant Justice

The question of whether Instant Justice is justified? has not been answered yet. Some claim that it may be justified for people to only resort to instant justice when the legal system fails them or when they aren't satisfied with the judgment. In the present scenario, Nina Frost, who knew the law better than anyone, decided to take the law into her own hands. She was convinced that the law wouldn't help her even before the trial took place. Therefore, when the person who is supposed to help aggrieved parties get justice through law doesn't believe in it themselves, how can we expect others to do so?

Nina Frost justified her actions under the pretext that she was only protecting her son and did what any other mother in her position would do. Her husband Caleb did the same by claiming his actions were only for the well-being of his family. This is one of the common reasons for the increase in cases of instant justice. People take the law into their own hands to protect their property and the people close to them when the law is unable to. However, under no circumstance should such actions be justified, for doing so would only lead to a vicious cycle and would create chaos in society. If people believe that instant justice is valid, the state's role in society will dwindle, and laws will become obsolete. This will have even more ramifications, and the people will bear the brunt of the consequences.

As a result, stricter laws and legal reforms are required to ensure the well-being of the people.

Conclusion

Instant justice is a form of retribution that has been a menacing society, and lately, the number of such cases has been increasing. Several reasons incite people to take the law into their own hands, the biggest being a lack of faith in the judiciary. A lack of faith in the judiciary will harm society. Along with this, the individuals' psychological aspect also convinces them their actions are justified. This type of mindset is inherently dangerous to society.

There is a need for the development of a mechanism that ensures speedy disposal of justice. Justice should not be delayed under any circumstance. For this, there is a need for collective action by the various authorities and government authorities. An efficient judiciary is critical for the well-being of the citizens, and there need to be more significant efforts for the same.

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