'What is the relationship between human rights and human dignity?'

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Introduction:
When considering the relationship between human rights and human dignity it is relevant to look at the history as to why rights have been globally recognised. As a result of World War II it was accepted that in order to prevent the horror of events that occurred throughout the holocaust, humans needed rights. It was recognised that dignity and equality were essential amongst the needs of human beings and these were taken away from the millions of Jews that were killed and tortured by the men working for Hitler. Therefore the relationship is extremely clear, as dignity is central to the basis of human rights.

What are human rights:
Human rights are a set of rights given to humans simply because of being human, the concept being, to ensure that there is equality amongst all and that humans are free from degrading behaviour, discrimination and prejudice views. Human rights have been acknowledged globally through the Universal Declaration on Human Rights as a result of the Holocaust of World War II. These rights are recognised within member states of the European Union, and have been adopted within the UK under the Human Rights Act 1998. The Universal Declaration and the Human Rights Act set out very similar rights however the difference being that those of the UDHR are not imposed or written in any constitution therefore there is power to take legal action against breaches of these. If there was such action then maybe human dignity would be secured worldwide, those in third world countries would be free from poverty and slavery however this is not case and the right to life and liberty does not exist for many.

Human dignity:
The idea of human dignity is different to each individual, however a common interpretation, is the idea that one’s self-esteem, self-regard and self-respect is preserved. When our dignity is interfered with we can often feel degraded, embarrassed and humiliated however our human rights are there as a protection and preservation in order for this interference to be eliminated. The office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights has stated that ‘it is commonly recognised that human rights derive from the dignity and worth of the human person’, that is why human rights are given to humans on the basis of simply being human. Human dignity is something that cannot be measured and something that is equal amongst all humans. Dignity is not defined by the contributions we make to others or to society, it is not based on our concrete lives in terms of personality, religion or culture, dignity is equal and is of fundamental value. It is something that cannot be replaced, by money nor anything of equal value, dignity is personal and irreplaceable. Article 1 of the UDHR states that ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights’.

The basis of Human Rights:
Human rights arose after World War II due to the horrors that occurred throughout holocaust in which around six million Jews were killed. During this the dignity of many people was totally ruined. Therefore when considering the establishment of human rights and the reason of which they arose,

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1 Human Rights, Human Plights – In a Global villag – by Rob Buitenweg
2 Human Rights, Human Plights – In a Global villag – by Rob Buitenweg
dignity seems to be relevant in the formation of rights that were granted to humans. ‘Over the last 100 years the notion of human dignity has gained more and more importance in the political discourse on human rights.’

The ideology of the relationship between human rights and human dignity is that our human rights offer us some protection of the exposure of our dignity. Many of us take the protection of our dignity for granted; in the UK we have our human rights declared in writing due to our membership to the European Union however others are not so lucky.

In the UK we are protected from slavery and cruel behaviour, we have a right to liberty and we also have the freedom to express both our religion and conscience therefore if we feel that our dignity is exposed we can protest against this and if a right is in breach take the matter to the European Court of Human Rights. Though there are some things that cannot be protected by our human rights, the natural process of age and some illnesses which allow our dignity to be exposed nevertheless this is impossible to stop. Therefore although there is a distinct relationship between human rights and human dignity, the preservation of human dignity will not always exist, disabilities such as Alzheimer’s disease mean that dignity may be lost.

Neil Wooding, the commissioner for Wales gave the following statement “Human rights are about how we treat each other. They can be particularly helpful in ensuring that the less powerful in society are treated with dignity and respect.” However human rights do promote this yet in many countries there is no enforceability and frankly these rights mean nothing. It is put forward that ‘At the heart of human rights is the belief that everybody should be treated equally and with dignity’. Therefore the central driving force behind human rights is the idea that all humans deserve the right to live life as equals to others and in dignity. Therefore the relationship between human rights and human dignity is very clear, without human rights citizens would be in fear of their dignity being taken from them therefore human rights serve as a protection from authorities and other public bodies. The law serves as a protection from influences of individuals and private organisations and institutions.

**The importance to protect dignity:**

The relationship between human rights and human dignity is very important, though worldwide human rights are put forward in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, people’s dignity is still being abused.

“The last 25 years have seen the most dramatic reduction in extreme poverty the world has ever experienced. Yet dozens of countries have become poorer. More than a billion people still live on less than a dollar a day. Each year, 3 million people die from HIV/AIDS and 11 million children die before reaching their fifth birthday.”

When recognising that with human rights comes human dignity, it is clear that here in the UK where our human rights are protected, so is our human dignity. However in the third world countries, where food is scarce, basic human rights are not recognised, in these countries trafficking of both

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3 [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/8/2/9/5/p82957_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/8/2/9/5/p82957_index.html)
women and children continues to exist, as well as slavery and torture. Yet the biggest torture being the inability of parents being able to provide their children with enough food to live. The lack of enforceability and acknowledgement of rights means that the dignity of parenthood is nonexistent. The trafficking of people undermines individuals of their dignity to live their own lives without dictatorship. Many people within the UK do not understand the importance of their human rights being enforced until you look at people without such a luxury, who live life in fear, pain and worst of all the inability to do anything about it.

**Case Study:**
In order to establish this relationship and the importance of human dignity I have used Ethiopia as a case study:

Ethiopia is one of the world’s poorest countries; out of the 85 million people that live there 35 million live in abject poverty. Forty Four per cent of the population live below the poverty line, it is absurd that nearly half of the country’s population live without adequate food, water and healthcare. Eighty per cent of the population rely on agriculture to supply the necessities to survive, however due to the arid conditions of the ground; as a result of the persistent lack of rainfall many farms are inadequate. Though there have been huge efforts to try and improve this, the changes have been hardly existent. The HIV and AIDs pandemic is pushing people deeper into poverty as this means families are being deprived of their young adults, who are the driving force behind the farming. Here is a country where the condition of life is extremely poor; people live in Ethiopia without dignity, the reason for this being that people in Ethiopia live without human rights. Therefore we can see that there is a distinct relationship between human rights and human dignity as where there is no human rights dignity is exposed; this highlights the point that human rights are invaluable.

**The universal declaration on Human Rights:**
When just reading the preamble it is recognised that ‘Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’. With a 192 members to the United Nations it is clear of the importance to protect, dignity, justice and freedom in order to live in peace and tranquility. It was evident after the consequences of World War II that people could not live in fear of something ever occurring again, people needed the freedom of life they need to feel secure. It is now surely clear that life without dignity is a life without happiness and this has been recognised by a huge number of countries whether it is enforce or not, human rights have been recognised around the world.

**Humans as equal, dignity as equal:**

It is evident that human rights are granted to humans due to them being human, as already understood, dignity is equal, no more and no less due to characteristics such as race, gender, social class etc. However people still see themselves as superior amongst others, those who live in poverty withstand the same dignity as those that live with wealth so why do we watch as their rights are abused and their dignity infringed? People continue to commit crimes without recognition of individual’s human rights, when an offender rapes or murders their victim their dignity is immediately lost. However even in the UK where human rights exist and are enforced people continue to commit crime, yet they are released from prison eventually but the dignity of their victim does not get replaced. Dignity just like human rights will not always exist, it will not always be
considered nor will it always be granted to humans, as in the world in which we live, people are not willing to accept others as human beings therefore they cannot accept that others also have rights and dignity. As individuals that have their own protection, well-being and freedom this will not be infringed because others do not have these particular values instead people will continue live without them. Therefore both the acknowledgment of rights of another individual and their dignity comes with a sense of morality and consideration, consideration of others also being human, as human rights are not granted to an individual because they are black instead they are universal.

There is a relationship between rights and duties, as we all have the duty of being citizens and of course dignity is an aspect that is protected by our human rights and in a perfect world people would have the duty to protect the dignity of others; however that is quite impossible as it is part of nature. Nature creates us all as different therefore with different views and prejudices some will always feel superior in their human form to others and therefore infringe others dignity. However organisations work to see that those in absolute poverty have clothes to wear, food to eat and water to drink, that they also have a right to preserve their dignity. In order to achieve people must work together as every individual will feel humiliated or violated at some point and their dignity may be infringed therefore we must work to protect others human rights and human dignity not just our own.

**Justice:**

Not only is there a clear relationship between human rights and human dignity, there is also a close link with the law. The law has to comply with human rights (to an extent, as prisoners of course have some of their dignity taken away when imprisoned along with their rights) therefore the law and human rights together insure that those who interfere with the dignity of another are punished that being if the act amounts to an offence. Some people are victims to crimes, some to very severe crimes in which their dignity is imposed upon, though human rights cannot give that back there can be justice.

**Conclusion:**

Therefore to conclude it can clearly be observed that there is a direct link between human rights and human dignity, as human rights are granted to humans for the point of them being human. Dignity alike is part of nature, something that each individual is born with and that cannot be replace with anything of equal value, dignity cannot be bought, sold or rented. Dignity is personal to each individual and is irreplaceable therefore human rights are there to ensure that this dignity is not removed. After the events of World War 2 many Jews that were subject to the horrific actions of Hitler and his supporters and were completely denied of any basic human rights and of their dignity therefore the purpose of our rights is to ensure that such events do not occur ever again. Albeit the relationship is that our dignity is protected by the implementation of our human rights, they serve to preserve.

**Bibliography:**

