

British Columbia's
Office of the Human Rights
Commissioner

Introduction to systemic discrimination

Module 3: Impacts

Learning goals

- identify the key elements of systemic discrimination
- explain the differences and relationship between systemic and interpersonal discrimination
- **become familiar with the nature and extent of impacts**
- **identify *who* is impacted by systemic discrimination and *where* it appears**

What did you notice?

What types of impacts did you notice in the previous examples of systemic discrimination?



Creating barriers

“When somebody has to go to the emergency room and gets sent home right away, nobody is surprised in my family. We get asked immediately, ‘Are you on drugs?’ ‘Are you high?’ ‘Why are your eyes red?’ All these questions that are just not appropriate, rather than: ‘What’s going on?’ and ‘What do you need help with?’”

—Pamela Beebe, Indigenous rights activist

Causing harm

“Who’s the first to show up when we’re peacefully defending our land rights or water rights? It’s probably going to be the RCMP, and they’re not going to look like the RCMP riding around on their red coats and horses. They’re going to look like the military: heavily armed, armed vehicles, snipers, camouflage, fatigues, you name it. That’s how they relate to Indigenous peoples, even today.

When I had my own sons, who are grown now, from the time they were teenagers onward, I was like, ‘please, it doesn’t matter what your human rights are, it doesn’t matter what your civil charter rights and freedoms are. Please, if you ever get stopped by a police officer, whatever you do, don’t say anything. Don’t cause any problems. Because I can’t get you back if they’ve already shot you.’”

—Dr. Pamela Palmater, *attorney and Mi’kmaq woman from Eel River Bar First Nation*

Reinforcing disadvantages

“Merlo’s voice cracks as she speaks about her 20 years on the force. When she got pregnant with her first child, she was told she needed to choose between having kids or working for the RCMP. Next time, she should keep her legs closed, she was told. When another officer cut his thumb on handcuffs, he put it in his pants pocket and asked her to kiss it better. Once, when a dildo was seized as evidence, she was accused of taking it home overnight, court documents show.

‘No matter what you did or said, it was turned around to be something sexual,’ Merlo said in an interview. ‘I did cry a little bit today, but it’s only in the past couple of years I could talk about it without just being a wreck. It takes a long time to heal from it.’”

—National Observer

Reflection questions

- Think back to previous examples of systemic discrimination.
- Does it only *impact groups* who are directly targeted?
- How does it impact all members of society, including those not directly targeted?



Impacts on all of society

1. Limits diversity of ideas and views
2. Prevents system from functioning well
3. Produces additional costs to society

- What groups are impacted?
- Where were they impacted?
- Why do we call it systemic discrimination?



Employment



Housing



Services



Publications



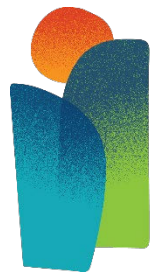
age, criminal convictions,
gender identity or expression,
family status, marital status,
ancestry, colour, place of origin,
race, mental disability, physical
disability, sex, sexual orientation,
source of income, Indigenous
identity, political belief, religion

Membership

Next module

Noticing systemic discrimination





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